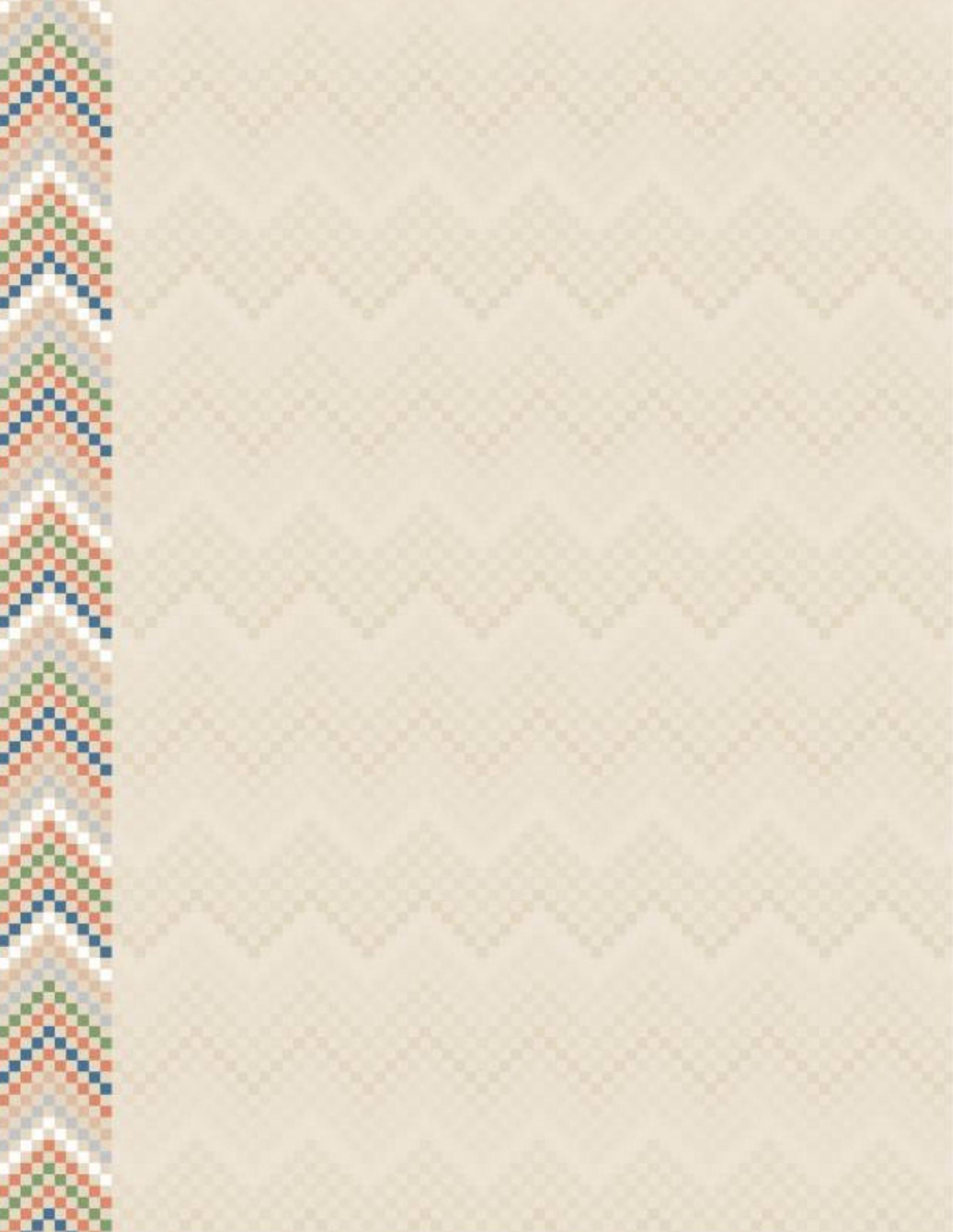


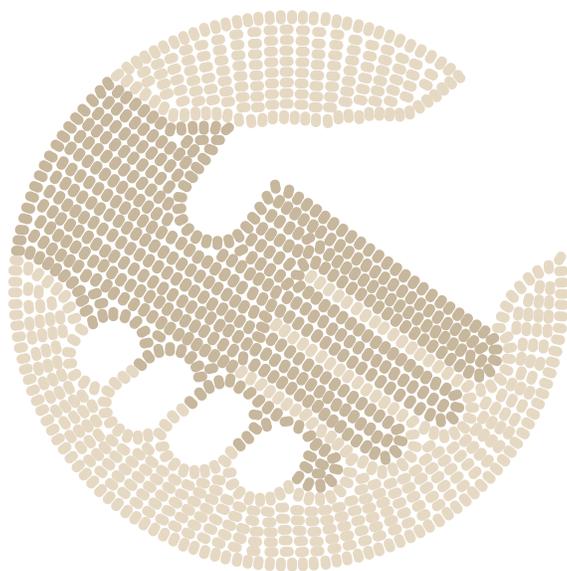
AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT
of First Nations and Métis
Traditional Knowledge Keepers

The Wîcihitowin Conference Committee



Authentic Engagement of First Nations and Métis Traditional Knowledge Keepers

Author: The Wîcihitowin Conference Committee





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Wîcihitowin Committee would like to thank our generous sponsors who helped make the Wîcihitowin - Aboriginal Engagement Conference possible and provided us the opportunity to bring so many Traditional Knowledge Keepers together.

This document is a starting point for organizations to engage Traditional Knowledge Keepers in their community in a respectful and meaningful way. It is not a comprehensive guide to engagement as there are communities and protocols not represented in the document. Our hope is to continue building upon this until it truly represents all Indigenous people living in Saskatchewan.

Thank you to our humble group of Traditional Knowledge Keepers who gave us their time so that we could provide the community with a document that will help us on the road to reconciliation.

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ELDERS AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS ACROSS THE PROVINCE

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INTRODUCTION

The City of Saskatoon has declared July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016 a Year of Reconciliation. An important piece of this historical journey is to honor the Calls to Action set forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Reconciliation is an ongoing process of dialogue and engagement between Indigenous people and the rest of the Canadian public. In some instances, engagement may mean going back and repairing past mistakes and forging new partnership models as a way to move forward.

“Wícihitowin” is a Cree and Saulteaux word that means, “They help each other” or “working together”. It’s a word that describes the collective process involved in helping/sharing with one another. The word helps us understand the concept of reconciliation and that it is by helping each other reach our optimum humanity.

