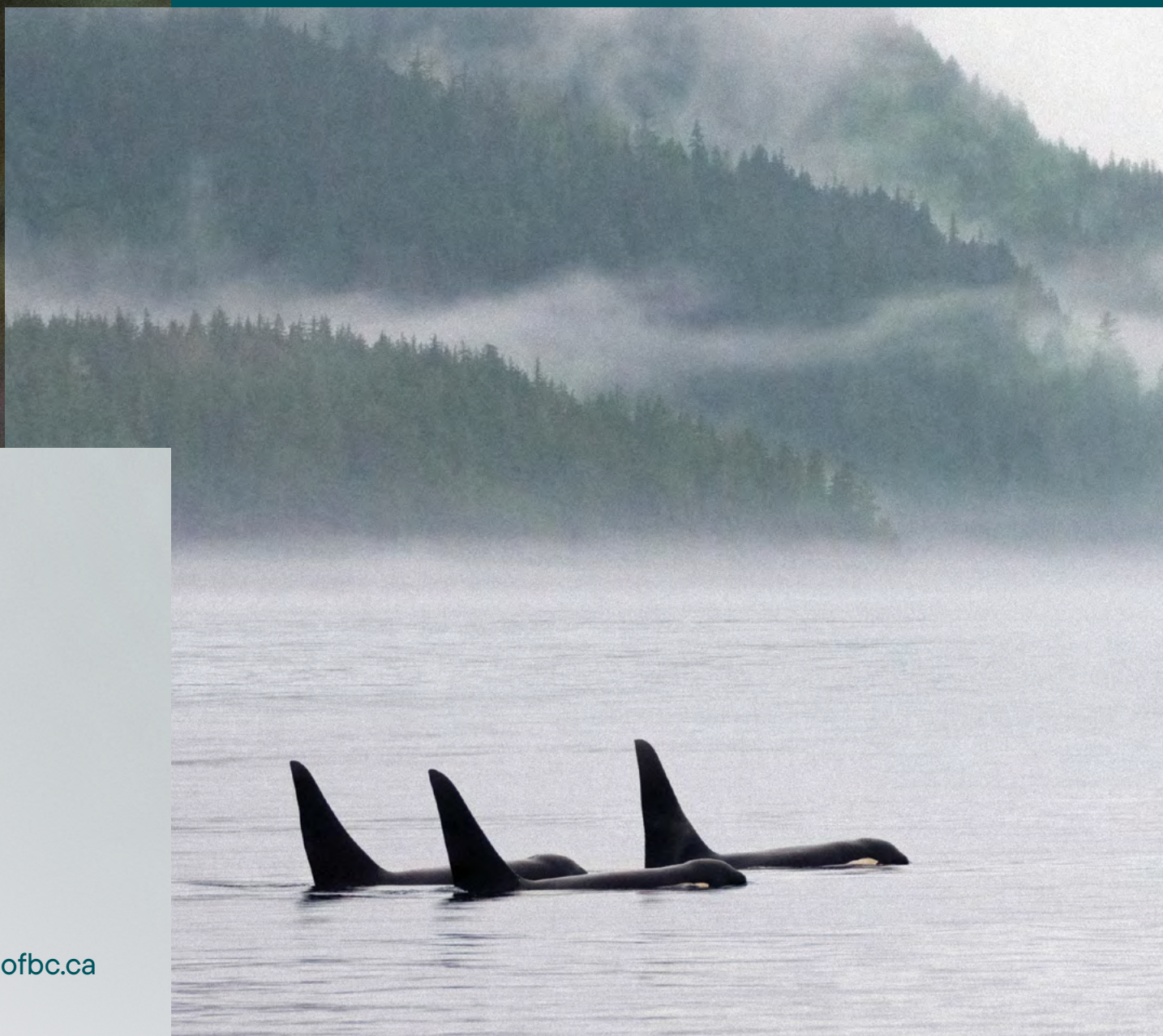


June 2025

Guide for respectful Indigenous engagement



**PICTURED:**

Doctors of BC's ISAR & Cultural Safety Liaison Tracy Elke confers with facilitator Len Pierre and x'məθk'əy'əm (Musqueam) Elder Thelma Stogan at the 2023 Community-Based Experiential Learning Session at the x'məθk'əy'əm Cultural Centre in Vancouver.

