

Our Mission, Vision and Beliefs for Indigenous Intercultural Work

It is our privilege to be invited into communities to present and work with people from indigenous and other cultural backgrounds. With this privilege comes a responsibility to honour the history, the diversity of beliefs and the practices that make up individual value systems. We believe overall health and positive service is promoted when there is an effort to increase awareness of cultural biases, impact of colonialism, inter-generational trauma and respect for differences.

The beliefs presented here are guiding principles behind the attitudes and behaviours we expect of our trainers in contexts of cross cultural work.

We are invited to provide training and information

Our presence is the result of an invitation and we are privileged to offer our services. We should be gracious guests, and we need to keep this as our reference point. We may know a lot in our specific realms of experience, but every client and community we enter knows their community and issues in ways that we will never fully comprehend. We should speak and behave as grateful guests.

Build relationships

Love your audience. We don't want to be a flash in the pan. We want to be the *go to people*, not just an organization that provides resources, but one that is kind, caring and a group of people who are trustworthy.

Collaborate and work with the community

There is much we have to offer. We have exceptional resources, training and really great trainers. But we are only part of the picture. Our material needs to be accessible and relevant. We need to listen, listen, listen and then be responsive.

Always be open to learn

Have your mindset be one of openness. We are often looked to as the "experts". Again, we know our material and have our NFD but if we deliver a training and have not been moved, changed, or enlightened with some tidbit of knowledge, then we should question why this is the case.

Our economic interest is subservient to clients' interests and needs

We offer only what is helpful and necessary, not just services for the sake of services. We are passionate about our resources, and what we offer should be what is needed, what truly will make a difference to the individuals, communities, and places of work we serve.

We will be posting this Belief statement along with further ideas for implementing beliefs in your workshop on our trainer site.

Working with Indigenous Peoples - Tips for Implementing Beliefs in your Workshop

1. Consider carefully how you introduce yourself and open the training:

- ✓ Give thanks – for the invitation, for the land we are standing on, for the food, for people in the room, and say this **first thing**.
- ✓ Have a learner stance – verbalize that you are there as a learner – to offer a realm of experience and knowledge with the hope that it is helpful.
- ✓ Acknowledge the history – of oppression and colonization and the resilience of indigenous peoples.
- ✓ Be thoughtful of your wording. It needs to fit the community and also you as a trainer, so it is authentic and respectful. Sometimes it may fit to give a more formal acknowledgement. AN excellent example is shared here by Alana (one of our trainers):

“As many of us who do training with Achieve/CTRI know, we work with many Indigenous people and organizations. Whether or not I am training with an Indigenous organization, I will always acknowledge the traditional territory the workshop is located on. For me, this is one of many small acts of reconciliation I can commit to.

When preparing for workshops, I will research the city and/or organization I will be working with. I will also learn what traditional territory I will be visiting. One resource I find helpful to locate this information is <http://www.native-land.ca/>. For on-site workshops, I will confirm this information with my contact and then, at the start of the workshop, acknowledge the territory. My acknowledgement in Kamloops would sound something like this, "I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather for this workshop today is the unceded territory of the Secwepemc (Shuswap) People, who today are a Nation made up of 17 bands." This language is consistent with teachings I have received from Elders as well as that which was provided to me as an educator through the Canadian Association of University Teachers guide which you can find at <http://www.caut.ca/docs/default-source/professional-advice/list---territorial-acknowledgement-by-province.pdf?sfvrsn=12>.

While I have not received a lot of direct feedback about this practice, it allows me to start workshops in a way that I feel is respectful and grounded. When I approach workshop contacts about this, they always are very appreciative of this overture. “

- ✓ Sometimes a less formal acknowledgement may feel more appropriate, such as simply owning your own ethnicity and locating yourself. Vicki (one of our trainers) shares:

“ I will include an acknowledgement in my introduction or early on during the content of the workshop. I might say something like – I want to acknowledge I’m the white person in the room –

and I'm wanting this day to be collaborative and something we do together. I am sensitive that there is a backdrop here of outside, mostly white colonizers coming in to tell people in your community how to be or what to do."

- ✓ Offer something about yourself history, family, and *why* you do what you do. Tell a story about yourself to help them know you

I usually follow this with also telling more about who I am and where I come from than I might in a public workshop. Locating myself and sharing my own context and family background sets a tone that is (hopefully) approachable and collaborative."