“Our societies were finished. We knew how to treat the world. We knew how to treat other people. We understood ethics. We understand the spiritual.”

The Wícihitowin Aboriginal Engagement Conference, held in Saskatoon in November 2015, brought together key investors and community members who were interested in authentic engagement with Indigenous people. During the conference, a two-day meeting took place that brought together 24 First Nations and Métis Traditional Knowledge Keepers from across Saskatchewan. The Traditional Knowledge Keepers represented many nations that included representatives of the Cree, Saulteaux, Dene, and Métis nations. The purpose of this gathering was to develop a protocol guide that would help the City of Saskatoon and its many partners to respectfully engage with First Nations and Métis Traditional Knowledge Keepers. The Traditional Knowledge Keepers were deeply committed to ensuring that the information they shared would support this work in a meaningful way.

Following the gathering of the Traditional Knowledge Keepers, it was felt that there should be a provincial wide engagement of Traditional Knowledge Keepers. As a result, 31 Traditional Knowledge Keepers from across the province of Saskatchewan were approached in their own communities to contribute to the development of this guide to authentic engagement of Traditional Knowledge Keepers. The aim was to provide insights into the appropriate protocols to follow when individuals, partners, and agencies are seeking the knowledge, wisdom, and advice of Traditional Knowledge Keepers. The Traditional Knowledge Keepers were identified by their own communities to participate in this provincial engagement.



The term “Elder” was originally used to describe the individuals that we had engaged, however, an overwhelming majority felt that “Traditional Knowledge Keeper” was a more appropriate and accurate description in the English language. Some expressed that “Elder” was a term used by other cultures, such as the Mormons, to describe the older, more mature persons within their community.

