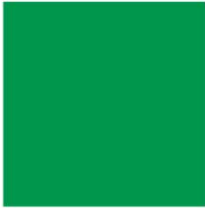


Indigenous Education | Cultural Protocols



learning | as unique | as every student



Calgary Board
of Education

Table of Contents | Guidelines

Indigenous Cultural Protocol Guidelines	1
What are Protocols?.....	2
Acknowledging the Land.....	2
Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers.....	3
Requests	3
Tobacco Offerings	3
Ceremony	4
Smudge	4
Helpers	5
Hosting	5
Gatherings/ Food / Hospitality.....	5
Honouring Knowledge	5
Acknowledgement	6
Additional Resources:	7
References	8
Appendix.....	9

Indigenous Cultural Protocol Guidelines



The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) is committed to working in ways that reflect worldviews and Indigenous ways of knowing that strengthen learning experiences for each student. In order to build meaningful relationships and to honour knowledge systems, it is critical that cultural protocols and worldviews are reflected in and through ways of working.

As First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities access and revitalize their spirituality, cultures, languages, laws, and governance systems, and as non-Aboriginal Canadians increasingly come to understand Indigenous history within Canada and to recognize and respect Indigenous approaches to establishing and maintaining respectful relationships, Canadians can work together to forge a new covenant of reconciliation. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission)

The CBE [Indigenous Education Strategy](#) articulates the following priorities:

- **Cultivating a Balanced and Respectful Relationship:**
Cultivating a balanced and respectful relationship between Indigenous knowledge systems and existing CBE knowledge systems in how we think about and do everything.
- **Advancing Culturally Responsive Instructional Design & Assessment:**
Honouring Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and histories through responsive learning environments and instructional design & assessment for the benefit of all students.
- **Advancing System-Wide Learning:**
Ensuring staff are knowledgeable, understanding and respectful of the strength and diversity of First Nations, Metis and Inuit; the implications of treaties and agreements with First Nations and Metis; and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- **Building Respectful Working Relationships with Community:**
Working with community from the very beginning as part of how we think about and do everything.

The CBE Indigenous Education team has been seeking guidance, wisdom and teachings from Elders and community Knowledge Keepers regarding cultural protocols over a number of years. These teachings have been shared orally.

This document represents a summary of those teachings. It also includes knowledge gained from other organizations and districts.

This protocol document has been created to provide guiding principles for the CBE community as it moves forward in the implementation of the Three-Year Education Plan/Indigenous Education Strategy.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples have distinct and diverse protocols and teachings. Learning comes from asking, practicing, and building relationships. When asked, Elders have said, “*Come with an open heart and good intentions.*”

This guide is meant to provide some understandings but cannot contain all teachings for all peoples. Additional support from the Indigenous Education Team is available.

What are Protocols?

The way knowledge is honoured matters. The importance of following protocols cannot be overstated. Protocols refer to the guidelines, manners, etiquettes and rules that are in place to keep Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing at the forefront. This is consistent with [Administrative Regulation 2060: Employee Business and Travel Expenses \(AR 2060\)](#). It is the first step to establishing good relations. It acknowledges that time has been spent learning Indigenous protocols and recognizing their importance.

Protocol Events are activities that involve consideration for the customs and regulations dealing with diplomatic or cultural formality, precedence and etiquette.

Engaging with Elders (n.d.) tells us that protocols “are part of our natural laws and keep things respectful of the process. They are ways to acknowledge the roles and responsibilities that each of us has to play when interacting with each other and Creator.”

Doreen Spence in *Engaging with Elders* states that “protocols emulate the values - love, honesty, kindness etc. to have the courage to approach and humbleness.”

Acknowledging the Land

Elders have taught us it is important to [Acknowledge the Land](#) where we gather and the first peoples who traditionally lived here. It shows respect for people, their contributions and their ways of knowing, which are reflected through the stories and songs that have lived on this land for thousands of years. We are making an acknowledgment to further demonstrate our commitment to work together as a community in laying the foundation for reconciliation through education.

CBE Acknowledgement of the Land

We would like to acknowledge the traditional territories and oral practices of the Blackfoot Nations, which includes the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai. We also acknowledge the Tsuut'ina and Stoney Nakoda First Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.

When should schools use the acknowledgement?

- At the beginning of the year, e.g., the first assembly of the year
- At the end of the year, e.g., the final assembly of the year
- At significant school celebrations, e.g., graduation

When should service units use the acknowledgement?

- At significant celebrations, e.g., retirements and long-service awards
- At significant system meetings and events, e.g., Leadership Meetings

Elders have provided [pronunciation](#) examples for each of the Nations. Practising pronunciation is recommended prior to events to ensure comfortable delivery.

Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers

This document provides some basic information as a guide to approach and work with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples defines an Elder as:

Elders in Aboriginal communities are those recognized and respected for knowing, living and teaching the traditional knowledge. They see the world through the eyes of the ancestors and interpret the contemporary world through lessons passed down through generations. Their wisdom is transferred to young people who seek their teachings. The elders are a living bridge between the past and the present. They also provide a vision for the future, a vision grounded in tradition and informed by the experience of living on the land, safeguarding and disseminating knowledge gained over centuries...The elders are willing to share if we are willing to listen. We hope to do justice to their words. (RACP, Volume 4, p.3)

An Elder or Knowledge Keeper is someone who has earned a reputation for wisdom and spiritual knowledge. Elders perform traditional ceremonies, are respected as teachers, and are often sought out as healers. Some people are recognized as Elders because they have spent a lifetime studying a particular aspect of their peoples' culture and traditions. Others are acknowledged as Elders because they are members of sacred societies or holders of sacred objects. Still others are respected as Elders for their kindness and generosity.

Elders' contribution to education is enormous because they possess specialized knowledge about First Nations, Métis or Inuit history, society and spirituality. Elders seldom announce their status or position but are known to their communities. (Education is Our Buffalo, p.32)

Requests

Given the gifts and wisdom that Indigenous Elders bring and their recognition in a community, it is suggested that each person work with the community to learn the specialized knowledge that each Elder holds. It is important to ensure that gifts match the request being made. In the spirit of reconciliation, the Elder should be an integral part in the planning and unfolding of the whole event if they are to have a role.

When inviting or requesting help from Elders, it is a generally accepted protocol in Treaty 7 territory to offer tobacco. Requests should be clear and specific, and, when possible, made in person. Elders may or may not accept the tobacco. If they feel they are able to fulfill the request, they will accept the tobacco. The tobacco in this instance becomes a "contract". If they feel they are unsuited to the request or that another Elder may be more suitable to guiding the request, they will not accept the tobacco and may suggest another Elder or Knowledge Keeper.

Tobacco Offerings

Typically, a pouch of tobacco, or loose tobacco wrapped in broadcloth, is used as an offering. Tobacco is usually presented at the time of the request or just before the blessing, ceremony or event.



For larger requests such as a ceremonial events, square meters of cotton broadcloth may be offered with tobacco. Colours of cloth vary with each Elder. It is important to consult with the Elder supporting the event.

Tobacco should be stored in a safe secure location and out of reach of students. [AR 2060](#) section 6-32 makes allowances for the purchase of tobacco for protocol events.

Ceremony

The Calgary Board of Education is committed to cultivating a balanced and respectful relationship between Indigenous ways of being and existing CBE knowledge systems. This may include holding ceremonies when appropriate. Please contact the Indigenous Education Team for further guidance.

Smudge

The focus of school is to be a place of learning. The inclusion of relevant cultural, spiritual, and traditional knowledge and practices in school can positively impact student success. (Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools)

Elders, Knowledge Keepers, families, community members, staff and students may wish to smudge at the beginning of meetings, events or professional learning. Smudge is a practice in many Indigenous cultures that involves burning a small piece of dried medicine such as sage, sweetgrass or cedar inside of a cast-iron dish or abalone shell. Participants sit in a circle and listen to the facilitator offer teachings about the practice and its role in historical and contemporary Indigenous communities. Participants may be asked to pass the smoldering ember around the circle as part of this traditional way of opening or beginning time together, always with the option to pass.

While smudging during CBE events or in schools, please be aware of the following protocols.

- When smudging with students or participants under 18, parents and guardians should be informed. Please see appendix for a smudge letter template
- The CBE Education Centre requires 24 hours notice for smudging. Please contact security desk for further information
- Contact building administration at CBE sites (CT centre, Area offices, schools) for building specific protocols around smudging
- Use well ventilated spaces when possible (open window)
- Communicate smudge location and time with students, staff and families
- Smudge is led by a person who has an understanding of what a smudge is and why it is done. That person may be an Elder or cultural teacher who has been invited to the school; it may be a knowledgeable staff member; it may be a family member or guardian; it may be a student (Smudging in Schools, 2016)

It is significant that this is an honoured practice in the CBE community. For additional information and questions, please contact the Indigenous Education Team.

Helpers

Elders may be accompanied by another person for help and support. Helpers should be treated in the same manner as the Elders and it may also be appropriate to consider financial compensation. It is suggested to ask the Elder directly if they will have someone with them.

