



Southwest Ontario
Aboriginal Health
Access Centre



INDIGENOUS
PRIMARY
HEALTH CARE
COUNCIL

PROTOCOLS FOR NON-INDIGENOUS HEALTH CARE ORGANIZATIONS SEEKING TO WORK WITH INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to assist non-Indigenous health care organizations that are seeking to work with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers¹. It is critical to know that particular wise practices/protocols are to be considered and implemented before, during and after the event (e.g. openings, closings, smudging, workshops, seminars, talks, ceremonies, conferences, mentorship, mediation, committees, advice/support, other).

WHO IS AN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE KEEPER?

It is crucial to know that these gifted individuals have been identified by their respective communities as embodying physical, emotional, intellectual and/or spiritual gifts that are unique. They are also known for:

- Holding a position in the community that is recognized and respected,
- Having a specialized and valued set of knowledge, values, experiences and skills,
- Living a good life (balanced and spiritual) and is a role model for the community, and,
- Is not limited by or automatically assigned this role based on age progression or gender.



¹ Indigenous refers to those that self-identify as First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit. Knowledge Keepers refers to those that are identified as Elders, Métis Senators, Knowledge Sharers, Helpers or other culturally appropriate terms.



WHAT CAN AN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE KEEPER DO IN HEALTH CARE SETTINGS?

It is important to know that these exceptional individuals are diverse and that their presence/ services are just as distinct. However, some of the roles that they can do are:

- Openings and closings²;
- Smudging and particular ceremonies;
- Workshops, seminars, panels and talks;
- Preside over conferences and professional development;
- Mentorship, mediation and guidance;
- Committees, boards, consulting and meetings; and
- Advice and support.

²It is important that you ask if the Knowledge Keeper wants to attend or be involved throughout the day for the event. Often Knowledge Keepers may want to contribute more than just the opening or the closing.

A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Why is creating a welcoming environment important? Relationships are foundational in engaging with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers. Most Indigenous peoples have had negative and/or traumatic experiences with external institutions and their representatives. This is why a breadth of preliminary work needs to be done. First, examine the current structures, staffing and programming/policy compliments for inclusivity by reviewing these key topics and answering these select questions:

BUILDINGS, SIGNS, SPACE, MEDICINES, PARKING

- Is the building accessible?
- Is there any local Indigenous presence in terms of signage, language and symbols?
- Is there a specific room or area set aside for the Indigenous community?
- Is this space (or another space) available for smudging or other ceremonies?
- Do these spaces reflect respect for the community (e.g. organization, cleanliness, access, clear signage)?
- Are local traditional medicines for prayer available in these places (e.g. sage, cedar, sweetgrass, tobacco, other)?
- Is there suitable parking available close to the event location? That doesn't require multiple complicated steps (e.g. offer complimentary parking)?
- Can the announcements, bells or other institutional sounds/systems be turned down or off during a proposed event?

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL SAFETY (ICS) TRAINING, TRAINED STAFF, SMUDGING

- Have staff taken an ICS course or workshop? And explored their own privilege and how this affects (and has affected) Indigenous peoples?

- Do staff know the Indigenous territory in which they are working and living in?
- Is there an Indigenous Patient Navigator (or Navigators) on site?
- Is there a volunteer or staff member trained to work with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers that will meet/greet/shadow for the entire event and ensure that these respected individuals are comfortable (e.g. food, water, beverages, breaks, rest, comfortable chairs, assistance)?
- Are there smudging policies in place and proper ventilation for these types of (or related) ceremonies?



HONOURARIUMS AND FINANCIAL PROCESSES

- Do your financial processes allow for expedient and fair payment for honourariums?³
- Is there a staff member and/or user friendly system that can make preferred travel and accommodation arrangements (main floors) for these respected individuals?
- Do your policies recognize and cover the work/expenses of the helper (an individual that typically travels with the Indigenous Knowledge Keeper)?⁴
- Are T4s or T4As going to be issued? It is important to inform as this can (and will) affect their existing benefits in the next tax year?⁵
- Are there gifts ready to begin, continue and potentially close this relationship/s? Gifting is a traditional way to engage and gifts can range from organizational swag to local crafts to practical items to others.
- Is there a reimbursement method for additional expenses incurred that is simplified (e.g. parking, mileage, meals, other)?⁶

³ It is recommended that your organization have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Aboriginal Health Access Centres (AHACs), Indigenous-governed Community Health Centres (CHCs), Indigenous Friendship Centres or another Indigenous governed organization to take care of the payment and financial processes of/for the Indigenous Knowledge Keeper. This MOU process would position these Indigenous organization/s in a respectful place. This means that they would invoice your organization for the services of the Knowledge Keeper and take care of the financial aspects of this important relationship.

