

Working Respectfully with Indigenous Elders & Knowledge Keepers - Offering an Honorarium

A Teaching on Respect, Reciprocity and Gratitude

One of the most common questions people ask when planning an Indigenous event is: "*Should we offer an honorarium?*" The simple answer is yes.

When an Elder, Knowledge Keeper, Cultural Teacher, Drummer, Singer, Dancer, Artist, Language Speaker, or other Indigenous community member is invited to share their knowledge, culture, or traditions, it is customary to offer an honorarium.

An honorarium is much more than payment for someone's time. It is a way of expressing gratitude, respect and reciprocity for the knowledge that has been shared.

What is an Honorarium?

Within Indigenous cultures, teachings have been passed from generation to generation since time immemorial. Knowledge is learned through years of listening, observing, ceremony, experience and guidance from Elders and other Knowledge Keepers. Those entrusted with these teachings carry an important responsibility to preserve and share them with future generations.

When someone agrees to share that knowledge, they are offering a gift. An honorarium is one way of saying *Miigwetch* (Thank You). It recognizes not only the time spent at an event, but also the many years of learning, preparation, responsibility and lived experience that make those teachings possible.

Every Invitation is Different

Every gathering is unique. A Knowledge Keeper may be invited to:

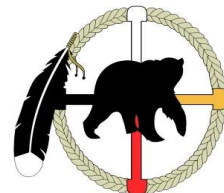
- Offer an Opening Prayer or Thanksgiving Address.
- Conduct a Smudging Ceremony.
- Share Traditional Teachings.
- Speak about Algonquin history.
- Teach language or cultural protocols.
- Tell traditional stories.
- Lead a traditional craft workshop.
- Participate in a panel discussion.
- Provide cultural guidance or advice.
- Open or close a community gathering.

Some invitations may require only a few minutes, while others involve many hours of preparation, travel, and participation. For this reason, there is no single honorarium that is appropriate for every occasion. The respectful approach is simply to ask.

Offering Tobacco

Within many Algonquin communities, it is customary to offer *Asemaa* (traditional tobacco) when asking an Elder or Knowledge Keeper to share teachings or ceremony. Offering tobacco is a sign of respect. It acknowledges that the request is sincere and that the knowledge being shared is sacred.

If you are unfamiliar with local protocol, simply ask. Each Indigenous Nation has its own customs and traditions, and they should always be respected.



Planning Your Event

When inviting an Elder, Knowledge Keeper, Cultural Teacher, Drummer, Artist, or other Indigenous presenter, it is important to remember that the honorarium is only one part of planning a respectful engagement. Organizations should also plan to cover any reasonable expenses associated with the event, including travel and mileage, parking, meals, accommodation (where required), workshop or craft materials, drum transportation, accessibility supports, and the assistance of helpers or support people when needed. Whenever possible, these operational expenses should be reimbursed separately from the honorarium so that the honorarium remains a meaningful expression of gratitude for the knowledge, teachings and cultural gifts being shared.

Working Together in a Good Way

Respectful relationships begin long before the event itself. When inviting an Elder or Knowledge Keeper, it is helpful to:

1. Contact them well in advance.
2. Clearly explain the purpose of the event.
3. Discuss expectations together.
4. Ask about local cultural protocols.
5. Confirm the honorarium before the event.
6. Ensure expenses are covered.
7. Create a welcoming and respectful environment.
8. Thank them for sharing their knowledge.

Small gestures of respect often leave the greatest impression.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Do I always need to offer an honorarium?

Whenever someone is invited to share Indigenous knowledge, teachings, ceremony, language, music, or culture, it is customary to offer an honorarium.

Q. Is an honorarium the same as a consulting fee?

No. An honorarium recognizes the gift of Indigenous knowledge and the responsibility carried by those who share it. It is not simply an hourly wage or payment for a service.

Q. Should I ask how much the honorarium should be?

Yes. Every Elder, Knowledge Keeper, and Cultural Teacher is different. Rather than making assumptions, simply ask what would be appropriate.

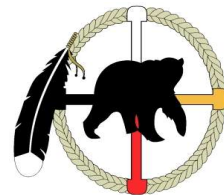
Q. Should travel and materials be included?

Whenever possible, travel expenses, accommodations, meals, and workshop materials should be reimbursed separately from the honorarium.

A Teaching on Respect

Reconciliation begins with relationships. Learning to respectfully engage Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Cultural Teachers is one way we can build stronger relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

An honorarium is not simply about money. It is about acknowledging the value of Indigenous knowledge.



It is about showing gratitude. It is about honouring the person who has accepted the responsibility of carrying these teachings. Above all, it is about respect.

Learn More

The following resources provide additional information about working respectfully with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members.

- **Elder Honorarium Guidelines – Queen's University.** This guide explains the purpose of honoraria, cultural protocols, planning considerations and respectful ways to engage Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers.
https://www.queensu.ca/indigenous/sites/oiiwww/files/uploaded_files/Elder%20Honorarium%20Guidelines%202023.pdf
- **Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Community Members – Western University.** This resource offers practical guidance for organizations working with Indigenous communities, including relationship building, protocol, honoraria, travel and event planning.
https://indigenous.uwo.ca/assets/docs/pdf/working_with_indigenous_community1.pdf

A Final Thought

Every Indigenous Nation has its own traditions, teachings, and protocols. The guidance shared here reflects the teachings and values of Shabot Obaadjiwan First Nation and is intended to help visitors, educators, municipalities, businesses, and community organizations engage respectfully with Indigenous people and communities.

If you are planning an event and would like guidance on local cultural protocols or would like to invite an Elder, Knowledge Keeper or Cultural Teacher, we encourage you to contact Shabot Obaadjiwan First Nation. We are always pleased to help people learn and build respectful relationships in a good way.