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Introduction to respectful Indigenous engagement

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Doctors of BC recognizes the negative impact that colonialism has had and continues to have on Indigenous communities, and how unsafe health care spaces have left many Indigenous patients fearful to seek medical assistance.

In alignment with the [2019 Declaration of Commitment: Cultural Safety and Humility in Health Services Delivery for First Nations and Indigenous Peoples in BC](#), signed by Doctors of BC and the First Nations Health Authority, we are committed to advancing Truth and Reconciliation across the profession.

Physicians have a significant role to play, and Doctors of BC will continue to collaborate with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to advance cultural safety in medicine. We are committed to developing a Truth & Reconciliation plan in collaboration with Indigenous leaders that considers the historical role of the Association and the profession, to address and eliminate racism.

In an effort to align with the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#), and the Government of British Columbia's [In Plain Sight report](#), much of our ongoing work and programs are supported through the Physician Services Committee and delivered through the Joint Collaborative Committees (JCCs), a partnership of Doctors of BC and the BC government.

This work cannot be achieved without meaningful partnerships and insight with Indigenous Peoples; we aim to continuously engage with Indigenous partners and follow their guidance to educate, inform, and motivate our members and employees.

Engagements with Indigenous Peoples are to be understood and approached as opportunities to develop and strengthen relationships, and to build trusted partnerships with local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community leaders.

On behalf of Doctors of BC, this guide is a resource to provide knowledge, wise practices, and support to community organizations, such as medical staff associations and divisions of family practice, to respectfully engage Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community leaders in events, meetings, project work, and/or celebrations.

Note: This document will be reviewed and refreshed regularly and should, as such, be considered a living document.



HOW ARE CULTURAL ACTIVITIES DEFINED?

Engagement may include project participation, committee leadership roles, consultation, cultural work, and meeting attendance by Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and/or community leaders.

Activities may include (but are not limited to):

- Cultural work such as drumming, singing, prayer, traditional welcomes, and smudging.
- Committee and/or working group representation.
- Facilitation, teaching, presentations, and consultation.
- Participation in organizational projects or initiatives.
- Inviting Indigenous Elders or Knowledge Keepers to attend meetings.

Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community leaders

An Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader is recognized within their community or Nation as having developed expertise in sharing traditional teachings of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. As such, the learnings they share are to be valued, respected, and uplifted.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL ROLES OF AN ELDER, KNOWLEDGE KEEPER, OR COMMUNITY LEADER?

An Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader (e.g., youth, council member, health director, etc.) may attend or facilitate workshops, cultural experiences, program gatherings, and events to share their knowledge and traditional teachings. When participating in organizational engagements, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or community leaders may support any of the following activities:

- Provide a welcoming to the traditional territories upon which the event or meeting is taking place.
- Provide traditional cultural teachings and protocols to assist with an event or celebration.
- Share Indigenous worldviews, wisdom, and teachings regarding (but not limited to) community history, decolonization, cultural safety and humility, anti-racism, and support with reconciliation.
- Promote and support the preservation and use of local Indigenous languages.



PICTURED:

Syexwáliya Ann Whonnock from Skwxwú7mesh Nation, 2024.

Respectfully engaging First Nations for traditional territory welcomings

CONNECTING WITH THE LOCAL FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY

- Determine the specific First Nations territories upon which the meeting or event is being held. [This map](#) from the BC Assembly of First Nations can assist you with identifying the traditional territories.
- Contact the local First Nations community administration office to inquire whether there is a staff member who provides liaison supports with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or community leaders.

