

WORKING TOGETHER

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT GUIDE



BC-Yukon
LIP/RIF Network



Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that the work of the BC Yukon LIP-ZIP-RIF Network takes place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of numerous Indigenous Nations across British Columbia and Yukon. These lands have been home to Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial, including, but not limited to, the Coast Salish (SAY-ish), Nlaka'pamux (in-LAH-cap-muh), Syilx (SEE-elks), Stó:lō Nation (STOH-loh), Songhees Nation (SAWNG-heez), Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KWAHN-lin DOON), Musqueam Nation (MUS-kwee-um), Secwépemc (Seh-KWE-pem), Ktunaxa (k-too-NAH-ha), Tlingit (TLING-kit), Tagish (TAG-ish), and Hän Nations (HAN), among many others.

As a regional body dedicated to supporting Local Immigration Partnerships and Réseaux en immigration francophone, we understand that our mission to foster welcoming and inclusive communities for newcomers must be rooted in truth, reconciliation, and respect for Indigenous sovereignty. We are committed to learning from Indigenous communities, amplifying their voices, and ensuring our work does not perpetuate colonial systems. Instead, we aim to contribute to equitable and just futures for all.

We are grateful for the opportunity to live and work on these lands and express our deep appreciation for the ongoing stewardship, resilience, and cultural richness of Indigenous Peoples throughout the region.



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The BC-Yukon LIP-ZIP-RIF Network (BCYN) extends gratitude to Jayme Gabriel-Chan of Kwantlen First Nation, whose Indigenous perspective and relational way of being guided the writing, research, and engagement that brought this guide to life. We also honour Shantelle Matos for the care and support she provided alongside this work.

Opening the Circle

This guide begins with the intention of opening the circle in a good way, by grounding ourselves in respect for the Indigenous Peoples whose lands we live, work, and gather on. Opening the circle means acknowledging the land, honouring where we come from, and setting our intentions for how we show up in relationship with one another. It reminds us that meaningful and respectful engagement begins long before action, with reflection, listening, and care.



We recognize the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples who have cared for these lands since time immemorial and whose enduring connections to the land continue today. This acknowledgment is a step towards reconciliation and reflects our commitment to building meaningful relationships rooted in respect and reciprocity.

This guide is presented by the **BC-Yukon LIP-ZIP-RIF Network (BCYN)** and is funded by **Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)**. The goal of this guide is to support BC and Yukon LIPs and and RIF (Réseaux en immigration francophone) in beginning the journey to build respectful, meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities, rooted in knowledge of their history, culture, protocols, and capacity.

This guide reflects learnings from the ***Surrey First People's Guide for Newcomers***, created in consultation with local Indigenous Nations, organizations, and newcomers, led by *Jeska Slater of Little Crane Consulting*. By following the steps outlined, LIPs/ZIPs/RIFs can foster ethical and culturally safe engagement, bridging relationships between Indigenous and newcomer communities, while addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

We invite you to approach this work with humility, curiosity, and a commitment to reciprocity. This guide is part of an ongoing journey towards allyship, rooted in understanding, respect, and mutual benefit.



Our Shared Purpose

Our shared purpose in this work is to learn, listen, and deepen relationships with Indigenous communities in meaningful and respectful ways. This guide is intended to support Local, Zonal and Francophone Immigration Partnerships as they continue to build and strengthen relationships rooted in trust, accountability, and reciprocity.

Rather than offering a checklist or set of instructions, this guide provides insights, reflections, and pathways to help nurture ethical engagement grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and relating. It encourages an approach to relationship-building that is intentional, ongoing, and responsive to the communities you are engaging with.

Meaningful engagement begins with doing the work within – taking time to learn, reflect, and understand the histories, realities, and responsibilities that shape relationships with Indigenous Nations and Peoples.

While this guide offers suggestions and ideas to support the beginning of this journey, it cannot replace the importance of direct connection. True relationship-building emerges through listening deeply, showing up with humility, and learning from Indigenous Nations themselves. This work requires patience, openness, and a willingness to be guided by the communities you seek to engage with.

Through this guide, you are invited to:

- Build awareness of the Indigenous Nations and Peoples whose lands you live and work on.
- Learn how to engage respectfully and collaboratively.
- Reflect on your role in reconciliation and your ongoing responsibilities.