Each Indigenous nation is unique and has their own set of customs, beliefs, and practices within the province of Saskatchewan. There will never be a congruent set of protocols that can be used in every community. More specifically, each Traditional Knowledge Keeper has their own protocols that adhere to their unique knowledge and spiritual practices. The goal of this document is to outline the consistencies in protocol that emerged from across the province of Saskatchewan. Therefore, this document is intended to only be a starting point for community agencies to begin working collaboratively with First Nations and Métis Traditional Knowledge Keepers. It is up to an individual and/or community agency to initiate a deeper understanding of Indigenous cultures by working directly with Traditional Knowledge Keepers and their communities.

“As Traditional Knowledge Keepers we have to make our knowledge available to society — that’s engagement.”

PROTOCOLS

Protocols are a key feature of Indigenous spiritual belief systems. Since Indigenous peoples’ spiritual philosophy includes an attribution of spirit and aliveness in the universe, the concepts of protocol also extends to how the elements (Ex: earth, wind, fire, water) and other entities in the universe are approached and treated. This spiritual concept would also include the ways that knowledge is approached and treated since it, too, would have a spirit in its own right and requires its own protocols for proper acknowledgment and engagement. Protocols are considered crucial in the proper and ethical engagement of others whether it be a Traditional Knowledge Keeper, prospective partner, or anyone else you wish to collaborate or engage with for the first time. Proper protocols, done with care and precision, ensure good energies are exchanged and sustainable relations are created.

“Our inherent spirituality is so sacred that we can’t just give it out to anyone, they have to follow spiritual protocols.”

One of the fundamental principles of Indigenous peoples' philosophy is that there is a "spirit world" that co-exists with the physical world in which we all live. The physical world and the spirit world co-exist with one another in relative harmony. Traditional Knowledge Keepers teach that one affects the other; hence, the need for protocols and authentic, respectful engagement of both physical beings (Ex: Traditional knowledge Keepers) and spiritual beings (Ex: the Creator) when attempting a large undertaking such as a research project or community event. Therefore, it is of vital importance to remember that respecting prayers and ceremonies is just as important as respecting the Traditional Knowledge Keeper themselves.

Indigenous people have an inherent culture of spirituality and Traditional Knowledge Keepers recognize their roles in promoting these values. The inclusion of ceremony in engagement is based on the Indigenous belief that people have to rely on a power greater than the self to transcend human frailties. Knowing spiritual protocols and teachings is a key skill of the Traditional Knowledge Keepers, and Traditional Knowledge Keepers who perform spiritual services consider this service as part and parcel of their work for the Creator. To respect this aspect of Traditional Knowledge Keeper wisdom is to respect the spiritual knowledge of Indigenous people.

The Traditional Knowledge Keepers put emphasis on acknowledging the spiritual dimension of doing things. For this reason, the Traditional Knowledge Keepers recognize, often through the teachings of the older generation, that they must uphold standards for spiritual and physical cleanliness. There are a vast number of various protocols which are based specifically on what an individual is requesting from a Traditional Knowledge Keeper. Depending on the community or nation, protocols could be different when seeking advice, requesting a prayer, hosting a pipe ceremony or any other traditional ceremony for that matter. The protocols that have been described in this document are the appropriate protocols when seeking the knowledge of a Traditional Knowledge Keeper during the initial stages of meaningful engagement. A Traditional Knowledge Keeper will often explain the importance of adhering to spiritual protocols, as well as the specific requirements for each request that is being made. The person(s) making a request from a Traditional Knowledge Keeper may, in turn, be requested to accomplish a task set out by the Traditional Knowledge Keeper and/or spirit world so that the request may be fulfilled. For example, an offering of tobacco or food may be requested as a way to satisfy the spirits that have been contacted by the Traditional Knowledge Keeper.



It is important to note that it can often be difficult to initiate the engagement of a Traditional Knowledge Keeper due to individuals being uncertain or afraid to offend. However, Traditional Knowledge Keepers are well aware of the uncertainty that exists and will often facilitate and teach the protocols with kindness and compassion.

WHAT IS A TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE KEEPER?