INTRODUCTORY MEETING WITH THE ELDER, KNOWLEDGE KEEPER, OR COMMUNITY LEADER

- In preparation for your initial meeting with the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader, develop a clear understanding of why you would like to have this person present to offer a welcoming and/or share their teachings and knowledge.
- Approach this as an opportunity to build a trusting relationship. This is an ideal time to create a shared understanding of who you are, what your role is, and what your organization represents.
- Meet with the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader in advance of the meeting to introduce yourself. Share the purpose and intended outcomes of the meeting or event and who will be in attendance.
- Communicate to the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader that they are welcome to have a support person accompany them to, and be present with them during, the meeting or event.

AGENDA AND BUDGET PLANNING

- Include time on the agenda to offer a territory acknowledgment. It is best practice that the most senior leader in the organization who is hosting the event will acknowledge the territory and then introduce the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader. The [Guide to the Pronunciation of Indigenous Communities and Organizations in BC](#) and the [First Peoples' Map of BC](#) can assist the speaker.
- Ensure that ample time has been scheduled on the agenda for the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader.
- Ensure that budget considerations have been determined, allowing for an appropriate honoraria rate and a gift of reciprocity for the sharing of traditional teachings. Travel expenses, including time, mileage, and meals, should also be factored in.
- The presentation of a gift of reciprocity is recommended in addition to the honorarium payment. It is up to the individual or team who hired the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader to decide what they would like to offer. Traditionally, gifts were offered as a thank you to assist on their journey back to their community; gifts may include a small tea bundle, mug, candle, or treats. A signed thank you card on behalf of the team is very meaningful and shares that their teachings were valued and respected. Gifts of reciprocity are also recommended for Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community leaders who offer traditional teachings virtually.

BEFORE THE ELDER, KNOWLEDGE KEEPER, OR COMMUNITY LEADER'S VISIT

- Determine and share the purpose of their visit with meeting or event attendees. This will ensure clarity about the intended outcomes and a meaningful visit for all.
- Share the subject matter of the meeting/event in advance with attendees to create a safe and respectful space for all participants. This also ensures that participants are aware that the topic(s) and information shared may precipitate emotional responses.
- Ask the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader if they are comfortable with their cultural teachings being recorded or photographed and if there are specific moments that recording or photography should not take place.
- Ask the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader if they have a preference for the layout of the room, e.g., circle format. Make accommodations, where possible, to meet these preferences. Ask them if they would like a small table for their sacred items placed by their chair.
- Ask the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader if they would like to be introduced with their ancestral name. Ensure that the person who will be offering the territorial acknowledgement and introducing the person practices the correct pronunciation of their name and the name of the territory.
- Assign a designated person as a Respectful Host for the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader. This should be someone whose sole responsibility can be to connect and stay with the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader for the duration of the meeting or event.

ON THE DAY OF THE ELDER, KNOWLEDGE KEEPER, OR COMMUNITY LEADER'S VISIT

Before the meeting or event begins, the designated Respectful Host will be responsible for:

Greeting the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader:

- Before greeting the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader, the Respectful Host should familiarize themselves with room location, elevators, stairs, and nearest washrooms to ensure ease and safe access. Meet the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader at the location's entrance at the prearranged time. Assist them with their belongings (without handling sacred items) and walk them to the meeting room or event space. Invite them and their support person(s) to stay for the duration of the meeting or event, if they wish.

Comfort and amenities:

- Offer water, tea, or coffee.
- Show them where the washrooms are located.

Room setup:

- Confirm the room is setup in alignment with their preferences as previously discussed, e.g., circle format, table for their sacred items, etc. Support them with getting settled in the space.
- Eagle feathers, drums, and smudge ceremonial items are sacred. Please do not handle unless requested to do so.



PICTURED: Clarissa Moody, of Katzie First Nation, on traditional Katzie Territory, January 15th, 2025.

OPENING THE MEETING OR EVENT

Offering the territory acknowledgement:

It is customary to acknowledge the traditional territory in which the meeting, event, or celebration is taking place. As mentioned above, it is best practice that the most senior leader in the organization who is hosting the event will acknowledge the territory and then introduce the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader.

Note: Before commencing, please request that all participants turn off or silence their cell phones.

Sharing thanks and providing payment:

After the cultural protocols have ended, formally thank the speaker and present a gift of reciprocity to the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader.