Walking Through This Guide



Go slowly

Learning and relationship-building take time.



Engage collectively

Read and reflect as a team or community, not just individually.



Reflect often

Use *Reflection Spaces* to note your learning and evolving intentions.



Listen and remain open

Be prepared to sit with discomfort, receive guidance, and adjust your approach as your understanding grows.



Revisit

This is a living guide, return to it as your understanding deepens.



Definition Guide

The definitions in this section are here to support your learning as you move through this resource. Some of the words and ideas used throughout this guide may be new, unfamiliar, or carry different meanings depending on context. This definition guide is meant to offer shared understanding and plain-language explanations to help you engage with the content more confidently and thoughtfully.

You are encouraged to return to this section often. Use it as a reference when you come across terms related to history, relationships, or engagement practices. The definitions are not meant to be final or complete; they are starting points for learning that will deepen over time through reflection, conversation, and relationship-building with Indigenous Peoples and communities.

Allyship

Allyship means learning, listening, and taking action to support Indigenous Peoples in ways they define. It is not a label or identity, but an ongoing responsibility that requires humility, accountability, and being open to guidance.

Colonization

Colonization is the process of taking Indigenous lands and controlling Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and ways of life. In Canada, this included laws and systems that pushed Indigenous Peoples off their lands and tried to erase their identities. The effects of colonization are still felt today.

Colonialism

Colonialism is a system that keeps power in the hands of settlers by controlling Indigenous lands, laws, and institutions. It is not only part of the past and continues to affect systems and relationships today.

Cultural Equity

Cultural equity means creating fair opportunities for everyone to keep, share, and celebrate their culture. It involves recognizing the unique needs, histories, and experiences of Indigenous communities and making sure they have a voice, resources, and representation in programs, services, and decision-making.

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety means creating spaces where Indigenous Peoples feel respected, heard, and free from discrimination. Only the people receiving the service or engagement can decide whether it feels culturally safe. It requires ongoing reflection on power, bias, and fairness.

Decolonization

Decolonization is the process of challenging and changing colonial systems, practices, and ways of

thinking. It involves sharing power, centering Indigenous knowledge and leadership, and supporting Indigenous rights and self-determination.

Dispossession

Dispossession is the loss of Indigenous lands, resources, and ways of living due to force, unfair laws, and broken agreements. It has caused long-lasting social, cultural, and economic harm to Indigenous communities.

Engagement (Indigenous Community Engagement)

Engagement is an ongoing relationship built on respect, trust, and mutual benefit. Meaningful engagement goes beyond one-time meetings and involves listening, learning, accountability, and long-term relationship-building with Indigenous communities.

Elder / Knowledge Keeper

Elders and Knowledge Keepers are respected community members recognized for their wisdom, lived experience, and knowledge. They may share teachings and guidance, and their time and contributions should be respected and fairly compensated.

Ethical Engagement

Ethical engagement means working with Indigenous Peoples in respectful, honest, and responsible ways. It involves listening, building trust over time, and respecting Indigenous leadership and decision-making. Ethical engagement avoids rushing, taking knowledge without consent, or acting without community guidance.

Forced Assimilation

Forced assimilation refers to actions and policies that tried to make Indigenous Peoples give up their languages, cultures, and identities to fit into settler society. Residential schools and the Sixties Scoop are examples.

Indian Act

The Indian Act is a federal law passed in 1876 that controls many aspects of First Nations life. It limited self-governance, land rights, and cultural practices and has caused ongoing harm.

Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples are the original inhabitants of the land, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples in Canada. Indigenous Peoples are diverse, with distinct cultures, languages, and systems of governance.

Indigenous Sovereignty

Indigenous sovereignty is the right of Indigenous Peoples and Nations to govern themselves, make their

own decisions, and care for their lands, cultures, and communities. It means that Indigenous Peoples have control over their own laws, systems, and ways of life, outside of authorities.

Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma is the harm passed down through families and communities because of events like residential schools, displacement, and violence. Even those who did not experience these events directly can still be affected.

Knowledge Systems (Indigenous Ways of Knowing)

Indigenous ways of knowing are knowledge systems based on relationships with land, community, culture, and spirituality. Learning often happens through lived experience, storytelling, and shared responsibility.

