



WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND GROUPS a toolkit from Indigenous Performing Arts NL

Prepared to assist individuals and groups that work with Indigenous Performing Arts NL and other Indigenous groups. We also highly recommend accessing the the Indigenous Cultural Diversity training offered regularly by First Light NL - firstlightnl.ca/advocacy/training/

INDIGENOUS ALLYSHIP

Allyship with Indigenous people is not a badge of honour. It is not an extracurricular activity, hobby, or special interest. It is not a pat on the back for a job well done. Allyship is a process of **educating** oneself on the realities and history of Indigenous experiences without the expectation of accolades or special recognition from Indigenous people or communities for recognizing that every person has a basic right to human dignity, respect, and equal access to resources.

To be an **ally** is to actively support the goals of Indigenous solidarity. This can include, but is not limited to:

- **Speaking up about injustice** in professional and social situations involving other non-Indigenous people.
- Transferring and leveraging **the benefits of your own privilege** to those who have less.
- Acknowledging and accepting that the conversation is **not centred on your own experience**.
- **Amplifying marginalised voices**, especially in spaces not “set aside” for these voices to exist in.
- Being **open to correction and criticism** from Indigenous voices concerning your own habits and behaviours.
- Involvement in anti-oppression work under **the guidance of Indigenous experts** and those with lived experience.
- Self-reflection and critical examination of your own **biases, beliefs, and motivations** around interactions with Indigenous communities, companies, and individuals.

Challenging and changing one's understanding of Indigenous-Settler relations is not easy, and can be uncomfortable to confront, but is essential to working in allyship with Indigenous communities, companies, and individuals.



TYPES OF ALLYSHIP

NON-ALLY - complicit participation in institutional and systemic racism, colonialism, and white supremacy by way of not educating oneself and other non-Indigenous people about the realities and histories of Indigenous communities, regardless of intention.

GENERAL ALLY - disrupting oppressive spaces by educating other non-indigenous people on the realities and histories of Indigenous people, especially where there are no Indigenous people present, or in support of existing Indigenous voices.

ACCOMPLICE - working within a system to directly challenge institutionalised and systemic racism, colonialism, and white supremacy by blocking or impeding racist people, policies, and structures.

CO-RESISTOR - combining theory and practice by establishing relationships and being deeply involved within a community that informs how one listens critically, understands an issue and influences the way they go about disrupting oppressive institutions and systemic systems.

THE WORK OF SELF- REFLECTION

When approaching allyship, both personally and professionally, you may start by answering the following questions, and taking time to critically reflect on your answers:

- Where does my interest in Indigenous issues, people, representation stem from? Does it serve further personal or professional motives, such as diversity quotas, increased funding opportunities, or capitalising on current events?
- Does my involvement in this work hijack the message, insert my own opinions and values, or otherwise disrupt the work of the Indigenous people or communities it is meant to serve or represent?
- Do I continue the work of allyship in my everyday life, or is it something I only practise in specific circumstances, when it is required or convenient?
- How do I feel about my answers to these questions? Where does this reaction come from and how can it inform my actions going forward?



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In order to support the presenting of Indigenous work, the following guiding principles should be respected:

- **Learn about your community's Indigenous peoples and practices**

Each community is unique in its Indigenous territory. Reach out to local Councils or Cultural and Friendship Centres (like First Light NL) to learn more about your local community, their cultures, history and practices and how the Indigenous work you consider presenting can engage local audiences of all cultures.

- **Avoid cultural appropriation**

Indigenous stories need to be told in a way that reflects an Indigenous perspective and voice. Ensure that the work you present includes Indigenous artists in the creative, decision-making and performance aspects of the work.

- **There is no one “Indigenous Culture”**

Make no assumptions about the artist or work you are presenting. Take time to learn and ask questions to have a clear understanding of the context of the work and of the artists creating it.

- **Develop mutual understanding with the artist**

Presenting Indigenous work requires more than a transactional approach. Ensure that all parties understand the expected performance content (including any expected community outreach) , intentions and expectations of each other before formally contracting the event.

- **Promotion and marketing campaigns need to reflect the artist's vision and intentions**

Promotional materials including images, descriptions of the work and vocabulary to be used will be developed in consultation with the artist to ensure it is consistent with their intentions.



- **Foster respect for different creative processes and practices of the artist throughout your organisation**

Ensure all staff and volunteers in the organisation have awareness and respect for cultural practices of the local Indigenous audience as well as flexibility and respect for cultural practices of artists.