This is typically done by the most senior leaders hosting the event.

- Custom requires that compensation is presented to the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader on the day of the event. Additional information is detailed in the Honoraria section on page 11.

FOLLOWING THE MEETING OR EVENT

Before the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader leaves the meeting or event, the designated Respectful Host should:

- If possible, hold a debrief of the session with the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader as some may have shared deeply personal experiences during their visit. Please ask them if they wish to have a few moments in a quiet place to ground themselves after the session.
- At the end of the visit, walk the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader out of the meeting room or event venue and assist them with their belongings to their vehicle or ride.

Guidelines for respectful Indigenous engagement in committee or project work

The important work of advancing cultural safety and Truth and Reconciliation cannot be achieved without meaningful engagement with and insight from Indigenous peoples.

As noted on the BC Government's [website](#):

Through the [Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) (Declaration Act), the Province has adopted a distinctions-based approach to advancing reconciliation and implementing the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (PDF, 150KB).

A distinction-based approach means that the Province's work with [First Nations](#), Métis, and Inuit will be conducted in a manner that acknowledges the specific rights, interests, priorities and concerns of each, while respecting and acknowledging these distinct Peoples with unique cultures, histories, rights, laws, and governments.

Indigenous Peoples' rights are recognized and affirmed in Section 35 (1) of the federal Constitution Act, 1982. However, not all rights are uniform or the same among or between all Indigenous Peoples.

A distinctions-based approach may require that the Province's relations with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit include different approaches or actions and result in different outcomes.

A [distinctions-based approach primer](#) (PDF, 168KB) has been developed to assist the provincial government in building an understanding of the legal basis for, and core elements of, a distinctions-based approach in all of the Province's relations with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in what is now British Columbia.

Given the adoption of a distinction-based approach by the provincial government, it is incumbent upon community organizations, such as medical staff associations and divisions of family practice, to mindfully integrate this approach into their work.

CONNECTING WITH LOCAL INDIGENOUS LEADERS

Contact the applicable organization to understand engagement protocols and assist with connections:

- First Nations Health Authority
- Métis Nation British Columbia or local Chartered Community
- Indigenous Health programs through regional health authorities
- Friendship Centres
- Local Indigenous health organizations

INTRODUCTORY MEETING WITH LOCAL INDIGENOUS LEADERS

- In preparation for your initial meeting, seek to learn about the respective community governance and engagement pathways. Develop a clear understanding of why you would like to have this person partner in your committee or project work.
- Meet with the leader in advance of the meeting to introduce yourself. Share the purpose and intended objectives of the meeting(s) or project and who else is involved in the work.
- Approach this introductory meeting as an opportunity to build a trusting relationship. This is an ideal time to create a shared understanding of who you are, what your role is, and what your organization represents.
- Ask the leader what the typical compensation expected for the request would be. This recognizes the uniqueness of each community.

AGENDA AND BUDGET PLANNING

- Ensure that the agenda is inclusive of and relevant to the Indigenous leader.
- For recurring meetings and/or ongoing projects, consider co-developing agendas and proposals with Indigenous partners.
- Ensure that budget considerations have been determined, allowing for the expected rate of compensation. Travel expenses, including time, mileage, and meals, should also be factored in.



PICTURED:

Len Pierre, of Katzie First Nation and owner of Len Pierre Consulting, facilitates a First Nations community-based experiential learning session at the "məθk"əy'əm (Musqueam) Cultural Centre in 2023.

Honoraria guidelines for Indigenous engagement

This section contains additional guidelines, wise practices, and recommended honoraria rates to support cultural engagement and partnerships with Indigenous Peoples through meetings, events, and program activities. These guidelines are shared as a reference only. In other words, they are not a formal policy. As a living document, the guidelines will be updated regularly to respond to changes in the provincial landscape.

In 2019, Doctors of BC signed the Declaration of Commitment — Cultural Safety and Humility in Health Services Delivery for First Nations and Indigenous people in BC, and the Joint Collaborative Committee Co-chairs included Indigenous Specific Anti Racism (ISAR) and Cultural Safety and Humility (CS&H) as a standing priority within their annual workplans. To support respectful engagement, Honoraria Guidelines for Indigenous Engagement were first developed in 2021.

