

Best Practices for Indigenous Engagement



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About the Authors



Sarah Gamble joined the Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark as Executive Director in 2015 after serving as a scientific advisor to the aspiring Geopark in her field of archaeology and anthropology. Ms. Gamble has 17 years of experience working as a consulting archaeologist and traditional use specialist, during which she completed archaeological overviews, impact assessments and traditional land use studies in Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories, as well as in the states of Idaho, Oregon, North Dakota, Minnesota and California.



Jenna McQueen is the Program Coordinator for the Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark and a member of the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation. Growing up in Tumbler Ridge, she was captivated by the outdoors. She now spends her free time hiking, camping, riding ATVs and cross-country skiing. Jenna has been an active member of the community, sitting on numerous Boards of Directors, coaching junior sports and volunteering for many different organizations. She draws inspiration from her Indigenous language, history and traditions to teach her children the stories of the land and how to cherish the culture they came from.

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Introduction

The [UNESCO Global Geopark guidelines](#) provide clear criteria requiring the full engagement of Indigenous Peoples in all UNESCO Global Geoparks. According to articles 41 and 42 of UNDRIP, all specialized agencies of the UN (including UNESCO) shall contribute to the full realization of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#). [UNESCO's Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples](#) underlines UNESCO's commitment to implementing UNDRIP principles across all program areas. The principles of UNDRIP are also embedded in the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action](#).

Section 3 (ii) of the Global Geopark criteria states that "UNESCO Global Geoparks should use that (internationally significant) heritage, in connection with all other aspects of that area's natural and cultural heritage, to promote awareness of key issues facing society in the context of the dynamic planet we all live on, including but not limited to increasing knowledge and understanding of: geoprocesses; geohazards; climate change; the need for the sustainable use of Earth's natural resources; the evolution of life and the empowerment of Indigenous peoples."

Section 3 (v) goes further, stating that "UNESCO Global Geoparks should actively involve local communities and Indigenous peoples as key stakeholders in the Geopark. In partnership with local communities, a co-management plan needs to be drafted and implemented that provides for the social and economic needs of local populations, protects the landscape in which they live and conserves their cultural identity. It is recommended that all relevant actors and authorities, at local and regional level, be represented in the management of UNESCO Global Geoparks. Local and indigenous knowledge, practice and management systems should be included,

alongside science, in the planning and management of the area."

However, not all Geopark management teams are familiar with the protocols and best practices for engaging with their local Indigenous communities.

This document provides a series of recommendations for best practices when beginning discussions with local communities, which can lead to meaningful relationships and true engagement. Consistently across different Indigenous cultures in Canada, real dialogue and work cannot take place until important relationship building has occurred. Once a relationship has been established with clear expectations and understanding, then the partnership can flourish and be celebrated. It is important to remember that the Indigenous Peoples of Canada are as diverse as our country is vast. While there are some consistent considerations when engaging with Indigenous peoples, there will also be unique cultural customs and practices within each Geopark territory and within unique communities within each area.

Best Practices



1. Identify which nation(s) have overlapping territory with your Geopark



Indian Reserve Lands cover a very small portion of Canada, yet all of Canada is the traditional territory of Indigenous Peoples. While there may not be an identified Indigenous community in your Geopark, there is likely overlapping territory that an Indigenous community has identified where they may practice traditional activities or exercise treaty rights. The provincial or territorial office which manages land access and permits will be able to refer your management team to the best contacts for your area. The regional municipality offices may also be able to recommend established organizations which represent the Indigenous Peoples whose territory overlaps with your Geopark. All federal and provincial/territorial governments have a duty to consult with Indigenous communities and they will be aware of overlapping jurisdictions.

2. Learn about Indigenous communities



In this early stage of engagement, you need to devote some time and attention to educating yourself about Indigenous Peoples. You need to understand the people and communities you are engaging with. It is also respectful to have a comfortable understanding of the history, traditions, culture, cultural events and celebrations of the community or communities that you will be engaging with. Your first meeting is also an opportunity to ask about cultural practices (e.g., opening prayers, tobacco, gifts and opportunities to speak).

Some key items to search for include:

- community profiles and statistics;¹
- fishing, hunting and gathering activities;
- spiritual activities;
- tribal council affiliations;
- treaty office affiliations;
- community priorities; and
- community protocols.

3. Create an engagement plan



Meaningful engagement and relationship building will take time and focus in the beginning, as well as follow-up to maintain the positive relationships your efforts produce. Creating an engagement plan will help your management team keep track of efforts and outcomes, and will help ensure that the positive outreach will continue.

¹ Community profiles and statistics are available for Indian Reserve Lands through Natural Resource Canada’s [Canada Land Surveys](#). [Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada](#) has information on each Indian Reserve registered with them. Provincial Treaty Commissions also have information on overlapping boundaries for those communities in the treaty process.

Important elements an engagement plan should include:

- **Goals:** what level of engagement do you hope to achieve? Is this to take place in stages? Break it down into small pieces that can change or shift as the relationship builds.
- **Strategy:** who will oversee researching the territory and who will be your lead on communications? What tactics will you use to ensure success?
- **Tracking:** a clear chart with communications, successes, and lessons learned will be helpful for your Geopark when planning for the future. This will also support your revalidation.

4. Engage and make contact



Indigenous communities frequently provide feedback stating that potential partners do not know how to reach out or are afraid of making mistakes when contacting them. This leads to frustrations due to projects which are intended to include them often progressing to an advanced state before they are introduced to the community.

