

MEA Clarification March 2023 Appropriate Terminology

Proponents should use appropriate language when engaging and/or working with Indigenous communities and community members. The following are suggested respectful and preferred wording.

Consultation (MCEA context): Process by which proponents participate in on-going dialogue regarding a specific project under consideration with Indigenous Communities, working together to understand issues or concerns, providing capacity funding (if requested) and allowing time for sufficient review and decision making.

Engagement (MCEA context): A high level process by which proponents make initial contact with Indigenous communities by providing project introduction and an overview, using plain language. This can be done via email, documented telephone call or letter mail and should also include offers to meet in person, at the convenience of the Indigenous community.

Indigenous: Indigenous people are the original inhabitants in what is now called Canada and can be characterized into three distinct groups: First Nation, Inuit, and Métis.

First Nation(s): First Nations people are the largest Indigenous group in Canada and live predominantly south of the Arctic. This term includes Status and non-Status Indians (status is membership within the meaning of the Indian Act). First Nation and Indigenous should not be used interchangeably.

Métis: Métis is a nation-specific term connected to an Indigenous people, who originated in western Canada. Métis people evolved from the intermarriage of First Nations people and European settlers beginning in the 18th century and arose with their own specific identity, unique culture, traditions, language, and way of life.

Inuit: Inuit are an Indigenous people living primarily in Inuit Nunangat (four Inuit regions that include land, water and ice). The spoken language is Inuktitut. Inuit means people in Inuktitut, therefore it is a redundancy to use 'Inuit people'.

Use of Indigenous Nations vs. Indigenous Communities: The English language unfortunately doesn't always capture the many nuances associated with the multiple Indigenous languages encountered within Ontario. In some applications the term "Nations" may be synonymous with "Communities" but in many cases "Communities" is used when referring to Indigenous people at a more localized level. This guideline utilizes the latter example of "Communities"

Storytelling & Oral Traditions: Storytelling is firmly grounded in Indigenous oral tradition and history and has been used to instill a knowledge of the mind, body, and spirit in connection to Mother Earth through experienced and trusted "knowledge keepers." Life lessons brought about in Indigenous storytelling are essential for Indigenous peoples to make sense of the world and to teach about values, history, significant events, relationships, cultural beliefs, and sacred stories.

Self-determination & Self-government: Self-determination is a principle that has been codified in Article 3 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP):

Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Self governance, codified in Article 4 of the UNDRIP is one way that the principle of self-determination can be put into action and is summarized as Indigenous people can exercise their right to self-determination and the right to autonomy in their affairs.

Indigenous Knowledge: Although there is no single, established definition of Indigenous Knowledge, it can be referred to as the vast, wealth of knowledge possessed by Indigenous Knowledge Keepers over thousands of years pre-dating European settlement. Indigenous Knowledge is deeply rooted in cultural practices that actively and consciously seeks to cultivate relationships between humans and the natural world. Indigenous People hold the worldview that this knowledge is a natural way of life that embraces the synergies between environmental and ecological

understanding, weather and cosmological observations, harvesting, hunting, fishing, and gathering, to name a few. Indigenous Knowledge is conveyed from one generation to the next through oral traditions like song and storytelling, ceremony, and art.

Aboriginal Rights: Aboriginal rights are collective rights which flow from continued use and occupation of certain areas by Indigenous people. They are inherent rights which Indigenous peoples have practiced and enjoyed since before European contact. Because each First Nation has historically functioned as a distinct society, there is no one official overarching Indigenous definition of what these rights are. Although these specific rights may vary between Indigenous Nations, in general they include rights to the land, rights to subsistence resources and activities, the right to self-determination and self-government, and the right to practice one's own culture and customs including language and religion.

Treaty Rights: Treaty Rights are held by an individual First Nation and may be recognized in Treaties or have been defined because of a court case. Treaty Rights typically provide for reserve lands, annual payments, hunting, trapping, gathering, and fishing rights.

Reserve: Reserve lands are lands set aside by the federal Crown for the collective use of a respective First Nation. Unique in this regard is the fact that an individual First Nation has the ability to exercise some jurisdiction over lands defined as reserve. It is important to note that a reserve does not include traditional usage and ceremonial sites.

