

100 TIPS



FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

On what to say and not to say or do when

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES[®]



INDIGENOUS CORPORATE TRAINING INC.

Ways to share this eBook

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- print a copy and leave it on the table in your break room
- pin it to a notice board
- post it to your website internet and intranet
- add it to the reading material in your waiting room
- take a copy with you if you are working remotely or visiting a field office

Foreword

At **Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.**, we believe that by sharing knowledge and information through our training courses, blog, and other free resources we can make the world a better place for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.

About Bob Joseph

Bob Joseph, founder and President of Indigenous Corporate Training Inc, has provided training on Indigenous relations since 1994. He has assisted thousands of individuals and organizations in building Indigenous relations. His Canadian clients include all levels of Government, Fortune 500 companies, Financial Institutions, including the World Bank, small and medium-sized corporate enterprises, and Indigenous Peoples. He has worked internationally for clients in the United States, Guatemala, Peru, and New Caledonia. In 2006, Bob facilitated a worldwide Indigenous People's roundtable in Switzerland.

Bob has worked as an associate professor at Royal Roads University and has routinely been a guest lecturer at other academic institutions. He has an educational background in Business Administration and International Trade and is a certified Master Trainer who in May of 2001 was profiled in an annual feature called, "Training: the New Guard 2001" by the American Society of Training and Development. Bob was one of nine trainers selected for the feature from over 70,000 members who come from more than 100 countries and 15,000 organizations.

Bob is the developer of a multi-layer suite of **training courses** and is the author and co-author of **books** and **resources** relating to working with Indigenous Peoples.

Bob is an Indigenous person, or more specifically a status Indian. He is an initiated member of the Hamatsa Society and has inherited a Chief's seat in the Gayaxala (thunderbird) clan, first clan of the Gwawa'enuxw. Bob looks forward to his first potlatch as a Chief in 2019. Bob's Chief name is K'aywumala'galic, which loosely translates to "whale who emerges itself

***“Education is the most powerful
weapon you can use to change
the world.” Nelson Mandela***

1.

Research the community and governing parties before going to the community.

Setting aside the time to do extensive research into the community history, governing parties, culture and traditions is the single most important step to take prior to contacting the community.

2.

Plan activities by taking into account the timing of issues such as fishing, hunting, berry picking.

Through your research, you will learn about the timing of traditional activities so you can plan your work to respect these important events. Timing can be everything for the person who is looking to build relationships with a neighbouring Indigenous community.

3.

The Issue of Timing.

Consider the issue of death in an Indigenous community. Life is precious in any community, but the population is a critical concern to communities struggling to grow as Nations. In this context it is not uncommon for all band operations, including the band office, to shut down completely following the death in a community. Try not to be disappointed if this happens to you.

4.

Learn how to pronounce the community's name correctly.

A good way to learn the pronunciation is to call the band office after hours and listen to the recorded message. Practice until you nail it - close enough doesn't count.

Here's a related article from our blog: [**Why should you learn to pronounce Indigenous names?**](#)

5.

Thank the community for the invitation into their traditional territory.

The long struggle for respect has been tough, but through it all Indigenous Peoples have continued to follow basic protocols. If you want to work effectively with Indigenous communities then one of the best ways to do so is to show respect to the people with whom you are working. This can be established at the beginning of any meeting by following proper protocol and acknowledging the host community, its people, and its territory.

Before the meeting determine if you are meeting on the community's treaty or traditional lands. Use the appropriate protocol according to whether the meeting is on the community's treaty or traditional lands.

Treaty Territory Protocol: "I would like to thank the _____ for agreeing to meet with us today and for welcoming us to your treaty lands."

Traditional Territory Protocol: "I would like to thank the _____ First Nation(s) for taking the time to meet with us and for inviting us into your traditional territory."

Here are some [resources](#) to help you in this important research.

6.

Use caution when shaking hands.

