

# Elder Protocol Handbook

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY



Alternative formats of this booklet are available on request

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## Introduction

Queen's University aims to create a community that is inclusive of all persons, including persons from Aboriginal and Indigenous<sup>1</sup> communities. In the past decade, various reports and working groups have explored a range of challenges Indigenous peoples face on Queen's campus, and more systemically in higher education. The extensive work of the Queen's University Aboriginal Council and its working groups have contributed greatly to ensuring all Aboriginal learners, staff and faculty have both positive academic and personal experiences on campus. An increased participation of Elders on campus has been a strong recommendation in past reports, and an interest of the Aboriginal Council and its working groups.

In addition, given the changing demographics of the University and province, and the growing interest in developing positive reciprocal relationships with various Indigenous communities, many Queen's students, faculty, staff, and units have expressed interest in having Elders share their knowledge with their classes or having them participate in cultural events and other functions. The work of Elders continues to be valued and is essential to recognizing and teaching First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives in various courses and venues across campus. However, to date, the roles for Elders have not had formal recognition with respect to establishing specific responsibilities or terms of service. For example, with respect to the participation of Elders in the classroom, faculty members have relied on their relationships with specific communities and/or Elders who are interested in contributing to the faculty member's class on an informal basis. This document is intended as a resource document for staff, faculty, learners and Elders at Queen's University regarding how members of the Queen's community can benefit from and appropriately respect the role of Elders in higher education.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Indigenous' are used interchangeably throughout this document. While there is debate about the correct terminology, "it can be argued there is no one definition because it is up to each Indigenous person themselves, something that for far too long has been done by others." (KAIROS Canada)

## Purpose

The intended purpose of this handbook is to assist departments and units at Queen's University in understanding the cultural protocols involved when inviting an Elder or Traditional Knowledge Keeper to events. The handbook also provides a brief overview of cultural content necessary to understand when working through Indigenous issues at Queen's University.

## Indigenous Elders

Elders or *Traditional Knowledge Keepers* are important within Indigenous communities and central to Indigenous cultures. When inviting an Elder into a classroom or to participate in an event, it is important to understand who is designated as an Elder, who to invite, and how to invite them.

### **Who is an Elder?**

Indigenous Elders are central to Indigenous communities. The term Elder does not refer to one's age, but rather to one's place within the community and the level of cultural and traditional knowledge that they possess. The term is bestowed by the community to individuals who are deemed spiritual and cultural knowledge keepers.

### **Importance of Elders at Queen's**

Elders are central to Indigenous knowledge – they link to the past and to the future.

Elders can complement Indigenous course content by providing cultural context and cultural specific ways of knowing. Elders are central to the success of Indigenous students on campus and can provide guidance and support to students who are not of Indigenous ancestry.

Elders can provide informal and formal teachings to raise awareness of Aboriginal histories and worldviews and to help both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff and faculty increase their own cultural competency.

## Cultural Understandings of Elders

### Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe

Kingston sits on traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe territories and as such Elders from these two distinct cultural groups are often those selected to attend events and ceremonies at Queen's – however, Métis Senators and Inuit knowledge keepers are also often invited, as are other Indigenous Elders from across Turtle Island (North America).

Knowledge, life-long experience with traditional teachings, and life skills are common gifts of many Elders. Specific teachings may vary slightly depending on the Elder's specific Aboriginal community, but many commonalities exist across Northern Ontario. The Queen's Aboriginal community draws upon the practices and teachings of Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe cultures.

These teaching and cultural practices include:

- The Seven Grandfather Teachings;
- The Creation Story and its demonstration of how people are to live together in Creation;
- Understanding of the Aboriginal world views on the cycle of life
- The Clan system and its function in contemporary society
- Hand drumming, sewing, beading, and other crafts
- Traditional and communal feasts
- Storytelling
- Aboriginal languages and culture
- Food harvesting and preservation
- Changing of the seasons and seasonal cycles
- Traditional medicines

- Cross cultural training

## Elders at Queen's University

Elders are already utilized in many ways at Queen's University.