2. Set and maintain an engaging, collaborative and relationship-building tone throughout the day

- ✓ Ask questions – doesn't matter how big or small the group, it is important participants know their voice matters and if at first they don't respond, be comfortable with silence. Avoid putting pressure on people to talk, but give many different opportunities for people to share and participate.
- ✓ Be open and human. Share information about yourself as you go along.
- ✓ Be ready to be flexible with start and end times– be ready on time, be prepared but don't force an agenda. Follow the lead of your contact or overtly ask the group how they'd like to handle the schedule for the day.
- ✓ Have a sense of humour – this is not about telling jokes, it is about enjoying the moment – whatever it presents. Smile, laugh and make sure the group does as well.
- ✓ Embody a holistic approach to the training day. Ensure there are ample opportunities to move around, engage in activities, energizers or games that shift the focus away from heavy topics; take breaks and eat snacks with the participants. Balance a head focus, with body and heart as well.

Further guiding ideas

CTRI/ACHIEVE materials

Be aware that the content of our materials is largely from western orientation. In many contexts the people we work with may not be used to it and/or may have been harmed by people using this type of educational approach. Try to make meaningful connection with an elder/leader(s) in the group. If there's receptivity bring them on to the process of bridging the content.

Know and respect your audience

We permission you to begin your work(shops) in indigenous communities by setting aside your agenda, expressing thanks to the people and the land, and inviting participants to teach you about the context for the workshop that has been requested.

Feel free to sit more often, ask others how they want to begin the session, ask if ceremony/prayer would be helpful, ask if it would be appropriate to begin with circle, etc.

Acknowledge personal biases

It is important to recognize who you are, and acknowledge privilege and relevant biases you will come with ('white, male, colonial, privilege..' etc). Also that *'there's a lot I don't know about the cultural knowledge present here.'*

'There is the potential that what I'm presenting here could miss the mark for you for personal or cultural reasons. If that happens, I invite you to bring it up so that we can discuss it.'

Bridging CTRI content with cultural learning

If it feels appropriate AND you have checked with a leader in the community, invite the use of the 7 teachings... a common Anishinaabe guide for learning. Explore how participants believe each teaching relates to a topic from the workshops. For ex. *'What does each teaching have to do with Healthy relationships...Discuss in groups and share...'*

1. Love
2. Truth
3. Humility
4. Bravery
5. Honesty
6. Respect
7. Wisdom

Uniqueness of Story

Warning to not *name drop* other First Nations communities. There is a risk of over generalizing and having this land wrong.

For context, Inuit are 50 years into colonization impact, vs the First nations who are 300 years along. These lead to very different trajectories and attitudes. Particularly when working with Inuit communities avoid lumping them together as 'indigenous' so name separately when possible.

The Tree of Life

We are all connected to the past. Exploring and building on these connections can be a source of strength for many as part of their recovery. This is especially true when there have been issues of intergenerational and historical trauma.

One exercise that has been helpful in creating connections and meaning with the past is the Tree of Life exercise, first developed by Ncazelo Ncube and David Denborough in their work in Africa with children orphaned by AIDS. Since then, this has been utilized around the world.

Instruct the person to draw a tree, one stage at a time. At each stage, encourage the person to reflect...

- **Roots** – Where we are connected to the earth and our past, our ancestry, places we come from, people we come from, etc.
- **Trunk** – Our name for ourselves.
- **Branches** – Skills and knowledge we have learned or been taught.
- **Leaves** – People and animals we are connected to.
- **Fallen leaves** – Loved ones who have died.
- **Fruit or nuts** – Our hopes, dreams and values for ourselves, loved ones, community, world, etc.
- **Storms** – Events we are surviving or have survived.

Encourage further conversations through reflective questions including:

- Where are trees the safest? Alone or with others? (If in a group setting, invite them to collect trees into a forest.)
- What happens to trees? (Storms.)
- What are the storms in people's lives? (Pain, hurt, loss, etc.)
- What do animals do when storms come? (Come together, run, hide, etc.)
- What do people do when storms come? (Same...)
- When do animals know it is safe to come out? (Wind, sun, new day, rain stops, no thunder, etc.)
- When do people know when it is safe to come out? (Yelling or fighting stops, next morning, no drinking, feeling better inside...)
- What do the animals do after the storm? (Run, play, eat, normal life.)
- What do people do after the storm? (Same...)

Adapted from David Denborough (2008).