



First Nation Elders and Métis Senators Protocol

It should be noted that the various beliefs within this Protocol vary in accordance with the different First Nations in the area and across the province and country. It is advised that individuals consult with their local community on a referral basis to locate local Elders and Senators who can assist them with understanding protocols and the significance of ceremonial objects.

First Nation Elders

Elders are keepers of knowledge, and they enjoy sharing their knowledge and teachings. Elders are valuable resources and are available to go into schools and do classrooms visits for topics such as:

- ❖ legends;
- ❖ women's and/or men's teachings;
- ❖ trapping;
- ❖ hunting;
- ❖ ricing;
- ❖ pow-wows;
- ❖ sweat lodges;
- ❖ naming ceremonies;
- ❖ child rearing practices;
- ❖ beading.

Keep in mind that the list provided is a short example of the knowledge that Elders hold, and each Elder has their own gifts to share.

Elders are also available to traditionally open gatherings and provide a prayer for the gathering. The opening gives thanks to the Creator and blesses the event/gathering.

See Appendix A, which is available at schools and work sites, for a list of First Nation Elders in the Rainy River District.

When approaching a First Nation Elder

Always plan ahead when you require guidance from an Elder. Elders need at least four days' notice to prepare their own thoughts and need time to reflect on what is being asked of them.

If an Elder is required for a specific topic, please inform the Elder so he/she knows what is expected of them during the visit.

Once an Elder is contacted, it is important to remember they enjoy passing on knowledge and teachings, so do not be afraid to ask questions.

Offering Tobacco and the importance of Tobacco

When a First Nations Elder is invited to come in for a visit or is asked for his/her guidance, it is very important to always offer them tobacco. Sometimes it is difficult to do this in person while making the request, so when the Elder is contacted, ask them if it is okay to give them their tobacco the day of their visit.

If the Elder is not available, they will often recommend another Elder.

If tobacco is offered wrapped in cloth, do not use the colour black.

Métis Senators and Knowledge Holders

Senators have a special place in Métis culture. Métis Senators are elected by the Métis community to provide Senator's presence at community events and meetings, and to help keep Métis culture alive by sharing traditions and ways of life. Senators are highly respected for their knowledge, values, and experience. One Senator sits as a member of each Métis Community Council.

Métis Knowledge Holders are members of the community who have special knowledge relating to the Métis way of life. From the seasoned harvester to the youngest Michif speaker, each Knowledge Holder has a piece of the Métis story and culture. As a result, all Knowledge Holders are respected for what they know and their contributions to the persistence of the Métis way of life through practice and knowledge transfer. See Appendix A, which is available at schools and work sites, for a list of Métis Senators and Knowledge Holders.

When approaching a Métis Senator and/or Knowledge Holder

To ask for help from Métis Senators, Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) staff, or Métis Knowledge Holders regarding an event or task, direct the inquiry to the appropriate resource person listed in Appendix A, which can be found at schools and work sites.

For other requests, not found in Appendix A, direct the inquiry to the contact person for the Métis Community Council or MNO staff in your area. Métis Community Council members, and/or MNO staff will contact the appropriate Métis Knowledge Holder for a specific event or task.

A gift of tobacco is not necessary for Métis Senators or Knowledge Holders.

Ceremonial Objects

Drum

The drum is the heartbeat of Mother Earth, the heartbeat of life and of First Nations people. People live the first nine months of their lives in the wombs of their mothers listening to their heartbeats which sets the pattern of our existence. First Nations people play these drums in ceremonies to bring in the spirit of Mother Earth. The drumstick which is used to beat the drum is called many things – some people say it is the Thunderbird coming, others call it the arm of the Creator who is breathing life into the ceremonies.

Feathers

Eagle feathers are usually carried in a sacred bundle; however, different Nations use different feathers for all kinds of reasons. The Eagle Feather is the one that is closest to Creator because the Eagle can fly so high and he speaks for the people to the Creator. When someone receives an Eagle Feather, they have been given a very high honour and must walk with such honour from that day forward.



Medicine Bundle

Some people display their sacred items on an altar in a special place in a main room of their home; others keep them in a bundle until they are ready to be used. Some leave their feathers or other objects out as they help calm the energy and ground people and/or the home. People feast their sacred items at least two times a year, which follows once in the spring and autumn; some feast their bundle every time they do a ceremony. This allows the person's items to have more power to help people.