Currently an Indigenous Elder sits on the Aboriginal Council of Queen's University and there is an Elder-in-Residence at Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre. The Elders participate in ongoing cultural events and programming across the University and serve as invited guests for important installations and community events.

Additionally, Indigenous Elders are commonly used within Convocation Ceremonies here at Queen's, especially when an Indigenous student is graduating or an Indigenous community member is receiving an Honorary Degree.

Indigenous Elders can be invited to any event on campus or asked to host ceremonies. One of the most common ceremonies for Indigenous Elders to host is a smudging ceremony and as such there is a smudging procedure on the Queen's campus.

### Smudging Procedure

The procedure can also be found online [here](#).

- If an Elder or another Indigenous person is leading a smudge then Queen's Department of Health & Safety must be [contacted](#) 24 hours prior to the event. Additionally, when you are booking a room, let Event Services know that a smudge is taking place.
- If you are concerned about potentially setting off a fire alarm then the ceremony can be completed outside.
- Notices may need to be placed on the door to the room in case there are people with allergies or asthma who may choose to avoid the space. Since smudging is a spiritual ceremony, non-smoking by-laws do not stop you from hosting the ceremony.
- Remove the sign once the aroma of the smudge has dissipated

## Requesting Services of an Elder

In order to maintain a respectful approach toward Elders in this region, when requesting the services of an Elder, Queen's members are encouraged to use the following protocol:

- Depending on the Elder identified by the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre, the Centre may make the initial contact on behalf of the requesting Unit, or staff themselves may make the initial contact if the particular Elder is known to them.
- Please keep in mind when contacting an Elder, they each have their own specialties so sometimes more than one Elder may be consulted. Because Elders have different knowledge it is also important to give Elders ample time to prepare and confer with others when necessary.
- If the Elder is reached by phone and agrees to provide the service, the Elder is provided with a gift of tobacco at the first opportunity.
- If the Elder can be contacted in person, then a gift of tobacco is personally presented to the Elder by either the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre representative or the person making the request.
- The gift at this stage is most often the gift of traditional tobacco tied in a small bundle.

## Gifting an Elder

- When making a request of an Elder, it is customary to present them with a gift.
- Gifts for Elders were traditionally a means of support with which Elders would feed, clothe, and shelter themselves. People gave genuinely what they could afford in essentials such as fabric, clothes, fur, meat, or firewood.



- In contemporary times, the gifts may be traditional or exclusively ceremonial and the Elder is financially supported through a system of honoraria.
- It is customary to provide an Elder with a gift or honorarium. If a ceremonial gift is provided, it may be tobacco, a household item, or food. Generally, Elders expect to be 'given' only what people or groups can afford.
  - When giving Tobacco, place it in front of the Elder and state your request. The Elder indicates acceptance of your request by picking up the Tobacco. A pouch form is acceptable
  - If the Elder declines, they may be willing to provide a referral to a colleague which the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre can take back to the Cultural Programming & Awareness Working Group

## Honorarium as Gifts of Appreciation

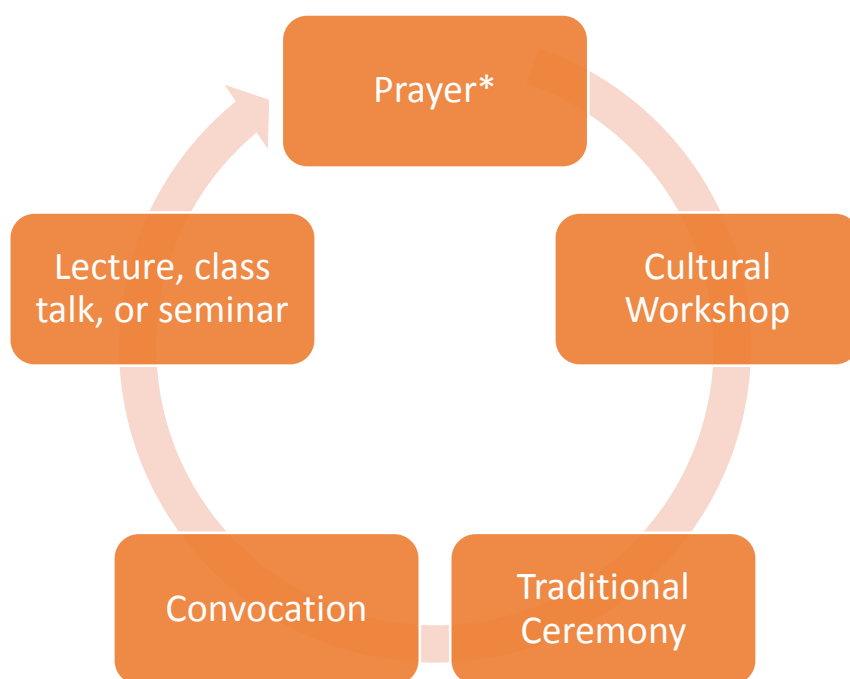
It is common practice to provide an honorarium to Indigenous Elders for sharing their traditional knowledge or gifts in a show of reciprocity. This honorarium is viewed as a gift to the Indigenous Elder or knowledge keeper. It is important to keep this in mind because these honoraria are not payments for services rendered but rather are gestures of appreciation for what has been taught and shared. Gift giving promotes balance in Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe cultures.