The typical North American elbow grab and double pump may not be needed or appreciated. Some Indigenous people do not shake hands and therefore are not expecting, or are uncomfortable with, a handshake. With this in mind, we have to understand and be prepared to offer a hand and not have one offered in return.

7.

Try to establish a relationship and meet before you need something.

Establish a positive presence before you make a request of the community. You are trying to establish a relationship that will support and benefit your work. Time spent building the relationship in the early phase is a wise and valuable investment of your time and resources.

And be sure to maintain the relationship by keeping in touch. It's respectful to avoid contacting the community only when you need something.

8.

Recognize that there are many dynamics at play when working with Indigenous people and organizations.

Try to learn all you can about the dynamics, identities, and allegiances of the participants in a situation before moving to a solution.

9.

Try to match the conversation pattern of the people with whom you are working.

Because the traditional mode of Indigenous communication is oral, speech nuances such as tone, tempo, volume and inflexions can be very important. Non-Indigenous conversations tend to follow a brisk pattern of “point-counter-point.”

Be aware of the differences and try to match the community style of speech if you can without trying to copy their accent. Don't be in a rush to respond until you figure out the pace and be sure to let the speaker finish speaking.

10.

Recognize that individual Nations highly value their autonomy.

One Indigenous community cannot speak for another. Avoid setting up processes, discussions, or engagements where this could be an issue.

11.

Learn about and stay up-to-date on Indigenous issues and perspectives.

A key to working effectively with Indigenous communities is to understand their perspectives in advance. Learning a community's history and current issues will enable you to anticipate its priorities and core concerns about your business interests. To do this, find out if the community is active on social media. Follow the community on Facebook. As well, subscribe to community papers and use Google alerts to help you stay up to date.

12.

Be prepared to have your meetings recorded via microphone or video camera.

Some communities have had problems in their dealings with people who were less than honourable in remembering what they said.

13.

Honour all your agreements, especially your oral agreements.

Traditionally, Indigenous communities are oral societies. In Indigenous culture, your word is more important than anything written on a piece of paper. At all costs, you must make sure that you protect your word and integrity in all your dealings on behalf of your organization. Nothing can damage your reputation more than having to say, "Things have changed and I will no longer be able to deliver what I promised."

14.

Understand that internal community communications happen in many different ways.

These differences can impact your organization's ability to work effectively with those communities.

15.

Know the difference between a band chief and a hereditary chief before you visit an Indigenous community.

There are two classifications of chief:

Band chief: A person elected by band members to govern for a specified term. Under the specifications of the *Indian Act* band councils must have an election every two years, unless modified by agreement.

Hereditary chief: A **hereditary chief** is a leader who has power passed down from one generation to the next along bloodlines or other cultural protocols, similar to European royalty.

16.

Be prepared to meet both band chiefs and hereditary chiefs on the same day and in the same meeting.

It is possible to have both band chiefs and hereditary chiefs at the same meeting. I have seen communities where as many as nine hereditary chiefs and one elected chief show up to a meeting.

Here's an article with some more information for you: **[Indigenous Chiefs - Traditional or Elected Roles and Responsibilities](#)**

17.

Aboriginal Peoples rights are communally held.

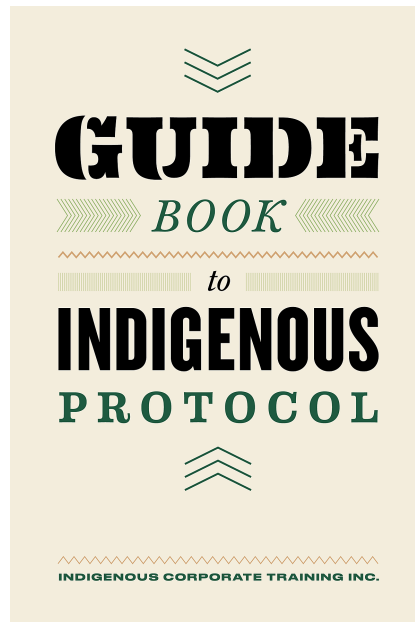
Be aware that the whole community may need to be involved in the decision-making process and plan accordingly to accommodate the time this will take.

