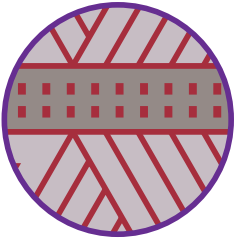


TOOL

Truth-Telling and Indigenous Cultural Awareness



Truth-Telling

In coincidence with an emphasis on truth-telling before reconciliation¹, it is imperative that municipalities and civic organizations be honest about the history of conquest, colonialism and genocide in Canadian state formation; and that all city building and placemaking occurs on the occupied lands of Indigenous Nations. An integral part of repairing, restoring and building mutually respectful and equitable relationships with Indigenous peoples is for settler institutions to become more conscious of the deeply ingrained colonial settler worldviews and power inequities that persist within contemporary urban planning and design, city building and municipal policies.

1 - Yesno, R. (2018, December). Before reconciliation is possible, Canadians must admit the truth, Maclean's Magazine. Retrieved from: <https://www.macleans.ca/opinion/before-reconciliation-is-possible-canadians-must-admit-the-truth/>

Moreover, the TRC Calls to Action and the preceding Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)² formally call on people in Canada to unlearn the false and damaging 'truths' about Indigenous peoples that have been taught and socialized within many educational, political and media spaces. This can be done through research, direct engagement and attending events and presentations led by Indigenous knowledge-keepers, practitioners and organizations.

Settler colonialism will continue to be the dominant narrative restricting Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds if it is not actively and constantly addressed and dismantled. Critical self-reflection of one's own cultural biases and blind spots, especially those that privilege settler colonial views and create exclusionary practices, is the only way to disrupt status quo patterns and inequitable practices. When we do this work with intentionality and open minds and hearts, it becomes possible to repair and rebuild relationships and reorient approaches that are more honest, mutually valuable and generative for Indigenous and civic partners. Truth-telling about the colonial settler history and present of cities and city building is a necessary part of reconciling and healing for the future.

2 - See Tool: Important Guidelines, Commissions and Reports.

Self-Reflection

Actively participating in self-reflection and challenging patterns that are damaging to Indigenous peoples – at personal and institutional levels – is a lifelong journey of learning and self-awareness, and requires us to look deeply and critically at our own beliefs, practices, histories, roles and biases – and those that have become part of an organization's culture and policies. The journey requires cultural humility including listening without judgement, being open to learning our own culture and our biases. The following questions³ can guide deeper self-reflection and compassion vis-à-vis colonialism, truth and reconciliation, settler identities, Indigenous cultural awareness, intercultural awareness, and inclusion:

- What is your personal and family history that brought you to this land?
- Are you aware of the history of the land you live and work on?
- What sources have you drawn on for this information?
- Were your family or ancestors impacted by colonialism, oppression, structural violence, war or poverty?
- What is your understanding of the impacts of colonial violence against Indigenous communities?
- What is your understanding of the role played by municipalities and urban planning in perpetuating colonial policies and forms of marginalization and erasure of Indigenous peoples?

3 - See Tool: Important Guidelines, Commissions and Reports.

- What does reconciliation mean to you? What does reconciliation look like to you?

Activating reflections into practice ⁴

- What guides your own cultural practices? What traditional teachings, systems of knowledge, or worldviews, inform your own philosophy of practice?
- Have you had the opportunity to learn Indigenous teachings and/or protocols? Are you able to practice these teachings in your profession? Why or why not?
- What is the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of your personal and professional communities?
- What are some things you are doing, or can do in future, to decolonize your personal practice; to be inclusive of Indigenous practice?

4 - Adapted from: Indigenous Working Group of the BC Association of Social Workers. (2016). Towards a New Relationship: Toolkit for Reconciliation/Decolonization of Social Work Practice at the Individual, Workplace, and Community Level, prepared by the British Columbia Association of Social Workers.

Ally Exercise: Acting as an Ally⁵

Consider a particular experience when you were an ally to another person who was experiencing or an attack on their dignity or oppression, while you were in a location of power and/or privilege:

- What was required of you in terms of being an ally in this context?
- How did you get your experiences of oppression out of the centre in order to be an ally?
- How did you get your own access to power and/or privilege out of the centre in order to be an ally?
- What actions did you take as an ally?
- What differences might your ally actions make for the people involved?
- What response did you get from the person you were trying to be an ally to about your actions or intentions?

How could you invite responses about if or how you were being an accountable ally in this situation? How did you stay open to hearing if you were not acting in line with your ethics and intentions for being an ally? Thinking back on this experience from the relative safety and community of this conversation, what different actions might you have taken? (If you had more access to power/less access to power?)

5 - Reynolds, V. (2013). "Leaning In" as imperfect Allies in Community Work, Narrative and Conflict: Explorations in Theory and Practice, 1(1). <http://journals.gmu.edu/NandC/issue/1>

How can you plan to respond with the discomfort and possible pain that may come from being in an ally position? What differences has being an ally made in your life? Community work?

Indigenous Cultural Awareness

Indigenous cultural awareness is about settler society and institutions attempting to understand the richness and diversity of realities, cultural differences, worldviews, values, practices and contributions of Indigenous Nations across Canada.

Also an important part of developing cultural awareness is learning about the colonial history of Canada and how settler colonial laws, policies, and perspectives continue to impact Indigenous peoples and their futures. An understanding and respect for Indigenous peoples as sovereign nations with distinct rights and relationships to land, governments and institutions is integral to cultural awareness.

Indigenous cultural awareness and competency does not require non-Indigenous people to become experts in Indigenous cultures, but it does require the ability to enter into the cultural worlds and realities of Indigenous peoples in order to cultivate understanding and compassion. Cultural competency also requires developing a level of understanding and proficiency in culturally specific protocols and knowledge systems commensurate with the scope of the partnership and initiative.

Indigenous cultural awareness encompasses the following important action-oriented values of humility, sensitivity, safety and competence and requires commitment by civic leaders to learn from and defer to the natural laws, cultural teachings and protocols, and needs and priorities of Indigenous community during engagement in co-design, planning and decision making processes.

- **Cultural humility** is a lifelong journey of self-reflection and learning that involves listening without judgement and being open to learning from and about Indigenous peoples. It involves learning about one's own culture and biases. It is an overarching principle that is threaded through one's learning and acts as the process by which change can occur.
- **Cultural sensitivity** grows when one starts to see the influences of their own culture and acknowledge that they have biases. This can be an eye-opening experience, and it may take courage and humility to walk this path. Cultural sensitivity is NOT about treating everyone the same. With cultural awareness and sensitivity comes a responsibility to act respectfully.

- **Cultural safety** aims for all people to feel respected and safe when they interact with cultural, educational, social and health care systems and institutions. Culturally safe services and programs are free of racism and discrimination. In particular, Indigenous and racialized peoples are supported to draw strengths from their identity, culture and community.
- **Cultural competence** requires developing knowledge, skills and attitudes for working effectively and respectfully with diverse and different peoples. It's about reducing the number of assumptions we make about people based on our biases. Cultural competence does not require us to become experts in cultures different from our own.

