



Outdoor Recreation
Council of BC

Guidance Toolkit for Engagement with Indigenous Communities

Tools for recreation organizations embarking on discussions and relationship building with First Nations at the community level.



Cover photo: Northern BC Tourism / Marty Clemens



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About the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia

The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC is a charitable society with more than 90 organizational members spanning the entire spectrum of outdoor recreation user groups, including paddlers, hikers, mountain bikers, off-road motorcyclists, equestrians, snowmobilers, quad riders, and anglers. We voice the interests and concerns of the organized recreation sector to government, advocate for access and funding, and build capacity within the sector. We indirectly represent more than 100,000 British Columbians.

Join us by [becoming a member](#) or [making a gift](#).

Written by Norman Marcy and Ryan Stuart with contributions from Rod Clapton

Norman Marcy is a kayaker, cyclist, retired skier and reformed fisher, who relishes foraging in the forest. In 30 years he has worked as a negotiator and engagement specialist with over 75 First Nations in British Columbia and Yukon. Norman participates in ORCBC's Indigenous Reconciliation Committee and Chairs BC Marine Trails' First Nations Engagement Committee.



Ryan Stuart started writing about his adventures as a way to get paid to play. Twenty years later he's still at it. Look for his name in magazines like Outside, Men's Journal, Ski Canada, online at Hakai and The Narwhal. When he's not typing at his home office in Vancouver Island's Comox Valley, you can find him skiing, hiking, mountain biking, surfing, paddling or fishing somewhere nearby.

Introduction

With this guide, the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (ORCBC) offers recreation organizations a roadmap for advancing reconciliation objectives within their organizations. This toolkit is one part of an ongoing effort to provide guidance and resources to the outdoor recreation sector on working cooperatively with Indigenous governments and communities on outdoor recreation projects.

We hope this guide will spark dialogue within your groups and help foster genuine collaboration with Indigenous communities.

The recommendations are meant to assist member organizations and recreation groups striving for reconciliation outcomes in tailoring unique and local strategies that benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.



Why is it important to collaborate with Indigenous People

Collaborating with Indigenous peoples fosters stronger communities, promotes sustainability, and advances the goals of equality, justice, and reconciliation. Respectful and transparent dialogue acknowledges and recognizes the following:

- First Nations possess constitutionally protected rights;
- First Nations held rights and title to the land before the imposition of Crown title by the Federal and Provincial governments;
- First Nations are distinct governmental entities like federal and provincial governments are;
- The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and enabling Federal and Provincial legislation recognizes First Nations' rights and First Nations' government participation in decision-making;
- A failure to collaborate may lead to governmental decisions that do not benefit all recreation sectors;
- Future land access for recreational opportunities will necessitate support from First Nations;
- Citizen-based reconciliation is likely the most beneficial strategy.





Five Key Lessons

1. Do your homework
2. Be local and personal
3. Listen more, talk less
4. Consistency and respect
5. Be flexible but committed

1. Do your homework

Before approaching a First Nation, get to know the Nation(s) whose territory you are on. Prepare yourself by learning about their interests, priorities and histories. And educate yourself about First Nations history in Canada and B.C. A good place to start is the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

Recommendations:

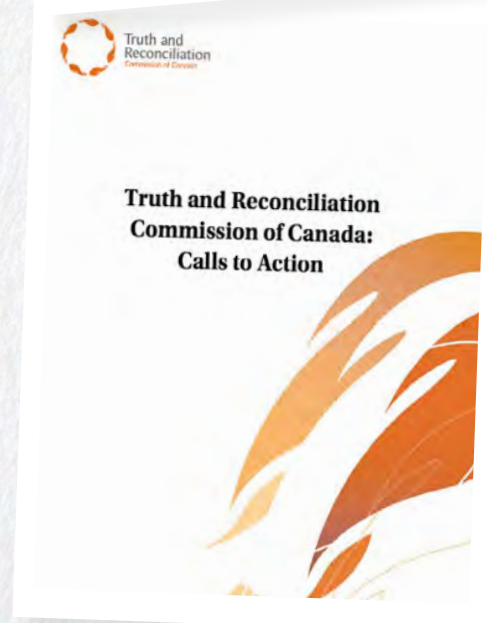
- Learn about the Nations in your area, including their history, governance structure, priorities and interests. Look for a tie-in to outdoor recreation (including opportunities for Indigenous youth to spend time on the land, cultural revitalization and trails to benefit community health).
- Find out who a good first contact should be. For outdoor recreation, look for departments or contacts related to lands, resources or recreation. If you don't know, call and ask.

Case in Point:

Spirit North, a charity dedicated to removing barriers to outdoor sport in First Nation schools and communities, used the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report as inspiration. Three of the [94 calls to action](#) speak about recreation and sport.

Resources:

- [British Columbia Assembly of First Nations Interactive Map](#)
- Civicinfo has a [searchable database](#) of First Nations in BC.
- [The Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.](#)
- [The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action.](#)



2. Be local and personal

First Nations are our neighbours and community members. We often have a lot in common, which provides easy places to build a relationship from. Rather than being transactional, focus on developing the relationship first, before asking for something.