Land Dispossession / Land Theft

Land dispossession is the taking of Indigenous land without permission or fair agreement. This includes broken treaties, unceded land, and development without Indigenous consent.

Powwow

A powwow is a gathering to celebrate First Nation culture, community, and traditions. It usually includes dancing, singing, drumming, storytelling, and sharing food. Powwows are a time to connect, honor heritage, and pass on cultural knowledge.

Protocol

Protocols are culturally specific ways of showing respect that vary between Indigenous Nations. They may guide how to approach Elders, offer gifts, participate in gatherings, or hold meetings, and are best learned through relationships.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity means giving and receiving in balanced and respectful ways. In engagement, it means ensuring relationships benefit Indigenous communities and are not one-sided or extractive.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the ongoing work of repairing relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. It involves acknowledging harm, listening, taking responsibility, and making lasting changes.

Residential Schools

Residential schools were government- and church-run schools where Indigenous children were taken from their families. Many children experienced abuse, loss of language and culture, and trauma. The impacts are still felt today.

Self-Determination

Self-determination is the right of Indigenous Peoples to make decisions about their own governance, lands, cultures, and futures. Respecting this means supporting Indigenous leadership and community-defined priorities.

Settler

A settler is a non-Indigenous person living on Indigenous land as a result of colonization. Recognizing this can support reflection on responsibility, privilege, and one's role in reconciliation.

Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism is a system where settlers move onto Indigenous land and create permanent systems that replace Indigenous ways of life. This process continues through laws, institutions, and land use.

Systemic Racism

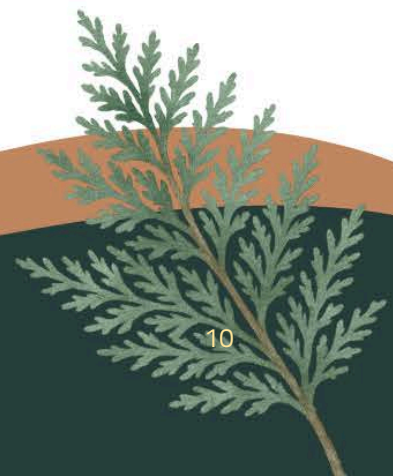
Systemic racism is unfair treatment built into laws, policies, and institutions, even when harm is not intended. It often leads to unequal outcomes for Indigenous Peoples.

Unceded Territory

Unceded territory is land that was never given up or sold through a treaty or agreement. Much of British Columbia is unceded, meaning Indigenous Nations still have rights to their land.

Walking in Good Relation

Walking in good relation means showing up with respect, care, balance, and accountability in relationships with Indigenous Peoples, communities, and lands. It focuses on how we act and relate, not just what we do.



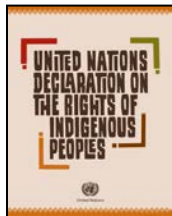
Stories That Shape Our Path

By grounding engagement in learning about the past, we create space for more honest dialogue, shared understanding, and relationships built on respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. When this history is not recognized, engagement can unintentionally cause harm, create unfair power differences, or ignore the real experiences of Indigenous Peoples today.

For many generations, Indigenous communities have lived with the ongoing effects of colonization. This includes being forced off their lands, being pressured to give up their cultures and languages, and being excluded through laws and systems such as the Indian Act, residential schools, and land dispossession. These actions disrupted governance, family life, and cultural practices, and their impacts are still felt today. At the same time, Indigenous Peoples have shown strength and resilience by protecting, reclaiming, and renewing their cultures, knowledge, and right to self-determination.

Understanding this history helps us see why trust can take time, why cultural protocols matter, and why ethical engagement must be thoughtful and accountable. Reconciliation is not a one-time action or statement, it is an ongoing commitment to listen, learn, and make meaningful change.

Frameworks that Guide This Work



United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

Affirms Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, culture, and land.

The report can be accessed via <https://www.ohchr.org/>



Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

Outlines 94 actions that guide governments, organizations, and individuals toward reconciliation.

The report can be accessed via <https://nctr.ca/>



Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People National Action Plan

Addresses systemic violence and supports safety, justice, and healing for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

The report can be accessed via <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/>

Listening and Learning

Understanding is the foundation of this journey. Start by embracing a mindset of curiosity and a willingness to learn. Actively listen with an open heart and mind. Take time to explore and learn more about local First Nations territories whose lands we live, work, and thrive on, as well as the histories, current realities, and aspirations of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples.

