

Background

The purpose of this Administrative Procedure is to provide Division employees with guidelines for approaching and inviting Indigenous and Métis Elders and Cultural Facilitators into their schools and classrooms.

It is important that Elders be approached, welcomed and thanked following a protocol and a code of etiquette appropriate to the customs of the Elder's community.

The protocol is required when inviting an Elder to contribute to your school or other functions within the Division.

Not all Indigenous people whom you may want to invite into your school are considered Elders.

There is no specific protocol for accessing the services of an Indigenous Cultural Facilitator or Spiritual Advisor. However, while staff could access these services without the facilitation of the Division's First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaisons, it is recommended that Liaisons are involved.

Please contact the Division's First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaisons for names of people whom you might want for your purposes.

Definitions

Elders: Alberta Education's publication *Our Words, Our Ways* defines Elders as men and women who are regarded as the keepers and teachers of an Aboriginal Nation's oral tradition and knowledge. Age does not determine who may be an Elder. Rather, essential spiritual knowledge or traditional knowledge is required to be considered an Elder. Elders are recognized by their communities as teachers and knowledge keepers. They play a vital role in the survival of Aboriginal cultures and the transmission of cultural knowledge.

It can be difficult for school staff to know who is an Elder and who is not, as it is not culturally acceptable to identify oneself as an Elder. It is appropriate for the Division's First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaisons to contact members of the community itself and ask them who is considered an Elder.

Cultural Facilitators: Cultural Facilitators are Indigenous community members who are willing to share their talent and knowledge of cultural activities. Cultural Facilitators may have knowledge of traditional dancing, drumming, singing, art, trapping, etc., but specific protocol is not required when inviting them into your school or classroom. They may charge a fee for performing or may ask for an honorarium to cover mileage and expenses.

Spiritual Advisors: These are sacred positions. Spiritual Advisors have been given rights to conduct ceremonies. They are also the ones who conduct sweat lodge teachings.

Step 1: Define the Purpose for an Elder's Involvement

1. Elders can play a significant role in schools when they are involved in meaningful ways such as:
 - 1.1. Bringing traditional ceremonies and teachings about ceremonies, spirituality, beliefs, and sacred traditional practices
 - 1.1.1. Tipi teachings (facilitated by females from the Indigenous community), Sweatlodge teachings, Medicine Wheel teachings, and ceremonies, need to be conducted by an Elder
 - 1.2. To talk about kinship, parenting, the importance of education, planning for the future
 - 1.3. To serve as role models
 - 1.4. Providing advice to parents, students, teachers, and school administrators
2. The roles of Elders and or Spiritual Advisors vary greatly from community to community, as do the protocols and traditions they teach (*Our Words, Our Ways*). Elders can be spiritual guides, healers, medicine men and women, artists, seers and counsellors. Elders often perform such services as:
 - 2.1. Giving prayers before meetings
 - 2.2. Describing or performing traditional ceremonies
 - 2.3. Sharing traditional knowledge
 - 2.4. Giving spiritual advice to individuals
 - 2.5. Demonstrating traditional crafts and practices
 - 2.6. Teaching the community's protocols
3. As indicated in the *Teaching Quality Standard*, teachers and school principals might choose to access Elders to:
 - 3.1. Support collaborative whole school approaches to capacity building in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education
 - 3.2. Help all students to develop a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit
 - 3.3. Support the learning experiences of all students by using resources that accurately reflect and demonstrate the strength and diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit
 - 3.4. Understand specific tribes ways of knowing
4. School and system administration might choose to access Elders to:
 - 4.1. Help to establish the conditions under which the learning aspirations and the potential of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students will be realized
 - 4.2. Enhance school and community understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit worldviews, cultural beliefs, languages and values
 - 4.3. Providing accurate information about Aboriginal heritage and Aboriginal communities
 - 4.4. Acting as a bridge between the school and the community

Step 2: Requesting an Elder

1. Contact one of the Pembina Hills Public Schools First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaisons:
 - 1.1. The Liaison will review your purpose with you and then contact an Elder on your behalf
2. After arranging a date and time, the Liaison will use the following protocol to meet an

Elder:

- 2.1. Usually, the Liaison will offer tobacco
 - 2.1.1. Tobacco is a sacred traditional plant used to begin consultation with elders
- 2.2. When the Elder indicates that he or she is ready and introductions have been made, the Liaison will relay your request in a respectful way. They will be clear, open and honest, and speak plainly. For example:
 - 2.2.1. "We would be honoured if you would give a prayer at our next meeting..."
 - 2.2.2. "I would be honoured to benefit from your advice and guidance..."
 - 2.2.3. "We would be honoured if you would visit our class to share your knowledge..."
- 2.3. If the Elder accepts the tobacco, he or she accepts the invitation or request. The tobacco will then be offered to the Creator
- 2.4. If the Elder declines the tobacco, he or she declines the request

Step 3: Prepare for the Visit

1. Review logistics and expenses:
 - 1.1. Ensure that transportation is taken care of either by providing it for them or by giving an honorarium for the service
 - 1.2. If accommodation and meals are needed, provide them or include these expenses in the honorarium
 - 1.3. If an Elder brings a helper, their costs should be covered as well
 - 1.4. Determine whether or not the Elder wants to smudge in preparation for the activity
2. Obtain tobacco:
 - 2.1. A pouch of tobacco is appropriate (as opposed to cigarettes)
3. Find out if the Elder needs to do a smudge on arrival
4. Before the Elder arrives, prepare the students for the visit from the Elder:
 - 4.1. Review behavior expectations
 - 4.2. Inform / remind them of the status of the Elder
 - 4.3. Explain the importance of Elders and the value of their knowledge
 - 4.4. Review good listening practices and manners such as avoiding eye contact and not asking inappropriate questions
5. It may be appropriate to present the Elder with a gift:
 - 5.1. The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaisons will assist you in determining if a gift is appropriate and what kind of gift is appropriate

Step 4: Hosting an Elder

Elders are highly respected members of the community. They should be treated well when they come to your school. *Our Words, Our Way* outlines the following considerations when welcoming an Elder into your school or classroom.

1. Greet the Elder when he or she arrives at your school:
 - 1.1. At this time, you will likely be required to present an offering of tobacco
 - 1.1.1. Begin by greeting the Elder with a hand shake
 - 1.1.2. With your left hand, present the offering out in front of you while stating your thanks for the Elder's visit

2. Take time to familiarize the Elder with the school building by pointing out washrooms, a quiet sitting area, etc.
3. If the visit is a long one:
 - 3.1. Offer breaks during which the Elder can relax in a quiet space
 - 3.2. Provide a light lunch or snack for the Elder, such as tea, bannock and jam
 - 3.2.1. If others will eat with the Elder, protocol usually requires that Elders are served first, then the students, and then others
4. **Photographs and video recordings are often *not* acceptable:**
 - 4.1. Explicit consent to take photographs or record an Elder must be received prior to any recordings being made
5. At the end of the visit, thank the Elder formally with a handshake and have the students express their thanks as well:
 - 5.1. If a gift was deemed appropriate, offer the gift at this time. The Liaisons will help you with the gift giving process if needed

Resources

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaisons: Contact them through your school office and or by calling Student Support Services.

Directory: The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaisons have a Directory under development which lists Cultural Facilitators/Advisors who have expressed a willingness to work with our school jurisdiction. The list may include Elders. The Directory is intended as a tool for the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaisons. Staff should contact the Liaisons when seeking an Indigenous guest to address a teaching and learning objective.

[Our Words, Our Ways](#)
[Stepping Stones: Elder Protocol](#)
[Teaching Quality Standard](#)

Credits

Protocol development committee:

- Audrey Degner, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaison for Pembina Hills Public Schools
- Darleen Olson, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaison for Pembina Hills Public Schools
- Heather Beaver, Teacher at Pembina North Community School
- Steven Kaplan, Principal at Alberta Distance Learning Centre
- Tammy Tkachuk, Principal at Dunstable School

The content of this Administrative Procedure was adjusted in response to suggestions from the following representatives from the local Indigenous communities during the 2018-2019 school year:

- The Chairperson of Peavine Métis Settlement
- An Elder from Alexander First Nations
- An Elder from Driftpile First Nations

Reference

[Alberta Education Guide to Education](#)