



Blue Sky

Community Healing Centre

One Tribe Indigenous Worldview and Diversity Coaching Relationship Building Principles ©

These guidelines are presented as a handout in coordination with the Blue Sky One Tribe Indigenous Worldview and Diversity Coaching. These best practices have been developed through our own personal teachings and professional experiences of working with Indigenous communities and organizations in the north. It would always be advisable to do your own research concerning the practices and expectations of the Indigenous community or organization you are working with.

Overall Philosophy

Relationship building is a process that involves:

- an introduction through a mutual contact or a cold introduction;
- a getting-to-know each other on a human level first;
- the development of a relationship built on values of honesty and trust;
- the fostering of that trust relationship built on a reasonable period of time, and;
- then finally a confidence has been established with that relationship.

Think about your working relationship with your doctor, your hairdresser, your babysitter, your mechanic and so on. Keep in mind that in many cases, the First Nation has not yet had a productive relationship with a government or industry representative. The fostering of a working relationship will take time.

Initial Contact

1. Important: **face-to-face meetings** are always preferred and encouraged;
2. In order to make **initial contact** to schedule face-to-face or electronic meetings, a telephone call is best. Do not assume that if you have sent an invitation or request via email, faxed or mailed a letter, or sent a letter by courier, that it will necessarily reach your targeted audience. It is always best to follow up with personal contact;
3. **Check with your colleagues and other acquaintances to see if they have an appropriate contact** in the particular community or organization that you are looking to work with. You could also try to **connect with one of the political organizations** associated with this community or organization i.e. tribal council or political territorial organization to ascertain who the best liaison person would be for you;

4. If you do not have a contact already assigned to you through your office, **protocol dictates that you would try speaking to someone from leadership in that community or organization first** i.e. Chief and Council, Band Manager or Executive Director. Once you speak to leadership, if they feel that this is a worthy cause for the community or organization **they will usually give you a contact to work with**;
5. If you **have a contact already assigned to you** through your office i.e. Ontario Works Administrator for the staff of the Ontario Disability Support Program as that is your client group you are usually working with, then that is the individual that you would be reaching out to initially and ongoing through your working relationship unless otherwise directed. During the scheduling of your meetings with the Ontario Works Administrator (or other business contact as dictated by your agency/business) please copy the leadership on all correspondence concerning informing the leadership when you will be in the community. Furthermore, when you arrive in the community advise the band office of your arrival;

Scheduling Meetings

6. Generally speaking, **road accessible communities are led by the leadership and remote communities are lead by the community** (including Elders, family heads, youth, etc.);
7. Having the community contact now does not necessarily mean that you are home free as community and organization front line workers are extremely busy and it will likely be **very challenging to connect with this designated community or organization contact person**. Persistence will be required;
8. When you do connect with the designated community contact person, you can then **present them very briefly your purpose**. It is suggested that you minimize the explanation and keep it focused on how this will benefit the community. You could mention that you were given their contact information from the leadership. You can now provide any associated written materials which you can encourage your contact to share with leadership and any other appropriate individuals or departments;
9. If all of this meets with the approvals required at the community or organization level, then you are on your way to **planning your first meeting with the community**;
10. It is suggested to stay in close contact with your liaison person in whichever way is convenient for them: phone, email and/or fax. The next task would be to **confirm a date**. Once the date is confirmed then you can proceed;

Winning Tips

11. Then you can **coordinate the rest of the details** with your liaison person, such as:
 - a. meeting room;
 - b. catering of a meal and/or snacks/refreshments;
 - c. translation costs;
 - d. honorariums for Elders if a prayer or greeting is required;
 - e. cost for a note taker if required;

- f. cost for microphone and other audio equipment if necessary; and,
 - g. any other costs as determined by the community.
12. As the government or industry, it is understood that **you would be responsible for these costs** (not the community or organization);
13. It is suggested that you **begin your meeting with food** i.e. lunch or dinner or snacks, food is a common denominator among all cultures. Having that introductory social bonding time could be helpful to the community or organization members attending the meeting to feel more comfortable with you as an individual. You would not talk about your business matters at this time. You could talk about topics that may be of an interest to them such as your hunting or fishing trips, time spent with your family and other pleasantries. The time and resources invested to start a meeting with a meal could be supportive in initiating a genuine dialogue and a working relationship with the community or organization;
14. Another suggestion regardless of the community's or organization's spiritual practices is to also **bring gifts** with you especially if this is the first time that you are meeting with this community or organization. Gifts should be equal to the requests that you are making of the community. At the very least, you could bring Tim's donuts or Kentucky Fried Chicken (favourites), gifts of fresh fruit (excellent gifts for schools or day cares), coffee, little items that the grannies would appreciate (sewing items), with a little imagination, and as you develop your relationship with the First Nations, it will get easier figuring out what would be good gifts;

