

# Seeking Meaningful Indigenous Engagement and Participation in BC Land Trust Practices

Indigenous Peoples are the original stewards and protectors of the lands, ecosystems, and biodiversity that land trusts across BC strive to conserve. Their connection and relationship with the Earth remains vital and strong to this day, as it has since time immemorial.

## 9 THINGS YOUR LAND TRUST SHOULD BE DOING NOW

1. Reaching out to local Indigenous communities, inviting relationship and trust building processes.
2. Researching what terminology the local Indigenous communities use to refer to themselves, (Indigenous, First Nation, Aboriginal, etc.).
3. Researching and learning about the local Histories and Stories.
  - a. Researching and applying any Indigenous names to the property (in consultation with local communities).
4. Researching and learning about Indigenous Ways of Knowing of the areas where you operate.
5. Creating signage that the property is on the territory of the local Indigenous communities.
6. Creating a space for communities to engage in sustainable harvests on the property.
7. Creating a space for communities to engage in ceremonies and cultural practices on the property.
8. Creating a space for traditional and/or medicinal herbs and plants to grow on the property.
9. Developing an organization-wide desire for meaningful Indigenous engagement.

## WHY seek Indigenous Engagement?

- Out of commitment to reconciliation and in support of Indigenous place making.
- Indigenous communities hold a wealth of knowledge and experience with respect to stewarding and safeguarding species and ecosystems[1]. Their Knowledge is complimentary and valuable in tandem with Western approaches.
- There is a legal Duty to Consult on all projects that may impact Indigenous rights or Treaties.

### What is the *Duty to Consult*?

- “The Province [of BC] is legally obligated to consult and accommodate First Nations, where required, on land and resource decisions that could impact their Indigenous Interests.”[2]
- It is often delegated to the proponent of a project to carry-out.
- The Indigenous communities involved determine how much consultation satisfies the DTC.
- Shifting to the world-view of Desire to Engage.



### WHEN to seek Indigenous Engagement? [3]

- **EARLY.**
- No need to wait until there is a project idea – seeking to build a relationship with Indigenous communities, on its own intrinsic merit, may prove to be a stronger act of meaningful engagement than merely fulfilling the Duty to Consult when legally obliged.
- In conservation, as soon as there is a project idea the proper Indigenous communities should be notified and given the opportunity to be included in the proceedings.

### HOW to seek MEANINGFUL Indigenous Engagement? [1, 3, 4]

Meaningful engagement goes beyond a threshold response of consultation. It involves the conscious, practiced and continuous efforts by settler organizations and individuals to seek sincere relationships and partnerships with Indigenous groups, and for those efforts to be welcomed and reciprocated by the community.

#### Start by Asking Ourselves:

- Which Indigenous Peoples have traditional or contemporary claims to the lands we operate on?
- Are there any established Treaties, Treaty negotiations or legal Land Claims currently underway in regards to those lands?
- Do Indigenous communities currently have access to the land to engage in hunting, gathering, fishing, cultivating or other traditional practices?
- Do Indigenous communities currently have access to the land to hold ceremonies or engage in cultural practices?
- Are there any spaces or places that have traditional names, significance or meaning to Indigenous Peoples on the lands?

Once the Land Trust has done its research, thoroughly and genuinely, reaching out to the local Indigenous communities is the next step.

**Understanding that, like all relationship building, it takes time. Do not impose timelines. Do not impose expectations. Be prepared to do the work.**

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[1] McDermott, L. & Bell, A., 2017. *Indigenous Perspectives on Conservation Offsetting: Five Case Studies from Ontario, Canada*. Ontario Nature; Plenty Canada; Indigenous Environmental Studies and Sciences Program at Trent University.

[2] Government of BC, 2022. *Consulting with First Nations*.

[3] Pritchard, G., 2022. *Achieving Effective and Meaningful Engagement with Indigenous Communities*.

[4] Vowel, C., 2016. *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Highwater Press.

[5] Deer, K., 2021. *What's wrong with land acknowledgments, and how to make them better*. CBC News: Indigenous.



#### A Note on Land Acknowledgements

All land trusts operate on the traditional and contemporary lands of Indigenous communities. Land Acknowledgements are a popular way for settler organizations and individuals to express their recognition of this, however, be aware that the words may come across as hollow and meaningless if they are not backed up with action. [5]



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