^{4, 5, 6} Refer to Note 3.



MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

- Are you clear as to why you or your organization is asking for Indigenous involvement? Purpose? Date/time? Length of event/commitment?
- Is there a focussed plan to meaningfully include the Indigenous community in the organizations policies, programs and staffing? And is it guided by representatives endorsed by the Indigenous community?
- Are the Aboriginal Health Access Centres (AHACs), Indigenous-governed Community Health Centres (CHCs) and local Indigenous organizations authentically connected/involved with your health care organization?
- Are you and your health care organization committed to this Indigenous Knowledge Keeper relationship? And improving the health outcomes and lives for/with Indigenous peoples?

These queries are foundational to assessing your readiness, capacity and commitment to working with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers.

BEFORE THE EVENT

Communication that is clear and respectful when engaging with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers is required. Prior to any event, a consistent contact person at your health care organization should be identified to engage in the following:

- Reaches out to the Knowledge Keeper by phone to introduce themselves and give a concise explanation of the potential request:
 - Identify where you received their name and who provided it.
 - Rationale for the outreach.
 - Specify date/time that you are requesting their involvement.
 - Highlight the location (is it an in-person event or virtual).
 - Identify what involvement you are requesting from them.
 - Highlight your organizations honorarium policy.
 - Specify what expenses are covered.
- Use this call as an opportunity to see if they are interested and/or available to participate in the event.
 - If they are not available, thank them for their time and send a follow up message of appreciation to keep the lines of communication open. Remember, you can always outreach on another occasion.
 - Also, be mindful that this gifted individual may not be able to answer right away and may have to confer with their helpers and/or schedules to determine availability. If this is the case, set up a follow up call and time for confirmation of involvement (or not).





- If the answer is yes, then consider implementing the following practices as a sign of respect:
 - Giving gifts
 - The first gift should always be the traditional agreement symbol between yourself and the Knowledge Keeper. For some the gift may be the sacred medicine of tobacco or a tobacco tie. However, it is ok to ask them if this is the preferred gift for this request. If not, then honour their request (e.g. some may ask for a blanket, sweetgrass or other item).
 - Setting up a separate meeting to discuss the particulars of the event.
 - Ask if the Knowledge Keeper has a helper. If yes, ask if the helper would be available for the event as well.
 - If not, ask if they require a helper at the event.
- In addition, it is good practice to always designate a trained staff member from your organization to work with the Knowledge Keeper. This person would be responsible to meet and greet them when they arrive at the event, to address any questions they might have, provide them with the gift, ensure they have access to water or snacks and provide them with the honorarium.
- At the meeting:
 - Details in terms of date/time, location, expectation for arrival to event (or events) and the agenda (or agendas).
 - Description of their role—What are you asking them to do? An opening? A talk? Expected length? Advisor on a committee? When can they leave?
 - Honourarium, expenses and reimbursement—Be clear about this and your processes. The key here is to have that consistent individual at the health care organization to navigate any issues that may arise. And it is preferred to have the honourarium in a thank you card at the end of the event.⁷
 - Way to introduce—What is their preferred name (with pronunciation) and way to be addressed (e.g. Elder, Senator, Nokomis, Aunty, Other)?
 - Food, beverage and accommodations (e.g. Potential allergies? Coffee? Water? Tea? Wheelchair? Sight? Time for Prayer?).

⁷ Refer to Note 3.



- Set up (e.g. circle, smudge spaces, table/s for sacred items, other).
 - Photos and videos (when it is allowed and not allowed).⁸
 - Trained staff member—introduce themselves and share their contact information.
 - Learn the Knowledge Keepers greeting and word for thank you in their language/s.
 - Answer any questions that they may have.
- Summarize these meetings notes into concise and accessible language. Send a copy to the Knowledge Keeper (their helper) and the trained staff member.
 - Follow up 5 to 7 days before the event to confirm attendance/expectations, make potential changes or respond to queries.
 - Prepare participants attending the event by providing the bio of the Knowledge Keeper and reinforcing the practices of respectful engagement (e.g. turn off your phones when they are speaking; important to listen; important to learn; important to follow protocols).