- **Acknowledgement of territory**

As part of recognition and respect for Indigenous Peoples, acknowledging territory at the beginning of events and gatherings should be done in a way specific to the lands and host communities in the area. Language suitable for each community should be developed through involvement of local cultural leaders or councils and respect local protocols, knowledge and preferences.

These principles are intended to be a living document and should be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect lessons learned and best practices in the presenting field.



TERMS TO UNDERSTAND

Indigenous, Aboriginal, Native: Umbrella terms used to include First Nations, Inuit and Metis people in Canada. All three terms have been used to refer to the original inhabitants of colonized countries, internationally, with Indigenous generally being the preferred term. In everyday encounters, use the term by which the individual or community self-identify.

First Nations: Descendants of the original inhabitants of what is now Canada, encompassing a number of nations, belief systems and languages.

Inuit, Inuk: Term for indigenous people from Arctic North regions of Canada, Alaska, and Greenland. Inuit is the plural form. Inuk is the singular form.

Metis: Term for post-contact Indigenous People. Métis refers to people with roots in the Red River community or other historic Métis communities, while métis refers to people with mixed Indigenous ancestry.

Status: A person recognised by the federal government as being registered under the Indian Act.

Non-Status: A person who is not recognised by the federal government as being registered under the Indian Act, but who is recognised as belonging to a particular Indigenous community.

Indian Act: Indian Act, 1876 The most important single act affecting First Nations is the Indian Act, passed by the federal government of the new Dominion of Canada in 1876 and still in existence today. The Indian Act was another attempt to assimilate First Nations people into Canadian society as quickly as possible. In the Indian Act, the Government of Canada defines who is an “Indian.” If the government defines you as an “Indian,” you are said to have “Status.” For this reason, “Indian” is a legal word, but not one that many Indigenous people are comfortable using to describe themselves. Not all people who identify as First Nations are Status Indian under the Indian Act. Over time there have been many different laws defining who is and who is not eligible for status. Defining who is and who is not an “Indian” is challenging and complicated. “Indians” are the only group of people where the Government of Canada decides who belongs and who does not.



Pretendian: A pejorative colloquialism describing a person who has falsely claimed Indigenous identity by professing to be a citizen of a Native American or Indigenous Canadian tribal nation, or to be descended from Native American or Indigenous Canadian ancestors. As a practice, being a pretendian is considered an extreme form of cultural appropriation, especially if that individual then asserts that they can represent, and speak for, communities from which they do not originate.

Two Spirit: An umbrella term that includes gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans/gender non-conforming identities and is what the “2S” stands for in LGBTQ2S. The term was intertribally adopted in Winnipeg during a gathering in the early 1990’s. Traditionally, people who were Two-Spirit were thought as being “born in balance” and held specific roles within their communities. The term is an act of resistance against settler colonial forms of sex/gender, meaning that only Indigenous people can identify as being Two-Spirit.

Settler: This term is used to describe people whose ancestors migrated to Canada and who still benefit from ongoing colonialism. This could be also applied to “settlers of colour” but doesn’t apply when referring to people who are descendants of slaves, considering they did not come to this continent willingly. Keep in mind the various intersections of a person’s identity and how this translates into the types of privileges they are either afforded or withheld.

Decolonisation: The work of challenging and changing the established White-Western patriarchal norms that the artistic work I do is based upon, and instead finding ways to incorporate practices that better align with the cultural values found in Indigenous ways of being.

Two Eyed Seeing: Learning to observe and experience the world with one eye toward the strengths and knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowledge, and one eye toward the strengths and knowledge of White-Western ways of knowledge.

Indigenisation: The reaffirming of education to include Indigenous ways of knowing, thinking, feeling and being. It involves elevating the voices of Indigenous peoples, elevating traditional, and cultural knowledge, and intentional inclusion of Indigenous ways of teaching and learning



TERMS AND PHRASES TO AVOID

Indian: When used to identify Indigenous peoples in South, Central and North America, is considered outdated and offensive. In Canada, the term has been used historically to refer to Indigenous peoples, but it also has modern legal significance. It is used to refer to legally defined identities set out in the *Indian Act*, such as Indian Status. For some Indigenous peoples, the term *Indian* confirms their ancestry and protects their historic relationship to the Crown and federal government. For others, the definitions set out in the *Indian Act* are not affirmations of their identity.