Practical Tips for Research

- Learn about First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and culture through exploring their distinct histories, traditions, and ways of life through Indigenous-led resources, cultural centers, and online materials.
- Visit local libraries, city archives, or Indigenous organizations to explore historical and current information about Indigenous Peoples.
- Follow Indigenous-led social media channels and websites to stay updated on community news, events, and perspectives..
- Find and attend community events and knowledge-sharing circles when invited, to learn directly from Indigenous voices..
- Connect with others in the Settlement Sector on this shared journey e.g.: *The National Newcomer Collective for Truth & Reconciliation Collective* <https://www.nnctr.ca/>

Remember: This process takes time. Be patient, intentional, and thoughtful. A saying we often use is

"We walk at the speed of trust"

Reflection Space

What is your current knowledge about the community(ies) in your area? What more do you wish to learn?

Walking in Good Relation

Engagement with Indigenous communities is not an isolated journey; it directly enhances inclusivity, mutual understanding, and reconciliation. By integrating Indigenous perspectives, organizations can create stronger, more responsive programs that reflect the diverse realities of the people they serve.

To **walk in good relation** means to move through your work, relationships, and responsibilities with intention, respect, and accountability, especially in relationship with Indigenous Peoples, communities, and lands.

At its core, walking in good relation is about **how** you show up, not just **what** you do.

Principles of allyship help guide this way of walking. They remind us to approach engagement with empathy rather than sympathy, to listen without centering ourselves, and to respect Indigenous leadership and self-determination. Allyship requires recognizing power imbalances, being willing to sit with discomfort, and remaining open to correction and growth.

Principles of Allyship

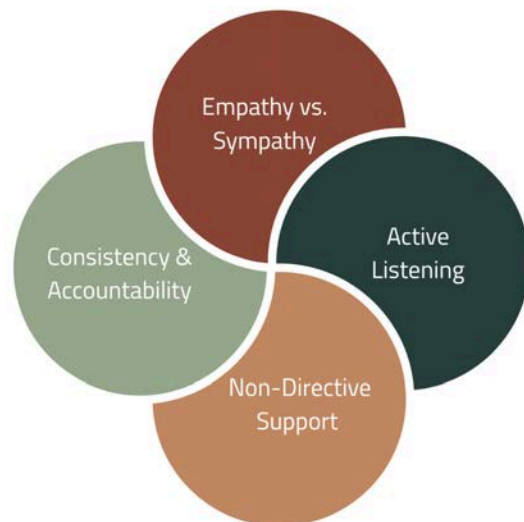
1. Empathy vs. Sympathy

Listen with compassion, not pity.

Empathy involves understanding and sharing feelings, while sympathy can reinforce power imbalances. Approach with empathy to build genuine connections.

For example, rather than saying,
'I feel so bad this happened to you,' try,
'I hear you, and I appreciate you sharing your experience with me. How can I support you in a way that feels right for you?'

This shift acknowledges the other person's experience without centering your own emotions.



2. **Active Listening**

Create space to hear Indigenous voices without judgment.

Active listening means paying attention, holding back assumptions, and seeking to understand the other person's experience. Create space to hear Indigenous voices without judgment.

