

ENGAGEMENT OF FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS ELDERS, TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS, AND ELDERS' HELPERS

Background

The purpose of this administrative procedure is to enable Good Spirit School Division (GSSD) to respectfully engage and enhance relationships with First Nations and Métis Elders and Knowledge Keepers and support their participation in schools, division meetings and events in a manner that respects and honours cultural traditions and protocols.

GSSD acknowledges that we are located within Treaty 4, signed September 1874 at Fort Qu'Appelle, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Assiniboine, and home of the Métis peoples.

Guiding Principles

The teachings of manâcihitowin, miyootootow, and Minowichin shall guide all aspects of Division operations, organization, structure, procedures, and practices. Corresponding to these teachings are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families and to the larger society.

GSSD respects and honours all First Nations and Métis cultures and language groups with GSSD and recognizes that not all aspects of cultural traditions and protocols may be reflected in this policy. The policy will serve as a guide for process and protocols when First Nations or Métis Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders' Helpers are invited to participate in school programming, meetings, and other events.

GSSD values and honours the advice and guidance of First Nations or Métis Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders' Helpers in schools, programs, policy and strategic planning and development. As such, it is essential to recognize and respect First Nations and Métis cultural traditions and protocols for their participation in meetings or events.

Providing offerings and gifts in a culturally appropriate manner shows respect for protocols and/or cultural traditions. As well, it enhances mutual collaboration and working relationships between First Nations and Métis and non-First Nations and Métis communities.

Definitions

- **Elder (Kici Anishinaabek – Saulteaux, Old One – Michif, kehtaya - cree):** A person who is a spiritual leader/practitioner and plays a prominent, vital and respected role. An Elder is held in high regard as a leader, teacher, role model and mentor, and is recognized within his or her community as having knowledge of First Nations or Métis history, languages, customs, traditions or ceremonies. An Elder may also have life experiences that have allowed them to persevere and gain knowledge from which others can learn life lessons. An Elder is an advisor, and provides encouragement, direction and support in moving work forward.

- **Traditional Knowledge Keeper:** An individual who is not an Elder but may be seen as an emerging Elder. This person provides a cultural role and is held in high regard as a knowledge keeper. A Traditional Knowledge Keeper may also be known as a wisdom keeper, medicine person, pipe carrier, feast advisor, sweat coordinator and/or ceremonial leader.
- **Elder's Helper (oshkaabewis – Saulteaux, oskâpêwis – cree):** A person who works closely with an Elder. This person may assist in ceremonies and may offer cultural teachings or, they may assist with transportation, travel, or mobility.
- **Offerings:** A sign of respect when seeking cultural knowledge and services. Tobacco and cloth are considered offerings, not gifts, and have a spiritual significance that outlast the event. Offerings show intent to seek and/or access knowledge of, and enter into, the Indigenous domain/ethical space. Gifts for male and female participants may vary.
- **Gifts:** Gifts are important as they honour First Nations and Métis protocols. They acknowledge the dual world view and are a sign of appreciation for an individual to come and share the Indigenous knowledge. They also show thanks for the enrichment that the knowledge provides.
- **Manâcihitowin (mana-chi-hi-tow-win, cree) – Respect.** This phrase embodies humility and speaks to the spirit of the treaties. It is an invitation to walk alongside, to travel down a path, working together to realize goals and a vision that strengthen all cultures.¹
- **Miyootootow (my-you-too-taw, Michif) – Respect.** Provided by Elder Fred DeMontigny
- **Minowichin (mee-no-wee-chin, Saulteaux - Working Together) – Working together.** Provided by kici Anishinabek Andrew Quewezance

Procedures

It is important to recognize that customs, beliefs, protocols and practices vary between Nations, communities and Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers so there is no protocol that applies to everyone.

Before contacting an Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper or Elder's Helper it is important that there is a clear understanding of the role, advice and guidance that will be requested, as well as the time requirements (e.g., one-time or ongoing). This is especially important as Elders can offer different talents/gifts and their comfort level in participating may vary depending on their talents/gifts and the type of participation being requested.

Providing offerings and gifts in a culturally appropriate manner shows respect for protocols and/or cultural traditions. As well, it enhances mutual collaboration and working relationships between First Nations and Métis and non-First Nations and Métis communities.

In the initial conversation requesting assistance and support, be mindful and respectful that there are specific First Nations and Métis requirements and protocols. As an example, it is important to ask if tobacco is an appropriate offering.

¹ Accessed from the University of Saskatchewan. <https://kagcag.usask.ca/about/manacihitowin.php#top>

Some Elders may prefer a small gift or tea or may provide additional cultural requirements depending on the event and personal preference. It is imperative that a conversation with the Elder or Elder's Helper occurs prior to the event to ensure that protocols and procedures related to the person's culture and language group are followed.

- Tobacco is considered a sacred medicine offering to First Nations peoples and is used in a number of ways, including prayers and ceremonies. Offering tobacco prior to asking an Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper and Elder's Helper for assistance is proper protocol. Tobacco is an important part of a contract to participate and access traditional knowledge. The acceptance of tobacco indicates the individual's willingness to participate as discussed and agreed upon. It symbolizes the mutual understanding and formalizes the intent between the parties. Tobacco and cloth have a spiritual significance that outlasts the event and are not considered gifts, but offerings.
- Prior to purchasing tobacco, check with the Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper or Elder's Helper to address suitable needs regarding type and amount (e.g., loose (pouch), package of cigarettes or tobacco in cloth, or if tobacco is a proper offering). After initial contact, some Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elder's Helpers may request tobacco ties.

It is respectful and expected to be aware of nutrition needs and health concerns of the individual that has been engaged. This includes providing food/beverages to the Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper and Elder's Helper even if no food or beverage is planned for the event.

To use information that is shared by an Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper and Elder's Helper, and to protect the intellectual property rights of traditional knowledge, permission must be obtained. For example, using a quote, video recording or statement requires permission.

Payment of honoraria, mileage, accommodation, and meals for services provided at workshops/events/meetings will be by way of an Expense Voucher (included in Appendix A).

The minimum rate:

- Elder/Traditional Knowledge Keeper:
 - \$300 for each full day (greater than three hours, including travel time) plus mileage and meals where applicable;
 - \$150 for each partial day (three hours or less, including travel time) plus mileage and meals where applicable.

Implementation of this policy allows for the purchase of tobacco, gifts, honoraria and related costs. It also allows for processing of payments prior to the event so cheques can be presented on the day of the event.

References

- *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework* (2018). Ministry of Education. <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/details.cfm?p=90278>
- *Policy and Protocols to Engage First Nations and Métis Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders' Helpers*. (May 2023) Ministry of Education.
- *Aboriginal Elders and Community Workers in Schools: A Guide for School Divisions and Their Partners* (2001). Ministry of Education. <http://treaty6education.lskysd.ca/sites/treaty6education.lskysd.ca/files/Aboriginal%20Elders%20and%20Community%20Workers%20in%20Schools.pdf>
- *Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies* (2009). Available from the Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre. www.goodreads.com/book/show/10833384-cultural-teachings