Hosting

During an event, Indigenous Elders should be provided parking, a warm welcome (light handshakes are well received), tea or coffee and a snack, an orientation to the washrooms, and priority seating. They should also be provided with a school staff member or youth volunteer to stay with them throughout the event. For larger events, it is customary to have a quiet room for Elders in which to rest. The quiet room should be equipped with chairs, beverages, and snacks.

Gatherings/ Food / Hospitality

Food plays a vital and important role in meetings, gatherings, ceremonies and Indigenous protocols. Food is sacred. All nourishment is a gift and held as sacred. Mother Earth gives food to all beings and sustains people both in body and in spirit. Food protocols include ethics around respect, reciprocity, relationality, sustainability, connectedness, and community. The late Blackfoot Elder and scholar Narcisse Blood and Dr. Cynthia Chambers remind us of the following Blackfoot teaching:

As well as being a highly valued social activity, áakssissawáato'op, or visiting a place, is a primary means of knowledge exchange for Niitsítapiiksi. A visit holds an expectation that one will spend time, be amicable and relaxed, stay awhile, be a guest, converse, and probably eat a meal and drink a cup of tea.... (Blood & Chambers, 2010, p.15)

Hospitality should be forefront at gatherings, meetings, learning opportunities, and a part of everything we do. This can include, but is not limited to: offering coffee and tea upon arrival; providing snacks and/or meals to attendants; ensuring comfortable seating; and providing convenient and marked parking. This shows respect for people and the knowledge they bring. It is important to attend to hospitality in schools and service units while attending to [AR 2060](#).

Honouring Knowledge

An honorarium is offered as a thank you, a gesture of reciprocity in recognizing wisdom and guidance that Elders offer. It is a way to honour the knowledge held and express gratitude to the Elder for the trust they have shown in their willingness to share their knowledge.

In addition to honoraria, expressions of gratitude such as blankets, mugs, or cards may be presented after the blessing, ceremony, or event is completed. It is suggested that the honorarium be included inside of a thank-you card and offered to the Elder with a handshake. These expressions of gratitude should be given upon completion of the event, ceremony or meeting. It is customary to offer them in a subtle and kind manner rather than in a public presentation.

The CBE has established guidelines for engaging with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Consideration should also be given to compensation for travel, exceptional time commitments, preparation, planning and materials provided, among other things.

Consultations and initial meetings 0-1 hours in length	\$100
1 – 2 hours	\$150
Half day	\$250
Full day	\$500

Acknowledgement

The CBE acknowledges the countless Elders, Knowledge Keepers, community members, students, families and staff who have contributed their knowledge and understanding to this work over time.

Additional Resources:

- Alberta Teacher's Association. (2018). *Stepping stones: Elder protocol*
<https://www.teachers.ab.ca/For%20Members/Professional%20Development/IndigenousEducationandWalkingTogether/Pages/WalkingTogether.aspx>
- Engaging with Elders: A co-created story. (n.d). *With support of Native Counselling Services of Alberta*. Retrieved from [Engaging with Elders: A Co-created Story https://obrieniph.ucalgary.ca/files/iph/elders-protocol-.pdf](https://obrieniph.ucalgary.ca/files/iph/elders-protocol-.pdf)
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- Engaging with Elders: A Co-created Story. (n.d). Retrieved from: https://auma.ca/sites/default/files/Advocacy/Programs_Initiatives/WIC/elders_protocol_by_native_counselling_services_of_alberta_2017.pdf
- Administrative Procedure 164: Smudging in Schools. Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools. (2016). <https://www.wrps11.ca/download/99615>

Appendix

The following text can be used in a message to parents/guardians prior to a smudge.

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The focus of school is to be a place of learning. The inclusion of relevant cultural, spiritual and traditional knowledge and practices in schools can positively impact student success. Smudging is a relevant Indigenous practice. (Smudging in Schools, Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools)

As part of our ongoing learning, students in Grade [grade] at [school] will have an opportunity to participate in a traditional smudge on [date].

Smudge involves burning a small amount of dried plant such as sage, sweetgrass or cedar inside a cast-iron dish or abalone shell. During smudge, participants sit in a circle and listen to the Elder/facilitator offer teachings about the practice and its role in historical and contemporary Indigenous communities. The smudge bowl may be passed around the circle as part of this traditional way of opening or beginning time together. Participation in smudge is informed, voluntary, and always connected to learning. If, for any reason, a student is not participating in the experiential learning, the teacher will ensure that associated learning outcomes are available.

We are honoured to offer this learning opportunity to our students. For additional information and questions please contact your student's classroom teacher.

Warm Regards,

[Name]
[Position title]