Traditional Knowledge Keepers are the foundation from which First Nations and Métis traditions, customs, laws, and spirituality are taught. They are the keepers of Indigenous knowledge that has been passed down from generation to generation since time immemorial. A Traditional Knowledge Keeper's duty is to preserve this knowledge for their communities and their nation. These individuals work towards achieving balance and harmony within their communities through the practice and preservation of Indigenous knowledge and culture; Traditional Knowledge Keepers teach the young people in their community about the inherent spiritual ways of First Nations and Métis people. When engaged, they do not seek to "convert" individuals into practitioners of Indigenous culture, rather, they simply wish to have their practices and beliefs understood and respected by those who may not be familiar with Indigenous traditions; especially, when a request is being made of them.

"We are each given gifts. We are each given the ability to speak for ourselves. At the end of the day it is not the people we are helping, we are working for our Creator."

As the caretakers of generations of Indigenous knowledge, Traditional Knowledge Keepers are the foundation of Indigenous peoples' societies. The Old People of the community have lived a long life which has enabled them to experience much of what life has to offer; the good and the bad; abundance and scarcity, triumph and loss, joy and sorrow. It is the Old People of the community who are considered to be the closest to the revered state of being "complete" men and women.

"What the Elders told me was that if I was looking for an Elder, I had to go to an Elder that was a good role model that has maintained good relationships with all their children, her husband, in-laws and had raised her children and helped raise her grandchildren and great grandchildren."

- o Traditional Knowledge Keepers are individual who demonstrates respect as an important value. They have respect for all people and all things, including those who have hurt Indigenous people.
- o Traditional Knowledge Keepers understand that we must not hate an individual but instead they pray for them.
- o Traditional Knowledge Keepers teach us to have love, respect, patience, and compassion for all things.

"It's not for us to hate the residential schools or the Catholic Church. We can't do that because they come from God in their own way. That is what we are trying to understand. When we talk about Elders, that is what I envision them to be."

WHO IS AN ELDER?

The role of a Traditional Knowledge Keeper is so sacred that most people do not believe that they have earned the title "Elder" or "Traditional Knowledge Keeper", even when the community acknowledges them as such. It is their genuine humility and respect for previous generations of Traditional Knowledge Keepers that inhibits their willingness to call themselves a Traditional Knowledge Keeper. Consequently, it is this humility and respect that is a benchmark of true Eldership within First Nations and Métis communities.

A Traditional Knowledge Keeper is a person who is trusted, respected, and valued by the communities they serve. This acknowledgment has been earned through their many experiences, clean way of living, and their willingness to help others in times of need. A Traditional Knowledge Keeper will often use their own personal journey in an effort to help others; reflecting on personal experiences and lessons that they had learned throughout their lives to help illustrate a healing journey. There were many individuals among the Traditional knowledge Keepers that felt that the only thing they could provide insight on was their own experiences, and often said it was inappropriate to tell another person how they should live their life.



There are various types of Traditional Knowledge Keepers within First Nations and Métis communities. They could include:

Contemporary Traditional Knowledge Keepers: These Traditional Knowledge Keepers provide insight and guidance on contemporary issues within a traditional context. They could also be known for their journey in life and pass on teachings about how to persevere within modern society.

Ceremonial Traditional Knowledge Keepers: These Traditional Knowledge Keepers almost always speak their traditional language, have spent time as a “helper” or “Oskapiwis” for other Traditional Knowledge Keepers and have acquired gifts and ceremonial rights through the appropriate protocols such as fasting and a naming ceremony. These Traditional Knowledge Keepers perform ceremonies such as sweatlodges and pipe ceremonies. It is important to note that ceremonies should only be conducted by those individuals who have earned the right to do so through traditional protocols and ceremony.

Oskapiwis: The Traditional Knowledge Keepers discussed the need to recognize the apprentices, the “Oskapiwis”; the “helpers” that are often seen with Traditional Knowledge Keepers in the performance of their duties. These apprentices are the Traditional Knowledge Keepers of tomorrow and are part and parcel of the Traditional Knowledge Keeper’s capacity to do what they must do. Apprenticeship is the process by which traditional knowledge is transferred to the Oskapiwis. Apprenticeship follows gender lines in the community. As an example, old men will teach young men and old women will teach young women, particularly as the knowledge relates to gender responsibilities. Within the process of apprenticeship, the sacred knowledge that is transmitted from one individual to another must retain its originality to the fullest extent possible. As an example, narratives, songs, prayers, and other practices are to be learned by the apprentice exactly the same way the teacher had taught them; same bodily movements, tone of voice, points of vocal emphasis or inflection, and timing. The apprentice has to practice and internalize the teachings until the knowledge is mastered. The knowledge obtained in this way must always be used for the good of the community and must never be used to the detriment of others.