18.

Expect to participate in cultural events and ask for protocol guidance from the host.

At some point during your work with an Indigenous community, you will be expected to participate in a cultural event. It could be an opening prayer, a smudge, or some other form of cultural protocol. When in doubt about what to do, ask the host or a friend of the community to explain the ceremony's participation process. If all else fails, follow the lead of the people in front of you.

Download our eBook on Indigenous Protocol



[Click here to download](#)

19.

Ask people “where they are from” to learn about where they likely stand on community issues.

This is different from “Where do you live?” If the person replies, “I’m living in Vancouver,” you may have uncovered an important clue about the role that person plays in the community. It could be that this person has left the community temporarily for education or management training, and is being groomed as a future leader.

Or, it could be that s/he has been adopted out and no longer has intimate community knowledge or involvement.

If the reply describes a place in the person’s traditional territory, then you might guess that the person is more connected to the community, and therefore is more knowledgeable and supportive regarding its interests.

If you are meeting people right in the community itself you can ask if they grew up there instead of where they are from.

20.

Don't use colloquialisms.

Few things will tarnish you faster than the thoughtless use of colloquialisms. Many colloquial expressions used in popular communication carry connotations that may offend at least some of the people you will meet.

21.

Use these eight colloquialisms at your peril!

1. Indian giver
2. Circle the wagons
3. Low man on the totem pole
4. Rain dance
5. Too many chiefs, not enough Indians
6. Pow wow
7. Indian summer
8. Indian time

22.

Don't use acronyms in communications.

I have attended many meetings in Indigenous communities and have witnessed first-hand the overuse of acronyms by other visitors, which may make great sense to the speaker, but not to those listening. Remember where you are and who is in your audience. Not only will many in your Indigenous audience be unfamiliar with your acronyms but they also might not even want to learn them so don't lace your presentation with them.

23.

Avoid using too many technical terms in your communications.

Much the same as the overuse of acronyms, overuse of technical terms will leave the same impression. Indigenous audiences are like audiences anywhere in the sense that they want a presentation that they can relate to and understand. One comment we often hear Indigenous community members say is, "How come the presenters have to use such big words?" Use language that the layperson will understand and explain things in plain language that everyone can understand.

24.

Avoid the term stakeholder.

“Stakeholder” is a commonly used business term that should be avoided at all costs when working with Indigenous communities. If the ‘Rod and Gun Club’ (a stakeholder) doesn’t like what you are doing they can lobby their MP or MLA to try to effect changes. If an Indigenous community doesn’t like what is happening they have the ability to launch legal action protecting their constitutionally protected rights.

For an expansion on this tip, read this article: **[Why Aboriginal Stakeholder Engagement is Bad on Your Business Card](#)**

25.

Don't tell the community that you have to treat them “equally” with others.

“Equality” is another term that should be avoided when working with Indigenous people. When they hear the term equality or equal they hear that they have to give up their constitutionally protected rights, or they hear we can be equal only if they give up their human rights to be who they are as a people.

Here's an article you might find interesting: [***Indian Act and the right to vote.***](#)

26.

Don't tell the community what dates to meet.

Your meeting is just one of many and may not be a priority for the community leaders who are very busy managing and addressing the needs of their communities. There are also traditional and cultural pursuits, such as hunting and fishing that only happen at certain times of the year and will take precedence over your meeting.

It would be a more respectful strategy to ask which dates would work best for their community.

27.

Don't name drop other communities.

Many people assume that in their work it is okay to name drop as they move from community to community. Such assumptions are risky and can be outright destructive when working in Indigenous communities.

Everything can change as we move from community to community, even when communities are in close proximity to one another. Ask yourself where the value is in adding this to a conversation.