3. **Non-Directive Support**

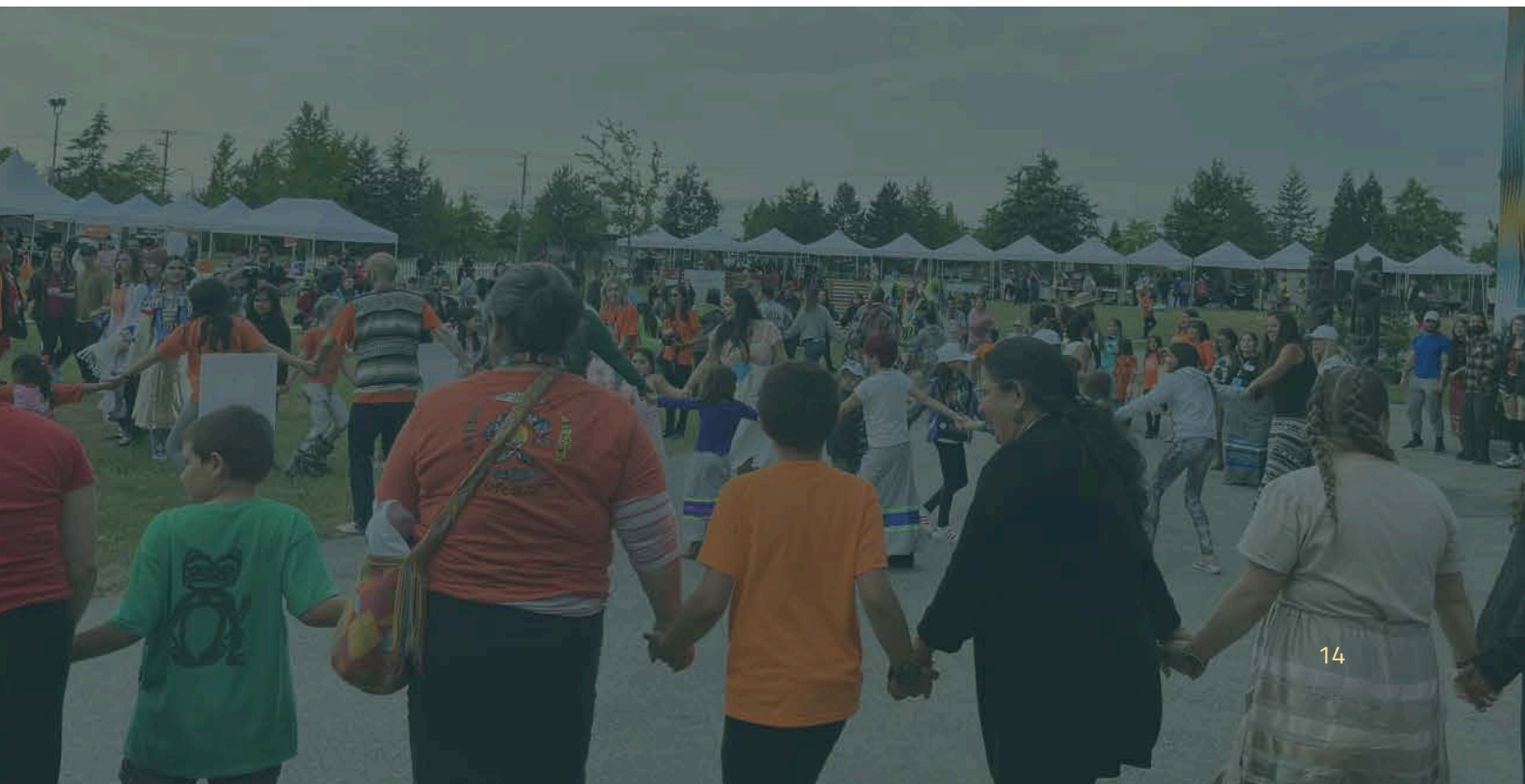
Non-directive support means stepping back and letting Indigenous communities guide decisions about what they need.

Avoid imposing solutions. Trust Indigenous leadership to identify and address their community's needs.

4. **Consistency and Accountability**

Build trust through reliable, respectful actions and follow-through on commitments.

This principle emphasizes showing up over time, keeping promises, and taking responsibility when things don't go as planned. Trust is built through consistency, honesty, and a willingness to repair or pivot when needed.



Key Areas to Acknowledge

Acknowledging and engaging with these key areas lays a foundation for meaningful allyship by helping you act with respect, awareness, and responsibility in your relationships with Indigenous communities.

- **Territory:** Learn about and respect the Indigenous Nations whose lands you live and work on. Start by identifying the Nations connected to the area and the treaties (if any) in place. Whenever possible, engage directly with local Indigenous leaders or Knowledge Keepers to understand their perspectives and histories. Incorporate this understanding into your daily practices and share it with your networks to promote awareness.
- **Cultural Equity:** Advocate for equitable opportunities that reflect the distinct needs of Indigenous communities. Recognize the systemic barriers Indigenous peoples face and work to address them through equitable resource allocation, tailored programming, and representation in decision-making spaces. Engage Indigenous voices in co-designing programs that honour their cultural values and traditions.
- **Protocols:** Respect traditional ways of being. Protocols vary across Nations; learn through relationships. This can include understanding appropriate ways to engage with Elders, offering gifts in line with traditions, or participating in ceremonies when invited. Building this knowledge requires ongoing learning and dialogue with community members. Approach this with humility, recognizing the depth and diversity of cultural practices.