In order to understand the protocols that are being followed, it would be beneficial to spend time with the Traditional Knowledge Keeper(s) that you are seeking assistance from. In fact, it is often viewed as unethical to simply approach a Traditional Knowledge Keeper and expect them to share the knowledge and wisdom you are seeking from them without proper protocol.

Furthermore, one cannot assume to gain everything they wish to know in one visit, regardless of the protocols that had been followed; those seeking the knowledge and wisdom of a Traditional Knowledge Keeper must be patient. There are often many personal sacrifices the Traditional Knowledge Keepers have had to make so to obtain the knowledge they keep. Traditional Knowledge Keepers have spent their entire lives acquiring the knowledge, experience, and wisdom that has been passed down from their ancestors since time immemorial. They have earned the rights to that knowledge through years of self-sacrifice and apprenticeship with other Traditional Knowledge Keepers.

“You have to spend time, if you want that knowledge you have to spend time to go through proper protocols that elder or maybe you go to spend 4 days with him, to teach you.”

The role of a Traditional Knowledge Keeper comes with great responsibility to the community they serve. There is a high demand for their time in a wide variety of roles that include leaders in prayer and ceremony, teachers to their apprentices, and council to their communities. The role of a Traditional Knowledge Keeper can be difficult and challenging due to the demands for their time, wisdom, and compassion.

“So I try to do that I try to give back what I have gotten out of life.”

The journey towards being recognized as a Traditional Knowledge Keeper is earned through dedication, sacrifice, and years of learning the protocols, songs, and ceremonies. Traditional Knowledge Keepers often spoke about the level of dedication that this journey required. The journey will be ongoing throughout the life of a Traditional Knowledge Keeper and will never be complete (Please see Appendix A for an Elders Biography that can be used when working with Traditional Knowledge Keepers).

OFFERING OF TOBACCO

The cultural use of tobacco is consistent throughout Saskatchewan. When an individual is seeking the knowledge, wisdom, or prayers of a Traditional Knowledge Keeper, it is essential to offer tobacco. It is often customary to explain in full what it is you are seeking from a Traditional Knowledge Keeper before offering the tobacco; this ensures that they are able to fulfill the request before accepting it. Traditional Knowledge Keepers may politely refuse the tobacco if they are unable to fulfill a request. At that time, they may suggest another Traditional Knowledge who would be better suited to provide the requested information or services.



For Traditional Knowledge Keepers, the use of tobacco is a spiritual principle and, essentially, a spiritual law that they must abide by in the work they perform for the Creator. Tobacco is a link between the physical and spiritual world. When burned, the smoke is believed to be the pathway to the spirit world, and as such, carries with it all the Traditional Knowledge Keepers thoughts, feelings, and prayers to the Creator. The offering and burning of tobacco is an ancient teaching regarding the protocol one must make prior to making a request. Traditional Knowledge Keepers feel an obligation to help when tobacco is used in a request and they say that nobody can be turned down when they follow the protocol.

“Because in our spiritual way of life the old man used to tell us what we have is so sacred we can’t just shout it out to everyone. You keep it to yourself unless people ask you in the traditional way to share that with you. That’s why they have to give tobacco. My understanding of the offering of tobacco is to, number one, let the person know you are serious about wanting the information.”

GIFTING OUR FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

Gift-giving also has a long tradition in Indigenous cultures. Organizations may need to consider providing a gift to Traditional Knowledge Keepers when requesting their assistance. Many Traditional Knowledge Keepers expressed their deep gratitude for the gifts that have been offered to them, regardless of the actual monetary value. The essence of gift-giving is that people are made to feel welcome and appreciated.