More Planning

15. It would not be advisable to bring an agenda with you. An agenda is a western concept and is not received well in the communities however, you could bring with you or send in advance a **list of topics** that you would like to discuss or share with the community or organization members. You cannot assume that your 'good idea' will necessarily be something that the community or organization will be interested in;
16. **Cultural activities** (i.e., hunts, annual gatherings, powwows, memorials, feasts, ceremonies, etc.) **are a priority** for communities and organizations which could therefore impact your schedules;
17. **Many Indigenous people teach through stories:** If you ask a question, you may not receive a *direct* answer (be patient as the answer unfolds or you understand later);
18. **Indigenous cultures look at 'everything' in a holistic manner** (spiritual, mental, physical and emotional) which you need to keep in mind as you are planning and organizing with communities and organizations;
19. We cannot stress enough **how important humour is to the Indigenous people.** Socialize first, crack a joke, have a tea, before you try to talk about serious matters;

Terminology

20. Generally speaking, your First Nation, Métis and Inuit **partners do not like the term 'Aboriginal'**. Find out the terminology that they prefer i.e. Indigenous or when in doubt use First Nation;
21. It would be very important for you to **use terminology such as 'engagement' rather than using 'consultation'**. The word consultation is not received well in communities;

Dealing with Emotions

22. **You could experience a variety of emotions from Indigenous people** such as displaced anger or confusion or other emotions which are direct impacts of Indian Residential Schools survivors, children of survivors and grand children of survivors. You did not necessarily do anything wrong or offend the person. It is important for non-Indigenous people to know that you have a unique opportunity to assist the Indigenous people. I could recommend some good books to read. We are very fortunate that some residential school survivors are now coming forward with their stories. This is a very comfortable way for you to get more familiar with some of the impacts of residential school and also to think of ways that you can help. Listening is a very good beginning to providing that assistance. You don't need to have any answers either, be compassionate and understanding. What you want people to do to understand a condition that perhaps one of your children had;
23. Your First Nation contact **may see you only as the 'face' of the government or industry**. Their experiences with government or industry in many cases has likely not been positive. They may paint you with the same brush. They may bring up every unfortunate experience that they have had with government or industry and may expect you to provide explanations or even compensation for these experiences. This is all the more reason to develop a trusting working relationship so that you can be very honest, provide your perspective to the situation and explain what you are prepared to do on their behalf.

Traditional Spirituality or Religion

24. As a result of the Indian Residential Schools and other impacts, generally speaking, **Indigenous people learn about their culture for the first time** when: they attend educational institutions, they attend drug or alcohol rehabilitation centres, they are incarcerated or are in an urban centre for medical treatment;
25. The broken situation of the Indigenous culture due to the Indian Residential Schools (and other impacts) causes a **push/pull and confusion around traditional spirituality and religion between community members**. This is a need to know item: is the individual or community that you are meeting with a traditional person, Gospel, or faith-based i.e. United, Anglican, Catholic, Mennonite, Baptist, and so on. If you were to offer tobacco to an individual of a Christian belief, this could impact your working relationship. Every individual, family and community is different!
26. If your research has determined that this particular community does follow traditional spirituality (most road accessible communities) then it would be advisable to **bring**

tobacco ties. You should have enough tobacco ties for all the people that you are meeting with plus extras. If you are meeting with the community or organization membership, plan for at least thirty tobacco ties. Tobacco ties are usually made with broadcloth (in one of the four main colors – red, white, yellow or black) tied with a small ribbon. You should have enough tobacco for a person who would be smoking a pipe (i.e. a pipe bowl full). Whenever possible, use natural tobacco i.e. purchase tobacco from Mother Earth Tobacco at <http://motherearthtobacco.com/>;

In Summary

27. It is imperative that you **do your research** and check on the community or organization that you are looking to work with. If you can't find the information ask. You can ask the individual or organization in a respectful and caring way;
28. **Create an honest and genuine environment** so that your Indigenous partners will feel comfortable working with you; and,
29. If you require further assistance, you could **contact Blue Sky Community Healing Centre**. We will be more than happy to work with you and provide you with further instruction.

If you would like more information, please contact:

Cindy Crowe, Executive Director
Blue Sky Community Healing Centre
512 Victoria Ave East, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7C 1A7
Tele: (807) 473-9851
Toll Free: 1-888-852-5856
Cell: (807) 627-5768
Fax: (807) 939-2750
crowe@tbaytel.net
www.blueskycommunityhealingcentre.ca
<https://www.facebook.com/BlueSkyCentre>
Sign up for our newsletter: <http://eepurl.com/b64Evz>