NDN: A term started off as online slang and is about First Nations reclaiming the word “Indian”. Only Indigenous Peoples can use this term.

Savage: A derogatory term to describe a person or people the speaker regards as primitive and uncivilized. It has predominantly been used to describe indigenous people worldwide, including North America, South America, Asia, Oceania, and Africa. Its predominant usage in American English refers to native North Americans. According to the National Museum of the American Indian, the word "served to justify the taking of Native lands, sometimes by treaty and other times through coercion or conquest".

Half-Breed: A term, now considered offensive, used to describe anyone who is of mixed race, although in the United States and Canada, it usually refers to people who are half Native American and half European/white.

Red Skin: A slang term for Native Americans in the United States and First Nations in Canada. In contemporary dictionaries of American English, it is labelled as offensive, disparaging, or insulting

Eskimo: In many parts of the Arctic, Eskimo is a derogatory term because it was widely used by racist, non-native colonisers. Many people also thought it meant eater of raw meat, which connoted barbarism and violence. This racist history means most people in Canada and Greenland still prefer other terms, though some still use the term to refer to themselves. Only Inuit People can use this term.

Squaw: an ethnic and sexual slur, historically used for Indigenous North American women. Contemporary use of the term, especially by non-Natives, is considered derogatory, misogynist, and racist.



“Canada’s Indigenous People” and “Our Indigenous People”: The Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island are not owned by Canada or by any individual, which is the way the language makes it out to sound. Try to say “the Indigenous Peoples of what we now call Canada” instead.

“Indigenous People/Lands were Conquered”: Surviving genocide is a revolutionary act and by saying this you are both condoning and celebrating genocide.

“In Indigenous Culture”: This is too broad considering that hundreds of Indigenous communities, nations, languages and cultures exist within Canada. Instead of singular, try using plural forms instead. Even better, try being specific about the nation to avoid pan-Indigenizing. I.e. “My Kanien’kehá:ka friends from Kahnawà:ke” or “the many Indigenous cultures.”

“The Government was trying to help” or “The Church had good intentions.”: The full phrase “we’re from the government and we’re here to help” was a refrain used by Indian agents, on behalf of the federal government, to describe laws and policies of the Indian Act designed to “help” Indigenous Peoples become something other than who they were. The prime minister at the time, John A. Macdonald, referred to the First Peoples of the land as “savages” and all policies were ostensibly for the betterment of the savages, to raise them up, to assimilate them into mainstream Euro-Canadian settler society. Prior to the Indian Act 1876, Indigenous Peoples were self-reliant, self-determining, and self-governing. Due to the over 140 years of the Indian Act and Church-run Residential Schools, Indigenous communities struggle with issues such as poorer health, inadequate and unsafe housing, unsafe drinking water, lower educational achievement, lower employment rates, and higher incarceration and higher suicide rates. All those policies to help were generated by a federal policy that was designed for cultural assimilation, and were so severe in nature that it qualifies as cultural genocide under the United Nations definitions.

“North America/St. John’s/Newfoundland was discovered by...”: North America, also known as Turtle Island, had already been inhabited for many centuries and was home to an estimated 10 million Indigenous People by the time of European contact.

OTHER PHRASES BASED IN STEREOTYPES, GENERALISATIONS AND APPROPRIATION

- **Hey Chief**
- **Too Many Chiefs, Not Enough Indians**
- **Circle the Wagons**
- **Hold Down the Fort**
- **On the Warpath**
- **Let’s Have a Powwow**
- **Low/High on the Totem Pole**
- **Do a Raindance**
- **Indian Giver/Summer/Time/Style**
- **Part of my Tribe**



Sources Used:

- *"Pulling Together: A Guide for Indigenization of Post-Secondary Institutions"* by Kory Wilson and Colleen Hodgson
- Queen's University Office of Indigenous Initiatives Website
- Calgary Foundation: *"Indigenous Ally Toolkit"*
- Montreal Indigenous Communities Network: *"Indigenous Ally Toolkit"*
- Legacy of Hope Foundation: *"How to Be an Ally"*
- North Vancouver School District: *"Indigenous Ally Toolkit"*
- The Canadian Encyclopedia
- National Public Radio: *"Why You Probably Shouldn't Say Eskimo"* by Rebecca
- Hersher Indigenous Corporate Training Inc Website