Once the Traditional Knowledge Keeper has accepted an offering of tobacco, it could then be followed with another gift chosen by the individual or agency. Traditionally, these gifts have been blankets, tea, and any other gift deemed appropriate by the person(s) making the request. We also need to be mindful that Traditional Knowledge Keepers need to survive within a modern society, therefore, the gift could be monetary. Due to traditional protocol, Traditional Knowledge Keepers are unable to set a specific dollar value on their services. They will often trust that the individual seeking their services will know what proper compensation is for the Traditional Knowledge Keepers time, wisdom, and inherent spiritual gifts.

“Once you set a price, you no longer have spirituality.”

“We don’t sell what we have.”

“We have to have faith that the people who invite us have an understanding that people should get paid first with tobacco because that is a spiritual law that protects our knowledge. That knowledge is very sacred to each nation.”

Since Traditional Knowledge Keepers are unable to set a specific price on their services, it is up to individuals, agencies, and institutions to use their own discretion to determine appropriate compensation; the amount should be based on one’s ability to provide said compensation. Traditional Knowledge Keepers will not turn away people because they cannot afford a large honorarium, they will accept what others can genuinely afford to pay. Therefore, the appropriate compensation must be identified by each agency and institution and should reflect how much the agency is able to afford while remaining considerate of what a Traditional Knowledge Keepers time and wisdom is worth. Monetary compensation that Traditional Knowledge Keepers’ have received ranged vastly, from \$150-\$1000 per day/event.

“...you have to ask yourself – What is it worth to you?”

Traditionally speaking, an individual or organization is not paying the Traditional Knowledge Keeper for their assistance. Rather, you are compensating the spirits that the Traditional Knowledge Keeper contacted for helping you with your requests. For Indigenous peoples, it is traditional practice to share what they have, especially when seeking the advice and guidance from a Traditional Knowledge Keeper; generosity is a value that has always been highly regarded within Indigenous communities. However, one should remember, that what you provide to the Traditional Knowledge Keepers, in terms of compensation, should only be what one can afford to offer.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Traditional Knowledge Keepers require a full understanding of the goals and missions of the organizations that they are asked to assist; they need this information so that they can identify how they may be able to best assist the individual or organization achieve their aspirations. Additionally, organizations can further support the Traditional Knowledge Keeper by creating an environment of “cultural safety” within their own confines; a workplace where differing cultures may be acknowledged, accepted, and appreciated for their differences. A major consideration in the engagement with Traditional Knowledge Keepers and benefiting from their help is the space where the services are performed. This space is twofold. First there is the



“ethical space” that includes the emotional and spiritual conditions that would provide the Traditional Knowledge Keeper cultural safety; conditions that will make the Traditional Knowledge Keepers feel welcome and comfortable. The other space is the actual physical rendering where the Traditional Knowledge Keepers are expected to perform their duties. For example, various organizations across Canada have arranged “smudge rooms” and, in some cases, facilities for sweat lodge ceremonies have been created to better serve Indigenous peoples. Efforts such as these do not go unnoticed and are very much appreciated by the Traditional Knowledge Keepers and the Indigenous community as a whole. The Traditional Knowledge Keepers talked about how they could assist organizations within Saskatoon to develop strong and inclusive spaces that would benefit the missions of both the organizations and the Traditional Knowledge Keepers.

When a Traditional Knowledge Keeper is invited into a meeting, conference, or workshop it is important that a Traditional Knowledge Keeper is able to focus on the thoughts and prayers that they are expected to share. They work hard to ensure that the group is protected, blessed, and that the event or research moves forward in a positive direction. It is the role of the agency and/or individual to ensure that the Traditional Knowledge Keeper is comfortable and able to focus on sending positive thoughts and prayers to the spirit world. An important way to ensure this happens is by having honorariums and or gifts prepared beforehand. Remember, you are not compensating the Traditional Knowledge Keeper for their time and efforts but rather the time and efforts of the spirits that are engaged with the Traditional Knowledge Keeper. Therefore, honorariums and gifts should be ready on the day of the event to ensure that the Traditional Knowledge Keepers are taken care of so that they can focus on their duties as a contributor to the research or event.