Consider that Indigenous Band Offices or other administrative offices are like non-Indigenous town offices, where frequent requests for information or involvement will be received. Either an individual Indigenous community (such as a First Nation or Métis organization) or a regional community (such as a council made up of representatives from a group of communities who may share a language or cultural identity, or an office established by a group of communities in a particular Treaty area) can be your first contact. Once you begin the conversation, you

will be given advice by your contact on the best next steps.

Above all, understand that basic communication steps and initial contact do not necessarily require certain protocols. Any missteps with good intentions can be overcome, and the benefits of early partnerships to your Geopark will far outweigh the potential concerns of calling the wrong person first or being unaware of all the contacts that should be made.

5. Maintain relationships through familiarity and openness



It may seem that first steps move slowly and that initial conversations lead to meetings without direct outcomes in the beginning. While every community is different, Indigenous peoples generally feel that a strong understanding and foundation is important for any relationship before moving forward with agreements and partnerships. That said, once the basis of trust and understanding is in place, the relationship is a strong one with much potential for positive mutual benefits.

As Global Geoparks, we are expected to adhere to the criteria in the guidelines put forward by UNESCO. Sharing the exact language of the criteria with your potential Indigenous partners will show that you are acting with good intentions that have structure to support them. This openness will be beneficial to the relationship and may result in support for your team.

What if you lose your contact or receive conflicting information?

It's possible that some offices may refer you to one or two communities while another would refer you to three or more. In general, being more inclusive is much more beneficial, especially at the beginning when you are looking to start building your relationship. Some communities may show limited interest when you begin reaching out. Consider that their community likely has limited Human Resources to deal with your request and your positive intention may not need as much attention as other topics facing the community, such as negotiating land claims or controversial large-scale industrial projects. Keep reaching out and try calling rather than sending emails.

If your efforts are met with little to no enthusiasm and you are having difficulty engaging any Indigenous communities in the Geopark area, reach out to the Canadian Geoparks Network and Canadian Commission for UNESCO as a resource with experienced teams who may have insight for new avenues to pursue.

Resources for Engaging with Indigenous Communities

Indigenous-authored Resources

Not all these resources provide specific guidance on how to engage with Indigenous peoples, but they are great sources of information for learning about Indigenous perspectives on a broad range of issues that form the foundation of Indigenous engagement.

21 Things You May Not Know About the *Indian Act*. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/21-things-you-may-not-have-known-about-the-indian-act->

Indigenous Rights, Title and the Duty to Consult. <https://www.ictinc.ca/aboriginal-rights-title-and-duty-to-consult?hsCtaTracking=7b3c758c-dda3-420b-a02c-be4dc29759f9%7Ce7067d46-4e28-4719-9251-61c3eca07557>

Best Practices Guide: Creating Resort Partnerships with First Nations. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/natural-resource-use/all-seasons-resorts/guide_to_creating_resort_partnerships.pdf

Guidebook to Indigenous Protocol. <https://www.ictinc.ca/guidebook-to-indigenous-protocol>

Dispelling Common Myths About Indigenous Peoples. <https://www.ictinc.ca/dispelling-common-myths-about-indigenous-peoples>

Indigenous Peoples: A Guide to Terminology. <https://www.ictinc.ca/indigenous-peoples-a-guide-to-terminology>

Working Effectively With Indigenous Peoples. <https://www.ictinc.ca/books/working-effectively-with-indigenous-peoples>

Non-Indigenous-authored Resources

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action: http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Aboriginal Consultation and Accommodation: Updated Guidelines for Federal Officials to Fulfill the Duty to Consult. March 2011. https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/intgui_1100100014665_eng.pdf

Ontario: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/draft-guidelines-ministries-consultation-aboriginal-peoples-related-aboriginal-rights-and-treaty>

Quebec: http://www.saa.gouv.qc.ca/publications_documentation/publications/guide_inter_2008_en.pdf

Nova Scotia: https://novascotia.ca/abor/docs/April%202015_GNS%20Mi'kmaq%20Consultation%20Policy%20and%20Guidelines%20FINAL.pdf

New Brunswick: <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/aas-saa/pdf/en/DutytoConsultPolicy.pdf>

Newfoundland and Labrador: https://www.gov.nl.ca/ola/wp-content/uploads/aboriginal_consultation.pdf

Prince Edward Island: <http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/sites/aboriginalaffairs/file/Provincial%20Policy%20on%20Consultation%20with%20the%20Mikmaq%20-%20Revised%20March%202014.pdf>

Northwest Territories:

<https://www.eia.gov.nt.ca/en/priorities/meeting-gnwts-legal-duty-consult-aboriginal-governments>

Nunavut: Not available

Yukon: [https://yukon.ca/en/your-](https://yukon.ca/en/your-government/government-government-relations/how-government-consults-first-nations)

[government/government-government-relations/how-government-consults-first-nations](https://yukon.ca/en/your-government/government-government-relations/how-government-consults-first-nations)

Manitoba:

<https://www.gov.mb.ca/inr/reconciliation-strategy/duty-to-consult-framework.html>

Saskatchewan:

<http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/313/98187-Consultation%20-Policy20-Framework.pdf>;

Alberta: <https://www.alberta.ca/indigenous-consultations-in-alberta.aspx>

British Columbia:

http://www.nrs.gov.bc.ca/aboriginal-people/building-relationships/story_html5.html

UN and UNESCO Resources

Global Geopark Guidelines:

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/IGGP_UGG_Statutes_Guidelines_EN.pdf

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP):

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

UNESCO's Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples: <https://en.unesco.org/indigenous-peoples/policy>