We have a great article on the pitfalls of this on our blog: **[Indigenous Name Dropping - The Dead Cat Bounce](#)**

28.

Don't assume a band is necessarily in its own territory.

Throughout Canada, many bands have been relocated from their traditional territories for different reasons. Be sure to talk to the ones who are on their traditional territories first and the relocated bands afterwards.

29.

Don't assume that the band chief and council are able to make land use decisions regarding other Peoples' territories.

The rights of Aboriginal Peoples are collectively held in law and apply only to their own territories.

30.

Don't assume that the community has a male leadership structure.

Some communities have matriarchal leadership while others have a patriarchal leadership structure.

If the community has a matriarchal leadership, then it's a good idea for those on your team who are engaging with the community to be women.

31.

Don't expect to work jointly with the same community, in the same way, on different issues.

Different issues will have different concerns and impacts. Take the time to learn the critical concerns of a community - it could be providing employment or preserving culturally significant areas - and modify your approach to respect the individual situation. It's always good to avoid a cookie-cutter approach when working with Indigenous communities.

32.

Don't expect to work jointly with different communities in the same way on similar issues.

"What I did with a previous community should work with all other communities!" Again, the cookie-cutter, one size fits all approach is to be avoided. Each community has its own **worldview**, history, culture, traditions, and challenges. Do your research, or due diligence, into each community you want to work with.

33.

Don't confuse potlatch with potluck.

A potlatch is an ancient, traditional gathering held by many coastal Indigenous communities that has survived the best attempts of the government to banish it. It is a primary means for the communities to bear witness, to confirm in public any changes in status such as marriage, birth, death, and coming of age. The word itself is a Chinook Jargon word that means "to give".

A potluck is a gathering of people who each bring food to share like chicken wings, chilli and brownies.

34.

Don't confuse reserves with reservations.

Reserve is the Canadian term. Reservation is the American term or used in booking hotels, restaurants, and airlines

35.

Don't refer to individuals as Indians or Natives.

Some people are really proud and others are deeply offended if you call them Indian or Native. Instead, use a term they are comfortable with. Go with what they are calling themselves. Read **Indigenous Peoples terminology - Guidelines for Usage** for some more insight and suggestions regarding usage

36.

Avoid asking if Indigenous Peoples are going to be Canadian when this is all over.

Good question if you are trying to start a bench-clearing brawl. Who is Canadian and what rights Canadians hold are contained in the *Canadian Constitution Act 1982*. Treaties and Aboriginal rights are entrenched in the Constitution. Therefore, Indigenous Peoples are already Canadian.

37.

Don't impose or expect direct eye contact.

Many non-Indigenous people believe that it is important to maintain eye contact during a conversation. For many Indigenous Peoples, continuous eye contact may not be expected or even accepted as a courtesy of conversation. For Residential School Survivors, eye contact with school or church officials often led to physical punishment.

38.

Don't overdress.

Along with any assumptions, you should also leave behind the business suit, Gucci bag or high heel shoes. This attire can send two wrong messages:

- 1) you have lots of money
- 2) your attire indicates a "defender of the empire" attitude.

Both of these messages can have serious ramifications for your meeting by setting a tone that may not accurately reflect you or your organization.

39.

Don't obsess about the duration of a meeting.

Sometimes meeting agendas aren't adhered to if some topics take longer to discuss or new ones arise. Be present in the moment. When you book a meeting with an Indigenous community, try to keep a buffer of time between the expected ending of the meeting and your next appointment. Don't check your watch, and definitely turn off your phone.

In **26 Ways to Derail Your Indigenous Community Meeting**, we provide some more actions to avoid.

40.

Don't feel that you must answer or fill silent periods during discussions.

These silent periods can be longer than you are accustomed to, and may be needed for thought formulation. Try to ensure that the speaker has finished before you contribute to the conversation.

Remember the saying "There is a reason we have two ears and only one mouth."



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