Elders are not paid for their work, which is why an honorarium is an appropriate exchange for their knowledge. While historically Elders were given food or other essentials for their help, today money is acceptable. A small gift of appreciation may be given rather than an honorarium if there is a small task or meeting happening. Some common gifts may include any kind of tobacco or sweetgrass, which will then be used for ceremonies.

The honorarium can be presented following the event for which you asked the Elder to attend.

***There is no set amount that you should pay an Elder; however, the FDASC currently gives an honorarium of \$60/hour to Elders.*** Honoraria should be provided based on what your respective faculty or department can afford. ***However, it is important to recognize that Elders in most institutions are acknowledged in the same way as visiting scholars or academics and therefore their honorarium should also be commensurate with their stature within the community.***

An honorarium is required when you are asking an Elder to engage in any of the following:



\*Please note that there are other individuals on campus that can be contacted to give prayers from other faith communities at an event. The Office of the Chaplain can provide you with more information.

Since the honorarium is a gift rather than a payment, it should be processed by your department and through financial services as such and Elders should not be required to provide social insurance numbers, dates of birth, nor sign receipts – this could have the effect of being viewed as

disrespectful and insinuate Indigenous Elders are selling rather than sharing their knowledge.

## **Tobacco as a gift of appreciation**

Tobacco is one of the few examples of something that is used in many Aboriginal cultures across Turtle Island. In Anishinaabe culture it is customary to approach an Elder with tobacco<sup>2</sup> as a gift of invitation for their wisdom. However, it is important that you understand the meaning behind the tobacco as a gift from the heart, rather than something that you just buy. While gifting tobacco is not a requirement in order to ask an Elder to come to Queen's, it is a courtesy if you understand why you are presenting it and feel connected to the gift. When an Elder accepts a gift of tobacco, he or she is accepting your request. If they are unable to help you they will refrain from accepting the tobacco. Please note that not all Elders will accept tobacco, nor should you offer it to all Elders. If you are unsure about whether or not you should offer a gift of tobacco then ask someone at FDASC or the Elders themselves. If you can meet with an Elder in person rather than through email or phone, then you can present them with tobacco as an initial gift. Upon giving the tobacco, place it in front of an Elder and state your request. You must be specific as to what you are asking an Elder to do for you, and know that when an Elder picks up the tobacco, he/she is accepting your request. Never hand Elders tobacco, because then you are taking away their choice in accepting your request. The tobacco, in its natural form, can be placed in a pouch or a piece of cloth and tied into a small bundle.

## **Current List of Elders**

For the most current and up-to-date list of Elders please contact Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre.

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<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, ceremonial, or natural tobacco is given to the Elder. If you cannot find traditional tobacco, some Elders will accept pipe tobacco.

## FOR ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

If you require additional assistance or guidance as to how to find, contact, and invite an Indigenous Elder to your class, event, or speaking engagement please feel free to contact the Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre. Please read through this protocol and familiarize yourself with Elder protocol before contacting Four Directions.

### Contact Us

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