Reflection Space

How can I begin participating in allyship in ways that are respectful and reciprocal?

Guiding Teachings

Engagement Principles

Engagement that honours Indigenous peoples is grounded in the following principles:

- **Respect:** Recognize Indigenous sovereignty, protocols, and worldviews.
- **Reciprocity:** Build relationships where learning and benefit flow both ways.
- **Transparency:** Be open about your intentions, capacity, and boundaries.
- **Self-Determination:** Honour Indigenous communities' right to define their own priorities.
- **Accountability:** Reflect regularly and hold yourself responsible for your impact.

These principles are rooted in Indigenous teachings about balance, harmony, and relationality. Visualize them as a *circle*, where each principle supports and strengthens the others.



Being Present

Engaging with Indigenous events and spaces is a meaningful way to connect and learn. Many events such as powwows, museum or art exhibits, or community celebrations, welcome non-Indigenous participation. It is important to **only attend events you are invited to or that are open to the public**, and to always show up as a respectful guest.



Tips for Participation

- **Approach with Respect:** Be mindful of the significance of the event and your role as a guest.
- **Observe and Learn:** Take time to understand before engaging.
- **Ask Thoughtful Questions:** When appropriate, ask with humility.
- **Support Local Vendors:** Buy from Indigenous artists, makers, and businesses.

Participation is an opportunity to build relationships, show solidarity, and deepen your understanding of Indigenous ways of being.

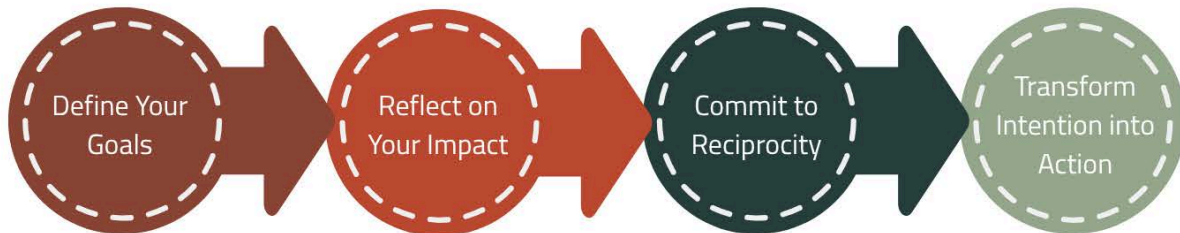


Reflection Space

*Where can I show up in support of, and to learn more about, Indigenous communities in my region?
How will I ensure my participation is guided by respect and learning?*

Planting Your Intentions

Setting clear intentions helps guide your engagement in respectful and meaningful ways. Intentions are more than statements, they shape how you follow through and how you show up.



- **Define Your Goals:** Be specific about what you hope to learn or support and why it matters.
- **Reflect on Your Impact:** Consider how your actions might affect Indigenous people and communities, both positively and negatively.
- **Commit to Reciprocity:** Think about what you can offer in practical, meaningful ways, not what you expect to receive.
- **Transform Intention into Action:** Turn intentions into steps you can take with timelines and outcomes.