The first set of guidelines were informed by an environmental scan of other health system partners' organizational practices. This scan included a review of suggested honoraria rates endorsed by regional health authorities, including First Nations Health Authority. The guidelines were further shaped through collaborative dialogue with First Nations Elders, Knowledge Keepers, communities, and local governments to better understand various practices and respectful rates.

With the establishment of the Doctors of BC ISAR and Cultural Safety team in 2024, a refreshed version of the Honoraria Guidelines was created to reflect current practices across the health care system for engagement with First Nations,

Métis, and Inuit partners. The September 2024 guidelines have been developed through various consultations, as shared above, along with referencing system partners, also as listed above.

A great deal of effort and consideration went into ensuring they are culturally appropriate. However, with humility, we cannot make absolute assurances that every community will agree that they are culturally appropriate as they have not been applied within every Indigenous engagement context in BC. As previously noted, this is a living document and, as such, will be revised based on input, guidance, and the evolving system landscape. We encourage their application with a posture of humility and curiosity, and we welcome feedback from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community leaders on their cultural appropriateness.

Again, these guidelines are not formal policy. The provision of guidelines in place of a predetermined policy is an act of honouring and respecting the uniqueness of each community. We encourage partners to engage in dialogue with local leaders and communities, learn about local practices and protocols, and build mutual understanding upon which localized honoraria rates can be established. If there are no locally preferred compensation rates, the rates suggested by Doctors of BC can provide a baseline.

1. **Honour local practices:** Ask and learn from the local Indigenous community or leader what the typical compensation expected for the request would be. This recognizes the uniqueness of each community.
2. **Provide honoraria:** If there are no locally preferred compensation rates, use the suggested rates for honorariums (see table below).
3. **Consider the additional cost burden of participation:** For example, extensive travel to attend a meeting and other expenses, such as parking and meals.
4. **Be inclusive of family and/or caregivers:** Additional assistance may be required to support the Indigenous Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader. Consideration should be given to expenses such as meals for the accompanying caregiver.
5. **Provide prompt payment:** Honorariums should be received on the day of the service that was provided out of respect for the Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or community leader.

RECOMMENDED HONORARIA RATES

As of September 3rd, 2024:

Cultural activity	Honorarium
Traditional welcome: Opening/Closing Prayer by Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or Community Leader	\$250 for one person for each event day.
Elder or Indigenous community leader Services may include participation in meeting, consultation/guidance, knowledge sharing, an opening/closing prayer, and storytelling.	\$250 for one person for a half-day meeting or portion thereof*.
	\$500 for one person for a full day meeting*.
Indigenous speakers/presenters	Rates will vary – refer to individual for rate.
Cultural teachings by Indigenous Knowledge Keeper(s) Holistic teachings may include cedar brushing, smudging, healing sessions, sweat lodges, and traditional wellness workshops.	Min. \$350 per event. Rates will vary.
Individual Indigenous dancers, singers, or drummers Outside of contracted cultural performance groups.	\$250 per person per event day.

*These rates cover all services performed during the meeting.

WHEN TO APPLY COMPENSATION GUIDELINES




When Indigenous communities or leaders are invited for engagement or to partner in a committee and/or project work, clarity may be needed on whether the compensation comes from the initiative or the organization's budget, or if the leader is currently receiving compensation as part of their job responsibilities.

- Chief and council members, as well as employees, are compensated as part of their salary and engage in initiatives or meetings based on their alignment with priorities and interests.
- Elders who do not receive a salary should be compensated for the work they contribute, and responsibility for this should be clarified between the partners in advance.
- As partnerships with Indigenous communities are established there may be mutual agreements developed and responsibility for compensation clarified within these agreements.

Contacting the ISAR team

If you have any questions about these documents or procedures, please contact the **Indigenous-Specific Anti-Racism & Cultural Safety** team by emailing isar.edi@doctorsofbc.ca.



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