When individuals and agencies are new to authentically engaging Traditional Knowledge Keepers, there is often a great deal of fear and uncertainty. The common fear is often related to making a mistake and/or offending a Traditional Knowledge Keeper during the process. Traditional Knowledge Keepers spoke to this by stating that “we are all on a learning journey”; meaning that everyone makes mistakes and that no one person has all the answers at all times. Traditional Knowledge Keepers will often correct any misunderstandings with kindness and compassion. They are aware that many people, even those within the Indigenous community, will not know all the traditional protocols pertaining to every single engagement or ceremony. Therefore, they will not embarrass or shame an individual for making an honest mistake.

THE AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT OF FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

True engagement of First Nations and Métis people is demonstrated by one's willingness to learn and understand their traditional values, beliefs, and practices.

Traditional Knowledge Keepers do not feel that it is necessary for anyone to adopt their traditional teachings but believe that they should be respected as cultural and spiritual people and they should be permitted to practice their culture within institutions and agencies that serve Indigenous people. Prohibiting smudging is an example of how agencies and institutions are still denying Indigenous peoples the right to practice their inherent spirituality. Also, the absence of Traditional Knowledge Keepers as staff within agencies and institutions that serve the Indigenous community, such as schools and hospitals, means that First Nations and Métis people are still being led away from their cultural roots.

"I would want to be listened to, but not only listened to but heard."

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS AND RESEARCH

There is an increasing interest in performing ethical research with the assistance of Traditional Knowledge Keepers. Unfortunately, there is a long history of unethical research practices with First Nations and Métis people; for example, nutrition studies conducted on residential school children in the 40s and 50s. As a result, many Traditional Knowledge Keepers are extremely cautious about participating in research projects. Hence, the need for authentic engagement and, in particular, proper acknowledgment of protocol.

Traditional Knowledge Keepers feel that, too often, research involving the aid of Indigenous peoples has resulted in little respect or understanding for the sacredness of the information and knowledge that had been shared. Remember, Indigenous peoples believe that knowledge has a spirit within itself; it does not belong to one person or organization, it is to be used to the benefit of all those who need it. Once a project is complete, researchers often feel a sense of entitlement to the information and knowledge that had been developed and captured with the assistance of Indigenous peoples. Attitudes and practices such as this have left many Indigenous peoples, especially Traditional Knowledge Keepers, reluctant to share information and/or knowledge with those who wish to study their people. Therefore, researchers must be willing to see Indigenous peoples and their Traditional Knowledge Keepers as collaborators rather than just participants or research subjects.



Traditional Knowledge Keepers need to have the ability to be full participants in an event, which includes offering an opening and closing prayer as well as providing insights and guidance on the event's purpose and intent. It can be deemed disrespectful and inappropriate to simply ask a Traditional Knowledge Keeper to provide an opening prayer; this is seen as "tokenism". Their services and expertise should be utilized throughout the duration of the event or research

COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Traditional Knowledge Keepers expressed that protocols will be similar when engaging them for research as it is for ceremony or prayer. Once again, it is critical to initiate the process through the use of tobacco. It is the tobacco that establishes the spiritual relationship the researcher has with the Traditional Knowledge Keeper. The researcher should be aware that the relationship that is developed must be based on reciprocity, respect, and compassion. Again, it is the important that a Traditional Knowledge Keeper be seen as an integral part of the team rather than a participant.

Once a Traditional Knowledge Keeper has been engaged with tobacco, ask for prayers for the project. It is important at this time to fully explain the nature and scope of the project to ensure that the Knowledge Keeper is fully aware of its activities and intent. Research in collaboration with Traditional Knowledge Keepers involves ensuring that they are involved throughout the research process from the initial discussion to the dissemination of the findings. They have great wisdom and knowledge that can and should be utilized at every stage of the research process; they may not always have input to provide at every stage but it is critical that they are informed of the activities that have and will take place with regards to the project.

Researchers must remember that Traditional Knowledge Keepers hold a vast amount of knowledge and need to be held in the highest regards for the information that they are sharing. Researchers often go into these relationships with very clear ideas about the information they wish to obtain, however, they may not always receive the information in the way that they expected. Traditional Knowledge Keepers are often very deliberate in how much information is being shared and when that individual will earn the right to receive the information that is being requested. It is important to be patient and to listen to the stories being shared because there is great knowledge one can gain when spending time with Traditional Knowledge Keepers, regardless of what a researcher had hoped to learn.