Tobacco (Asemaa)

Sacred tobacco is used to make smoke and is one of the most sacred of plants for Anishinaabeg. It is said to be the main activator of all plants. It was given to communicate with the Spirit world and when one uses it, all things begin to happen. Tobacco is always offered before picking medicines. When someone offers tobacco to a plant, and explains why, the plant will then let all of the other plants know the person's intentions. Tobacco is used first as an offering for everything and in every ceremony. When going to ceremonies, one would offer tobacco to the Elder leading those ceremonies along with an honouring gift. This announces a person's intentions and the Elders may ask a person's intentions with this offering.



Sweet Grass (Weengushk/Wiingashk)



Sweet grass is the sacred hair of Mother Earth; its sweet aroma reminds people of the gentleness, love and kindness she has for the people. This is why Native people pick it and braid it in three strands representing love, kindness and honesty. Sweet grass is used for smudging and purification of the spirit. When sweet grass is used in a healing or talking circle, it has a calming effect. It is said that it attracts the good Spirit, so it is used to call in the Spirit. Anishinaabeg believe that sweet grass puts the positive back in a person.

Ceremonial Sage (Sukodawabuk/Nookwezigan)

Sage is used in many different ways. It helps people prepare for ceremonies and teachings. Because it is more medicinal and stronger than sweet grass, it tends to be used more often in ceremonies. It also has physical healing properties – one can boil sage and drink it as a tea. Sage is for releasing what is troubling the mind and for removing negative energy – it is used for cleansing homes and sacred items. There is both male and female sage.



Ceremonial use of Cedar (Keezhik/Giizhik)

Like sage and sweet grass, cedar is used to purify the home. It also has many restorative medicinal uses. When mixed with sage for a tea, it cleans the body of all infections. Cedar baths are also very healing. When cedar is mixed with tobacco and is put in the fire, it crackles. This is said to call the attention of the Spirits to the offering that is being made.



Cedar is used in sweat lodge and fasting ceremonies for protection. Cedar branches cover the floor of many sweat lodges, and some people make a circle of cedar when they are fasting. It is a guardian spirit and chases away the bad spirits. Fresh cedar is used to hang in rooms and windows. When it is dried out, it is put in the woods or burned in a fire. Fresh cedar is put in houses on a regular basis.

Since it is believed, in many cultures, that the plants that people use to burn and purify themselves provide them with access to their soul and power, it is essential that one ask permission before gathering these plants. Take only what is needed without damaging the plant and give thanks for what is taken. If a person did not pick these plants, it should be recognized that someone else did, and that one can still give thanks for the life of those plants and the people who picked them.

Audience - Pow-Wow Etiquette

- Pow-wows are a celebration of life – have fun.
- Be respectful to yourself and others and be quiet when someone is talking.
- A good gift to give is anything cloth-like, for example, towels, dish towels, shirts, etc.
- It is impolite to stare too long in a person's eyes because it is considered as looking at their soul. This might upset that person's spirit (soul).
- One can only take pictures of someone in his/her regalia with their permission. Offering a gift, such as a cold glass of water, is appropriate when requesting photo permission.
- Stand up for all honour songs - the emcee will let you know when to stand. Songs include Grand entry, flag song, pipe song, veteran song, and any special songs. No photography or video recording is permitted during the Grand entry.
- It is not required, but females are encouraged to wear dresses.
- No children should be running in between dancers.
- If there is food left over, it is not thrown in the garbage. It will be collected and put in the fire for the ancestors to have, as they are in spirit form, dancing.

Dancer - Pow-Wow Etiquette

- Do not walk counter clockwise. This is only allowed when attending a funeral or when honoring spirits that have passed on.
- Do not carry children when you are in the dance area. It is like you are holding something to offer to the spirits.
- Offer tobacco to the drums. Each drum will have a tobacco bag, which is where the offering is placed.
- If one sees a feather on the ground, he/she should not pick it up, but instead, let the arena director (or an Elder) know that one has been found on the ground. Usually traditional dancers will dance around it and an Elder will pick it up.
- Dogs are not allowed to be near the pow-wow grounds.