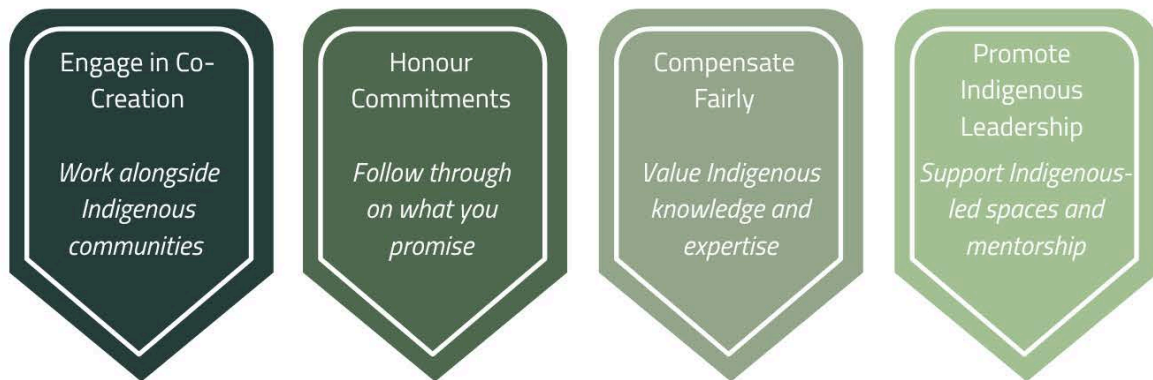
Reflection Space

Why am I engaging? What am I hoping to give and to learn? What concrete actions will I take in the next 1–3 months?

Carrying the Work Forward

Carrying the work forward means moving beyond awareness and intention into sustained, accountable action. Taking action transforms understanding into impact.

Steps to Take Action



Responsible Sharing

- Ask permission before sharing stories or images.
- Center Indigenous voices in communications.
- Actively highlight opportunities for deeper cultural understanding through Indigenous events that are open to the public.
- Avoid stereotypes and appropriation. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures are diverse and distinct; do not treat them as one.
- Use your platform to educate and advocate.

Action rooted in respect and collaboration can help create meaningful change and strengthen relationships within the community.