"I think that they're a source of, like books. They have volumes of knowledge with them that have been passed on. Little stories mean so much in that too. Not only to them, but also their family members."

Furthermore, when engaging in research with Traditional Knowledge Keepers, it is important to ensure that there are no time constraints. Researchers often enter into research processes with a strict timeline and have only a set amount of time for the interview process. However, Traditional Knowledge keepers prefer when there is no time limit to an interview as they may be caught mid-way through a story and/or lesson when the set amount of time for the interview has been reached. Stopping a Traditional Knowledge Keeper mid-way through a lesson or story can be considered very disrespectful by some. Therefore, a researcher should let go of any fixed notions of time, at least for the time spent with Traditional Knowledge Keepers. An interview with a Knowledge Keeper could be short or very lengthy; it should be left up to the Traditional Knowledge Keeper to determine the appropriateness of length and how much information will be shared during their time together. If and when researchers are wishing to enter a particular First Nations or Métis community, they will first need to seek community approval before engaging Traditional Knowledge Keepers for the purpose of research. They must have an understanding of how the community operates with regards to who the leaders are (Ex: Chief and Council), and what some of the practices and customs of that particular community may be. It is often customary to bring gifts for the community which could include blankets, tea, and other similar items. Above all, it is important that tobacco is offered to the leaders of the community and the Traditional Knowledge Keepers. The community needs to feel comfortable with the researcher which means that the researcher may have to work to establish meaningful relationships with the community.

Research with Traditional Knowledge Keepers and their communities must be participatory in nature. A certain level of trust will be required for the community to "open up" to the researcher(s). For this to occur, the researcher should be willing to spend time fostering relationships with leadership, Knowledge Keepers, and other community members. Although it takes longer to do research in this way, the benefits of developing authentic relationships far exceed the amount of time it takes to ensure respectful relationships are established.

"You earn trust eventually. It takes a while, sometimes years. But they do start - the Elders I've talked with, they do start to see what it is that you're trying to do, and they do help. Every community has a lot of sacred knowledges and good Elders. It's just a matter of them realizing that we do need their help."



ANALYZING INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE RECEIVED FROM TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

It is critical for researchers to listen carefully to what a Traditional Knowledge Keeper is sharing as they may not always provide a straightforward answer to the questions being asked; It may take time to fully comprehend the information that you have been given. Listening intently with an open mind is the key to having a positive and productive experience with a Traditional knowledge Keeper. It is also important to keep the research questions simple. Too often, it was said that researchers have a tendency to complicate the process by asking questions in terms that are not easily understood by the Traditional Knowledge Keepers. The intent of the questions and research should always be straightforward and clear. If the Traditional Knowledge Keeper cannot answer the questions being asked, they will likely recommend that the researcher speak with someone else who may be more knowledgeable in that particular area.

CONCLUSION

This document represents an entry point for working with Traditional Knowledge Keepers. Within each nation, within each tribe, there are many teachings that have been given to help individuals understand their inherent spirituality. It is up to the individual and/or community agency to engage First Nations and Métis Traditional Knowledge Keepers in meaningful relationships. This will often start by acknowledging the protocols that had been previously discussed. It is through respect, honesty, humility, and a strong willingness to learn that these relationships can be fostered and promote true reconciliation.

“The people in this country are hungry for what we need you to say to them. We need to speak up now. We can’t sit back and wait for them to find the answer for themselves. You need to be their answers.” — Justice Murray Sinclair

ELDERS BIOGRAPHY

1. What is your name? Would you like to share any other names you have been given in ceremony?
2. Where are you from?
3. What is your First Nation or Métis local you are affiliated with?
4. What tribal group/groups do you belong to? E.g. Nakawe/Cree
5. What is your first language and what other languages do you speak?
6. Are you an Elder, Knowledge Keeper, ceremonialist, or a combination of all?
7. What is your educational background? E.g. elementary, secondary, post-secondary, trades, military, etc.
8. What are your gifts and achievements or experience that you would be willing to share?
9. Would you like to tell us about your community and your involvement?
10. What other gifts, skills, and knowledge can you share?
11. Are you able to work with other groups or other departments, and if yes what areas would you like to be involved in?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share that would help us get to know you better?
13. Would you be willing to share this information about yourself on our website?

