
Guidelines for Respectful Engagement with Knowledge Keepers & Elders



Contents

Message from BU President & Vice-Chancellor..... 3

Purpose 3

Scope..... 3

 BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP..... 4

 EXTENDING AN INVITATION / MAKING A REQUEST 4

 Offer of tobacco or other culturally appropriate item 4

 HOSTING A KNOWLEDGE KEEPER OR ELDER 5

 Planning together..... 5

 Transportation, Accommodations, Directions & Parking 6

 Presentation of gift to follow 6

 Honorarium 6

 Identify a Point Person for the Duration..... 7

 Contact Knowledge Keeper a few days before event..... 7

 Opening remarks & protocol 7

 Refreshments & Meals..... 7

 Sacred Items..... 8

Acknowledgements..... 8

Message from BU President & Vice-Chancellor

"I am honoured to lead a university that is committed to progress on responding to the calls for action from the Truth and Reconciliation. My own journey on Truth and Reconciliation has been one of critical self-reflection and rededicated passion."

I spoke those words at my installation as President and Vice-Chancellor of Brandon University. My journey was aided immeasurably by time spent with Elders. One in particular was able to help me understand how I could be a part of true reconciliation and decolonization. During this process, I observed that each Elder had their own rituals and processes, from the way they received tobacco to the manner in which they were hosted. This was natural and understandable, but for those unfamiliar with the wonderful and inspiring Indigenous ceremonial norms, it can make some people feel as if they are doing the wrong thing. These guidelines are intended to assist us in understanding how we can hold respectful engagement with our Knowledge Keepers and Elders.

- Dr. David Docherty, President & Vice-Chancellor
Brandon University

Purpose

At Brandon University (BU), we value and respect the important role of Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders¹, as keepers and teachers of Indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions. We recognize that when an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper or Elder shares their knowledge and traditions with the campus community - work, life and learning on campus is elevated. The following guidelines offer faculty, staff, students, and others insight into important considerations for respectfully engaging and working with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers or Elders, while recognizing the distinct histories, experiences, belief systems, and cultural practices of Indigenous peoples and communities.

Scope

Members of the campus community engage Knowledge Keepers and Elders in the sharing of Indigenous knowledge and experiences, both on and off campus, for activities such as University-related events, research, teaching and learning. The duration and purpose of these engagements vary. For example, Knowledge Keepers and Elders may be invited to:

- Offer a prayer at the beginning and/or end of an event
- Share knowledge as a guest speaker or co-instructor (e.g. in class, at a conference)
- Offer ceremony (e.g. smudge, pipe)

¹ For the purpose of this document, the terms Knowledge Keeper and/or Elder will be used, however, it is recognized that how an individual prefers to be addressed will vary.

- Provide consultation and guidance in areas such as university governance, curriculum development and program re-design, and research projects
- Provide personal counselling to faculty, staff, and/or students
- Facilitate learning and healing through sharing circles

BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP

The success of any partnership is built on a relationship of respect, trust, and reciprocity. When working with Knowledge Keepers and Elders, do so with a genuine desire to cultivate the relationship, rather than viewing interactions as a one-time knowledge exchange or transaction.

Recognizing the distinct histories and cultural practices of Indigenous peoples and communities, there will be differences in how a Knowledge Keeper or Elder prefers to:

- receive an invitation or request
- be offered tobacco or other culturally appropriate item
- be addressed

The following guidelines for engaging respectfully with Knowledge Keepers and Elders are just that – guidelines. Remember, when in doubt – ASK!

When in Doubt -Ask!

The protocols and practices of a Knowledge Keeper or Elder will vary based on their unique knowledge and spiritual practices. As you get to know the individual you are working with, you will begin to learn about their practices and preferences. When reaching out for the first time, don't be afraid to ask what is appropriate.

EXTENDING AN INVITATION / MAKING A REQUEST

Offer of tobacco or other culturally appropriate item

When extending an invitation or making a request of a Knowledge Keeper or Elder to share their knowledge, offer ceremony, or engage in consultation, it is customary to offer tobacco - a sacred medicine for Indigenous peoples on the prairies.

Traditionally, tobacco is offered to the Knowledge Keeper or Elder in-person at the time of the request. When approaching the Knowledge Keeper or Elder, you would offer the tobacco and proceed with sharing the specifics of what you are asking of them. They may or may not accept the request for a variety of reasons, however, acceptance of the tobacco signals acceptance of the request.

If you are not able to reach out to a Knowledge Keeper or Elder in person, many will accept requests by phone or email. It is appropriate to begin by letting them know that you will have tobacco or other appropriate item to offer when you see them, then make your request. If this isn't until the time of the engagement, then be sure to offer the item before the event gets underway. Some Knowledge Keepers or Elders may prefer that the tobacco is offered privately or publicly. When it is offered and accepted publicly, it presents an opportunity for teaching and learning about this cultural practice.

Note of interest...