Case in point:

If you are seeking something from a First Nation, bring something to the table. Squamish Off-Road Cycling Association helps get Squamish Nation kids on bikes. BC Marine Trails helps Nations communicate visitation guidelines and sustainable practices with paddlers who might visit their territory.

Resources:

- [10 considerations when working with Indigenous communities](#) from Indigenous Tourism BC. A provincial guide to [doing business with First Nations](#).
- A good resource for preparing to meet with a Nation is the [Cultural Awareness Program](#) from the McLeod Lake Indian Band. It's specific to the band, but should provide ideas for interactions with any Nation.

Recommendations:

- Engage with the Nation now, before you need something.
- Incorporate First Nations engagement into your organization's mission and purpose.
- Use personal contacts in the community to provide an introduction.
- Write a letter introducing yourself and your group.
- Keep it casual. A phone call or cup of coffee is a good place to start.
- Communicate regularly. Invite the Nation to your events, programs and AGM. Attend their community events. Keep them informed of your club's actions.



3. Listen more, talk less

Put the Nation's needs, interests and goals ahead of yours. To be an ally, ask how your group can help them succeed and then find creative ways to contribute.

Recommendations:

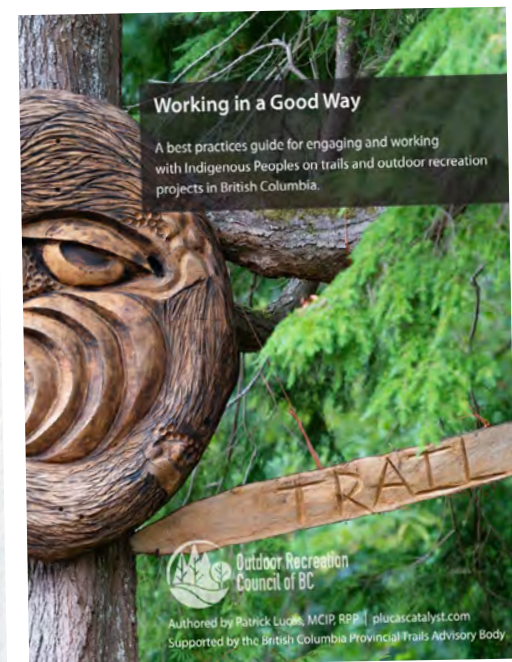
- Listen for common interests and build from there.
- Focus on small goals. They're easier to achieve, provide more opportunities to celebrate and are good blocks to build from.
- Nations often have capacity constraints. Respect that their priorities may not align with yours.
- Ease their workload. If they need more information or preparation of documents, ask how you can help.

Case in point:

Access to salmon on the Lower Fraser River is fraught with a history of conflict between First Nations, commercial fisheries and recreational anglers. But even here, there is common ground. Everyone wants their future generations to have the same opportunities to connect to the land and water. That became the foundation for the Lower Fraser Collaborative Table.

Resources:

- ORCBC [Working in a Good Way](#) is a good source for ideas for engagement.
- Recommended dos and don'ts from [Indigenous Corporate Training](#).



4. Consistency and respect

Building relations with First Nations is a long-term commitment built on many small steps. It requires consistency, persistence and respect.

Recommendations:

- Be patient. Indigenous communities and governments have many competing interests and politics.
- Don't dwell on setbacks.
- Emphasize collaboration and look for opportunities to work together.
- Be a conduit between the Nation and your membership and the recreating public.
- Listen to concerns, act on them and maintain the dialogue to address other issues.
- Be in contact on a regular basis. Follow up, check in and keep the Nation informed of what you are doing.
- Show you are an ally by writing letters in support of the Nation, attending their events and celebrating their wins, even ones that don't involve you or your group.

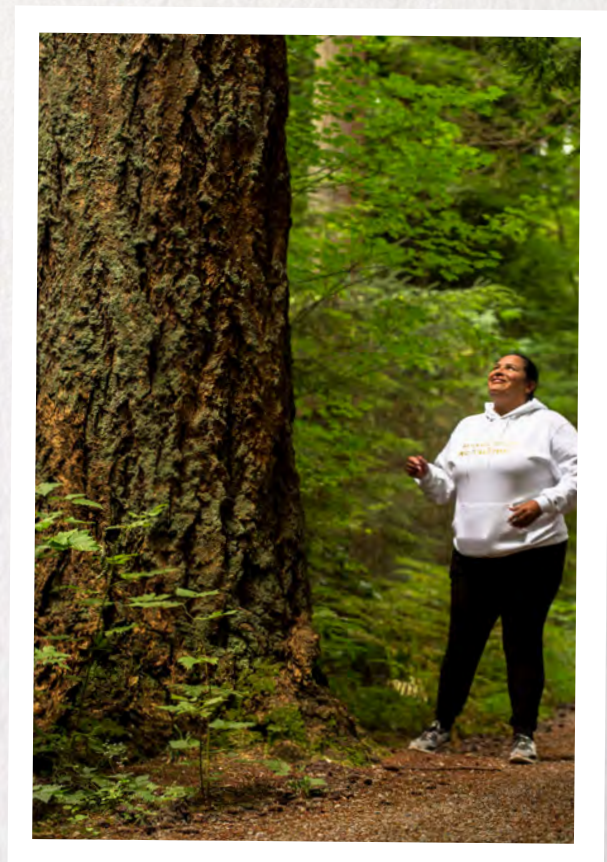
Case in point:

The building of a sanctioned trail on Squamish First Nation land without their permission was the first interaction between the Nation and the Squamish Off-Road Cycling Association. While it was an inauspicious start, both parties used it as an opportunity to open a dialogue that has grown into a collaborative relationship, including a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Nation and the club. As another example, the Howe Sound Marine Trail included

collaboration with multiple First Nations and governments but was collaboratively achieved and celebrated by all involved.

Resources:

- [Best Practices for Indigenous Engagement - Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark.](#)
- [Memorandum of Understanding between Squamish Nation and Squamish Off Road Cycling Association](#)



5. Be flexible but committed

Don't be fixated on one approach or outcome. By maintaining a dialogue, you can make the necessary adjustments to continue the relationship.

Recommendations:

- Watch for and assess changes in the First Nation's governance and circumstances that may affect the relationship.
- Make sure you are delivering on your commitments. Communicate achievements and results with the Nation and your members.
- If a Nation says no to a proposal, respect that they have a right to self-determination on their land. They likely have a good reason.
- Focus on the process, not the outcome. Be committed to reconciliation and relationship building.

Case in point:

The Wild Bird Trust of BC set a goal of transitioning 50 percent of its programming to an Indigenous focus. They tracked their progress with hard data and reported on it in their magazine and directly to their partner Nation. Another example comes from the BC Marine Trails, which works with First Nations to identify appropriate places for boaters to camp and stop along the B.C. coast. Through dialogue, one coastal First Nation asked for several places to be removed from public mapping or marked as closed in recognition of cultural values that need protection. Upon further review and discussion of safe travelling requirements, other sites were identified, and concurrence for use was agreed upon and publicized.





Summary

The hardest part of engagement that may contribute to reconciliation is getting started.

There may be many obstacles to overcome, but often the biggest is letting go of fear. The worry of mispronouncing a name, saying the wrong thing, or not knowing all the answers, often holds us back from engaging with First Nations at all. But when it comes to relationship-building with First Nations that fear is misplaced.

By approaching reconciliation as a relationship building exercise, with curiosity and compassion, good faith and an open heart, you will likely receive a similar reception.



Together, Canadians must do more than just talk about reconciliation; we must learn how to practice reconciliation in our every day lives - within ourselves and our families, and in our communities, governments....To do so constructively, Canadians must remain committed to the ongoing work of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships.

– National Center for Reconciliation

Glossary of terms.

Aboriginal - Legal term in Canada when referring to Aboriginal rights under [s.35 of the Constitution Act, 1982](#).

Aboriginal Rights - Asserted or established rights as referred to under Section 35 of the Constitution and Nation-specific Treaties.

Aboriginal Title - [Aboriginal title](#) refers to the inherent Aboriginal right to land or a territory. The Canadian legal system recognizes Aboriginal title as a sui generis, or unique collective right to the use of and jurisdiction over a group's ancestral territories. *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*, 2014 SCC 44, [2024]2 S.C.R. 256, para 69 & 70.

Crown Title - [Crown Title](#) is another term that is recognized in law. This is a difficult term to discuss with Indigenous peoples. In large sections of BC, Crown Land is unceded land meaning that Indigenous title has neither been surrendered nor acquired by the Crown.

First Nation - Any group of indigenous peoples of Canada recognized by the federal government, generally excluding Metis and Inuit. First Nations may in their name use the term Band or Indian Band. Always refer to the First Nation as they refer to themselves.

Indigenous - The term 'Indigenous Peoples' includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis people in Canada. Although used as a synonym to Aboriginal, Indigenous is often the preferred general term. Individual Indigenous people are more likely to identify with their First Nation than the term Indigenous.

Settler - A term used to refer to non-Indigenous people who settled on traditional Indigenous territory. Often also used to refer to any B.C. resident who is not of Indigenous heritage. The word can turn off some non-Indigenous audiences. Better to use non-Indigenous.

Stakeholders - Usually refers to parties who hold an interest in a project or consultation, but it should not be used to refer to Indigenous people or First Nations. The word has negative connotations to many Indigenous Peoples because in some instances, European settlers were given wooden stakes to claim their plot of land prior to any treaty or land negotiations with Indigenous Peoples.

Traditional Territory - Territories that Nations have occupied and continue to occupy and exercise their Aboriginal rights.

Here's a longer list of [terms and terminology](#).

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ORCBC operates on the sacred, ancestral and traditional territories of many diverse and distinct Indigenous Peoples and Nations, including the Sinixt, Syilx, Secwepemc and Ktunaxa Peoples.



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