



TIPS FOR Drafting Indigenous Engagement Strategies and Working With Survivors

Drafting an Indigenous Outreach and Engagement Strategy

Many newcomer serving organizations work with Indigenous peoples to advance Truth and Reconciliation and educate staff and clients on Indigenous cultures as well as the legacy of colonization in Canada.

An Indigenous Outreach and Engagement Strategy that is co-created with Indigenous peoples can help to guide your work and ensure a shared vision and goals. An important first step is to research the Indigenous peoples whose traditional lands are part of or near your local area. You can do this by exploring your region on the map at www.native-land.ca.

A Strategy can help you to clearly plan how your goals and objectives for Indigenous engagement connect to other internal documents, like your strategic plan and terms of reference for working groups. It is a best practice for your Indigenous Engagement and/or Outreach Strategy (as well as its component parts, like a land acknowledgment) to be created in extensive consultation with Indigenous peoples, leaders, and/or their representative bodies. In Canada, this might look like working with:

- Local First Nation(s), Inuit and Métis communities
- National Center for Truth and Reconciliation
- Elders and Knowledge Keepers
- Provincial Treaty Commission offices
- Groups dedicated to advancing Reconciliation at the municipal level
- Indigenous researchers and instructors at a university or other post-secondary institution, including the First Nations University of Canada and Gabriel Dumont Institute

- Staff and volunteers at a cultural and/or historic site that educates the public on Indigenous peoples. Some examples include (but are not limited to):
 - Nisga'a Museum in British Columbia
 - Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump UNESCO World Heritage Site in Alberta
 - Batoche National Historic Site in Saskatchewan
 - Winnipeg Art Gallery-Quamajuq in Manitoba
 - Woodland Cultural Center in Ontario
 - Kouchibouguac National Park in New Brunswick
 - Millbrook Cultural and Heritage Centre in Nova Scotia
 - Lennox Island Mi'kmaq Culture Centre in Prince Edward Island
 - Illusuak Cultural Center in Newfoundland and Labrador
 - Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre in Yukon
 - Legends of the Aurora interpretive tour in the Northwest Territories
 - Nunatta Sunakkutaangit Museum in Nunavut

When working with Indigenous groups, it is important to co-create objectives, content and deadlines and be mindful of capacity. Many Indigenous communities and groups are approached constantly with requests to share their time, teachings and cultures. Taking the time to check in frequently with project partners will ensure that everyone remains on the same page and that expectations for deliverables remain reasonable. Additionally, it is helpful when drafting an Indigenous Engagement Strategy to think of the Strategy as a living document. Your Strategy will never be completed or finished, but rather continually added to and changed to reflect new information as it becomes available, the needs of the communities you're working with and emergent best practices.

Taking Care of Mental Health

When working with Survivors (for example, Survivors of Residential Schools and the Sixties Scoop), it is important to be mindful when asking people to educate others by sharing personal stories. Re-living these experiences and discussing them in public may (re)-trigger trauma. Before reaching out to ask a Survivor to speak at an event or share their story as part of a project, conduct research and put supports in place to ensure your organization is operating from a **trauma-informed perspective**. The Canadian Medical Association and Public Health Agency of Canada offer the resources and supports linked below:

Trauma-Informed Engagement and Resources: [CMA Patient Voice Guide: Trauma Informed Engagement & Resources](#)

Trauma- and violence-informed approaches to policy and practice: [Trauma and violence-informed approaches to policy and practice - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/indigenous-aboriginal-mental-health/trauma-informed-approaches-to-policy-and-practice.html)

Many Indigenous groups and cultural organizations have **Speakers' Bureaus** where you can connect with Indigenous people who are experienced in public speaking and more accustomed to discussing sensitive and painful life stories in educational settings.

It is a best practice when working with Residential School Survivors to have culturally sensitive mental health supports available during both the planning and delivery of an event or project. The Resolution Health Support Program was established as part of the 2006 Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. The Program provides cultural and emotional support, as well as mental health counselling services to Survivors of Residential Schools and their families. These services are delivered by trained Resolution Health Support Workers, many of whom are Residential School Survivors themselves or impacted by the inter-generational effects of the abuse and violence perpetrated.

For more information on the Program and how to access it in your area, visit the Government of Canada website here: [Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program \(sac-isc.gc.ca\)](https://sac-isc.gc.ca).

Some provinces, including British Columbia¹, Alberta² and Manitoba³, also maintain their own 24-hour Residential School Crisis Hotlines.

Other Tips for working with Survivors, Elders and Knowledge Keepers

- It is a best practice to present an offering to the person(s) you are asking to join your initiative. What constitutes a culturally appropriate offering differs across Indigenous cultures. You will need to do research to determine how to proceed in the context of your geographic area and the initiative you have planned.
- It is a best practice to offer a monetary honorarium. Different amounts are offered depending on the amount of time and energy you are asking the person to commit to your initiative. For information on current standard rates in your area, you can reach out to an Indigenous-run organization.
- It is a best practice when working with Survivors to offer funds to cover transportation costs, whether this is mileage or a reimbursement for taxi costs.
- If a meal is being served at an event, your Indigenous partner(s) should be invited to join, even if their role in your event has already concluded.

1 Government of British Columbia: [Supports for Residential School Survivors | HelpStartsHere \(gov.bc.ca\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov2/serv/bc/indigenous/Supports_for_Residential_School_Survivors_HelpStartsHere.html).

2 Native Counseling Services of Alberta: [Residential School Health Support Program | NCSA](https://www.ncsa.ca/)

3 Government of Manitoba: [Province of Manitoba | inr - Manitoba Indian Residential Schools \(gov.mb.ca\)](https://www.gov.mb.ca/indigenous/ManitobaIndianResidentialSchools.html)