Land claim(s): Land claims arise when First Nation rights and title have not been dealt with by treaty or through other legal means. In areas where this has occurred, comprehensive land claim and self-government agreements can be jointly negotiated between a First Nation and Canada and, where applicable, provincial and territorial governments.

Chief & Council: A body of elected officials under the Indian Act, to govern a First Nation community. The Indian Act does not recognize traditional forms of governance and does not reflect, consider or honour First Nations needs or values.

Two Spirit People: "Two-spirit" refers to a person who identifies as having both a masculine and a feminine spirit, and is used by some Indigenous people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity. An English umbrella term to reflect the many words in different Indigenous languages; describing the fluid and diverse nature of gender and attraction and its interconnectedness to community and spirituality.

Indian Act: The principal statute, introduced in 1876 through which the federal government administers local First Nations governments and manages reserve land. It outlines governmental obligations to First Nations peoples and determines “status” — a legal recognition of a person’s First Nations heritage, which affords certain rights such as the right to live on reserve land. It remains the primary document defining how the federal government interacts with the First Nations in Canada and their members.

Suggested Tips

Capitalization - When referring to or communicating with an Indigenous community member or community, capitalize in all instances. For example: Indigenous, Inuit, Métis, Anishinaabeg, Ojibway, Chippewa, Odawa, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapew, etc.

Contact Community or Council - Do not rely on the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada website on how to identify a community or people. Instead, refer to the particular Nation or Community or band council’s website.

Terms and Phrases Not Recommended:

Aboriginal: Many Indigenous community members no longer refer to themselves as Aboriginal, due in large part to the connotation of the Ab-prefix. This prefix is largely compared to “abnormal” (not normal) or “absent” and “abduct” (away). Additionally, when Aboriginal & Treaty Rights were written into the Canadian constitution in 1982, the use of the term was opposed by many Indigenous people. Aboriginal should be used only when in a legal context, if it is part of a proper name (e.g. Aboriginal People’s Television Network) or the person identifies themselves as such. Aboriginal should never be used as a noun i.e. “Aboriginals think...”

Indian: Indian is considered offensive and should never be used when engaging with an Indigenous person, people or community. This word should only be used when in a historical or legal context i.e., Indian Act, Indian status, etc.

Native: Native is no longer recommended for use in Canada unless the person self-identifies as such. It is still commonly used in the US. The other acceptable use is in a proper name i.e., Native Women’s Association of Canada.

Indigenous Canadians/Native Canadians: Many Indigenous/First Nation, Métis, and Inuit identify as being Nations within a nation. Treaties were signed by the ancestors of Indigenous community members today and by definition, are agreements between sovereign nations. Due to the oppressive attitudes generally exhibited by society and throughout the history of Canada, many Indigenous, Métis and Inuit do not identify as Canadian and should not be referred to as such.

Stakeholder: Stakeholder when used to be inclusive of Indigenous people does not adequately describe inherent Aboriginal or Treaty Rights.

First Nations or Indigenous Groups: This terminology does not denote respect for First Nations & Inuit sovereignty. All First Nations & Inuit existed on Turtle Island (North America) prior to colonization and should not be referred to as ‘groups’.

Colloquialisms - Colloquialisms have become a part of common language despite many carrying a negative connotation.

- **“Indian Time”** is mistakenly used when describing an Indigenous person’s tardiness. “Indian Time” refers to a moment when any sort of meeting, celebration, etc. is set to occur. Most common use is when an Indigenous person visits an elder for guidance, the elder will begin when he/she feels the asker is ready, not at all related to the Western perception of ‘time’.
- **“Pow wow”** is used in common vernacular when describing a meeting. A pow wow is actually a celebration with food, dancing and where artwork and crafts are displayed for purchase.

- **Other terms** like “my tribe”, “circle the wagons”, “rain dance”, “low man on the totem pole”, “too many chiefs and not enough Indians”, “Indian summer”, “off the reservation” are all equally offensive and inappropriate.

Possessive Language

Avoid using possessive phrases like “Canada’s Indigenous people” or “our Indigenous people” to describe the Indigenous people whose ancestors predated the creation of Canada. It is paternalistic and implies Canada owns Indigenous people. An additional unacceptable example use is “Ontario’s Indigenous people”.