While tobacco is a customary offering across the prairies, it isn't necessarily an expected offering for Knowledge Keepers or Elders who come from other areas. For example, tobacco is not a part of Inuit tradition. Once again, it is alright to ask if tobacco is an appropriate offering or if there is a more culturally appropriate gift to offer.

To learn more about making the offer of tobacco or getting in touch with a Knowledge Keeper or Elder who has knowledge or experience related to your need, the [Indigenous Peoples' Centre](#) is a great resource on campus.

HOSTING A KNOWLEDGE KEEPER OR ELDER

As planning gets underway, here are a few important actions to consider:

Planning together

- Invite the Knowledge Keeper or Elder to be a part of the initial planning, as they are an important resource with much knowledge and experience to share. They can also help to ensure an event or engagement is facilitated in a culturally appropriate way.

Transportation, Accommodations, Directions & Parking

- Ask whether the Knowledge Keeper or Elder requires transportation to and from the event, as well as accommodations (depending on the duration of the engagement). Offer to help make arrangements and cover the costs of mileage, meals, and accommodation as per Brandon University specified rates per diem.
- Provide a campus map, outlining the location of the event and the nearest parking lot. A parking pass can be purchased from [BU's Ancillary Services](#), by the department or organizer and can be provided to the Knowledge Keeper in advance or upon arrival at the parking lot.

Presentation of gift to follow

- Often a small, non-monetary gift of thanks is presented following the engagement. Ideas shared by local Knowledge Keepers and Elders include tea, cloth, sage or cedar, or a nice tea towel. As you work together and get to know one another, you will learn more about what is meaningful to them (culturally and personally). This small gift of thanks would be in addition to an honorarium.

Honorarium

- For a one-time engagement, an honorarium is presented to a Knowledge Keeper or Elder in exchange for the sharing of their knowledge and work. An honorarium should be presented at the time of the event or engagement.

To ensure this is provided in a timely way, the most common process would be to:

- approach the Dean or Department Head to request approval for honorarium funding
- submit a cheque request to [BU's Financial & Registration Services – Accounts Payable Office](#) **no later than two weeks in advance** of the event for payment. Make a note to have it picked up or sent to you directly so you can present it to the Knowledge Keeper or Elder.

Recommended amounts for Knowledge Keeper or Elder honorarium:

- Opening or closing activity (hour or less) - \$100
- Half day (up to three (3) hours) - \$200
- Full day (up to seven (7) hours) - \$400

For ongoing engagements:

Contact BU's [Human Resources Office](#) or [Indigenous Peoples Centre](#) for guidance.

Identify a Point Person for the Duration

- Identify a point person who will greet the Knowledge Keeper or Elder upon arrival and will be available to assist them throughout the day.
- A Knowledge Keeper may be accompanied by a Helper, however, it is still important to have a point person who can offer additional support throughout the day as required.

Contact Knowledge Keeper a few days before event

- Contact the Knowledge Keeper or Elder two or three days prior to the engagement to finalize details.

Opening remarks & protocol

- If this is the first opportunity to offer tobacco to the Knowledge Keeper or Elder in-person, do so at the start of the event or engagement.
- Greet those in attendance, acknowledge the Knowledge Keeper or Elder's presence, and welcome the group with a land acknowledgment. To help guide members of the campus with offering a land acknowledgement, the University offers a couple of examples below, however, you are welcome to adapt the wording to make it your own and meaningful for those present.

Brandon University – Basic Statement of Acknowledgement

We respect the treaties that were made on these lands and acknowledge that Brandon University is located on Treaty 1 and 2 lands. On behalf of Brandon University, I welcome you to the traditional homelands of the Dakota, Anishanabek, Oji-Cree, Cree, Dene and Metis peoples.

Brandon University - Extended Statement of Acknowledgement

Brandon University has campuses on both Treaty 1 and Treaty 2 territories. Our main campus is located in Brandon, Manitoba, on Treaty 2 territory. This is traditional shared land between the Dakota and Ojibway. The Turtle Mountains and Brandon area was also home to the Métis peoples. Settlements along the Assiniboine River and into Northeastern areas of Saskatchewan created a chain of Métis communities.

We at Brandon University acknowledge and respect the history, land and people of this area. On behalf of Brandon University, I welcome you to the traditional homelands of the Dakota, Anishinabek, Oji-Cree, Cree, Dene and Metis peoples.

Refreshments & Meals

- When a Knowledge Keeper or Elder is joining you for an event where refreshments and/or a meal is provided, be sure that the Knowledge Keeper or Elder is served first.

Sacred Items

- Often a Knowledge Keeper will bring with them cultural or sacred items for ceremony. Those in attendance must be mindful not to handle these items without permission.

Acknowledgements

This document was developed in consultation with local Knowledge Keepers and Elders from within the community, many of whom contribute to Brandon University's Indigenous Education Senate Sub-Committee, Brandon University staff, and protocols that have been developed by peer Post-Secondary Institutions.

Miigwech | Ekosi | Mąsi | Pidamayaye ye/do | Marsee | Nakurmiik | Thank you

This document is available in alternate formats upon request.