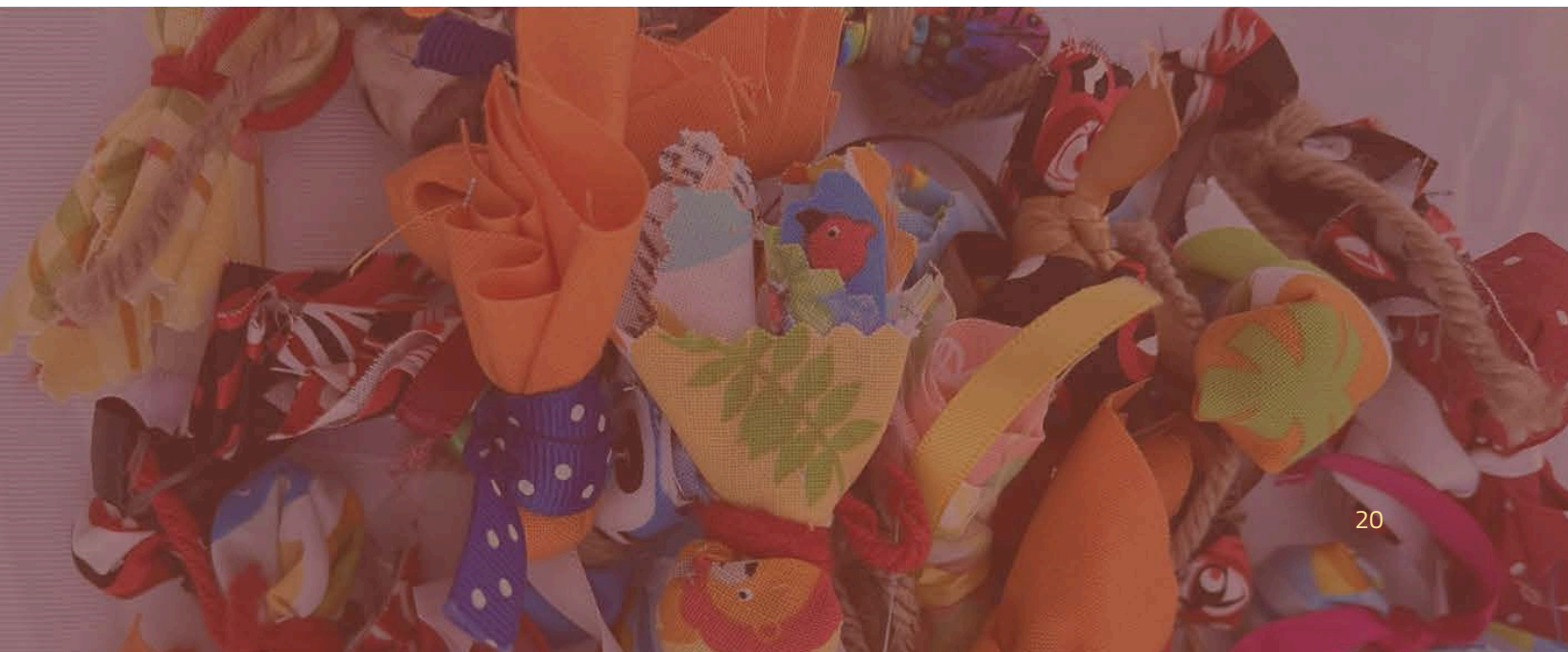
Continuing the Relationship

Continuing the relationship means recognizing that engagement with Indigenous communities is an ongoing practice, not a project. Meaningful relationships are built through consistency, humility, and a willingness to grow together over time.

Building and sustaining relationships includes:

- **Maintaining open and honest communication** beyond project timelines or reporting requirements.
- **Showing up consistently** at community events, gatherings, and spaces, even when there is no formal role or immediate objective.
- **Honouring commitments and repairing harm** by acknowledging missteps, listening to feedback, and taking responsibility when mistakes occur.
- **Practicing reciprocity** by asking how you can support Indigenous priorities and contributing in ways defined by the community.
- **Respecting time and pace**, recognizing that trust develops over time and according to community rhythms, not institutional schedules.
- **Sharing power and supporting Indigenous leadership** by creating space for Indigenous voices in decision-making and long-term planning.
- **Reflecting together** on what is working, what needs to shift, and how the relationship can continue to grow and evolve.

Sustaining engagement requires a shift from “doing” to “being”, from outreach to responsibility, from presence to partnership, and from short-term interaction to long-term relationship.



Returning to Reflection

As this guide comes to a close, returning to reflection is both intentional and necessary. Reflection allows you to assess whether your actions align with your intentions and whether your engagement has supported trust, accountability, and good relations. It invites honesty about what has been learned, where growth is still needed, and how colonial patterns may continue to show up despite best intentions.

Reflection Prompts

- *What have I learned about myself through this work?*
- *How did I show up in ways that supported or challenged colonial patterns?*
- *What feedback have I received, and how am I integrating it?*
- *How will I continue to deepen my understanding and accountability?*

Make reflection a collective process. Sharing learnings within your team builds stronger, more grounded relationships.



Reflection Space

What new relationships have you built since beginning this work? How are you ensuring Indigenous voices lead and inform your approach?

Shared Knowledge and Offerings

The resources below are shared to help you continue learning beyond this guide. They are starting points, not a complete list, and are meant to support deeper understanding over time. Learning is an ongoing process, and these resources can help you listen to Indigenous voices, expand your knowledge, and strengthen your commitment to respectful engagement.

Recommended Reading

- *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act* by Bob Joseph
- *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward* by Tanya Talaga
- *Who We Are: Four Questions For a Life and a Nation* by the late Chief Justice Murray Sinclair, Sara Sinclair, Niigaan Sinclair)
- *True Reconciliation: How to be a Force for Change* by Jody Wilson-Raybould
- *The North-West Is Our Mother: The Story of Louis Riel's People, the Métis Nation* by Jean Teillet

Further book recommendations can be found on the Canadian Broadcast Company's (CBC) list of 30 must-read books to learn about the Indigenous experience in North America: [30 must-read books to learn about the Indigenous experience in North America | CBC Books](#)

Resources

- Interactive Map of BC First Nations: <https://www.bcafn.ca/first-nations-bc/interactive-map>
- Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada: <https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/>

Organizations to Explore

- Local Indigenous Friendship Centres or cultural societies
<https://nafc.ca/friendship-centres/find-a-friendship-centre>
- Assembly of First Nations <https://afn.ca/>
- Métis Nation BC <https://www.mnbc.ca/>
- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami [About Canadian Inuit - Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami](#)
- Native Women's Association of Canada <https://nwac.ca/>
- Len Pierre Consulting <https://www.lenpierreconsulting.com/onlinelearning>
- The Circle of Philanthropy <https://the-circle.ca/>

*We are not meant to walk alone.
We walk together with humility and respect,
carrying a responsibility not only to each other,
but to those who will come after us.
The path we create today
will become the path they walk tomorrow.*





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