⁸ See **Specific Topics**, the section called **Photography, Video Recording and Use** for further details (e.g. How long can you use? For what audiences? And for what purposes?)

DURING THE EVENT

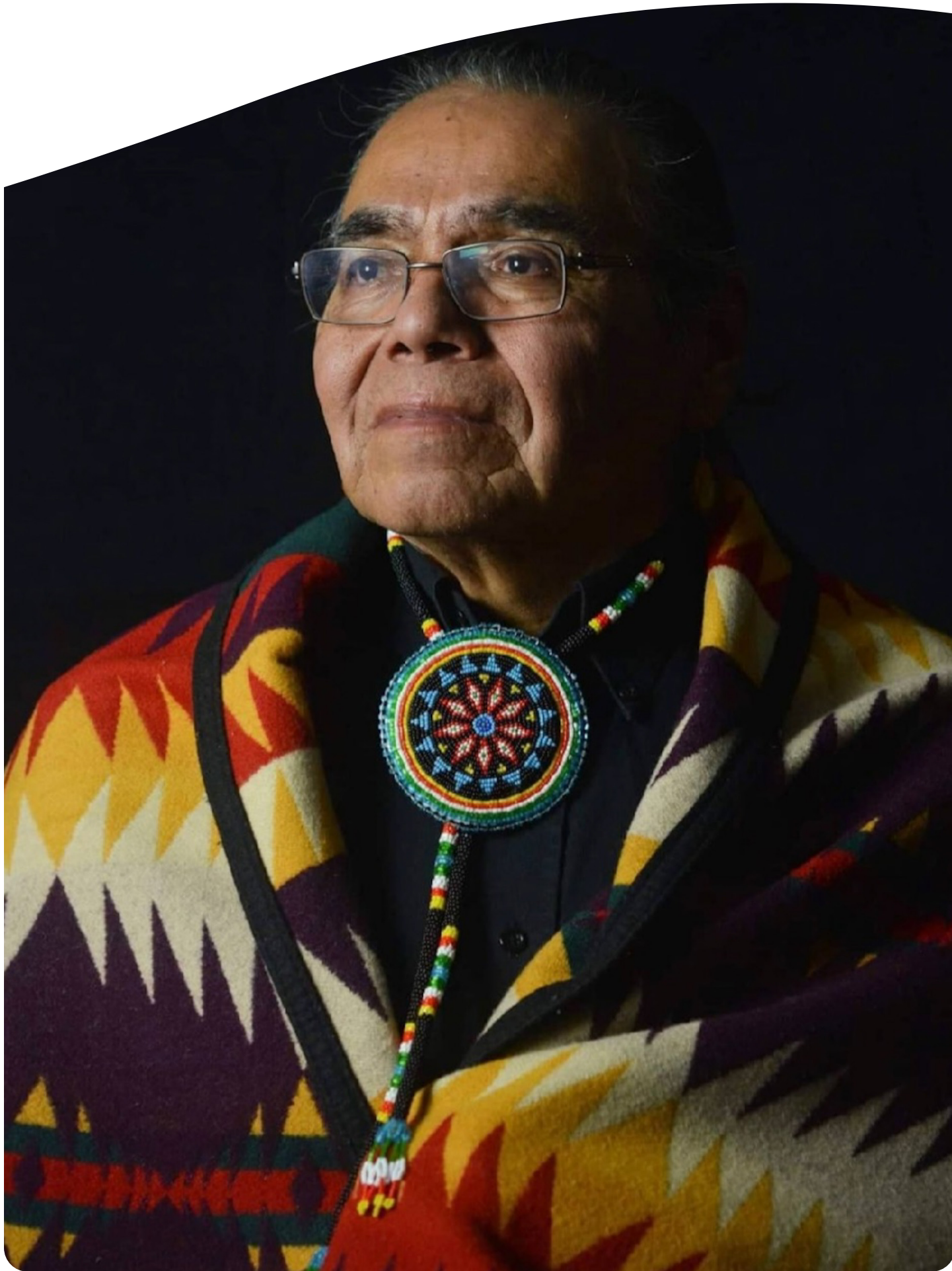
Respect and attention to the Indigenous Knowledge Keepers' needs and safety is paramount during the event (or events). This is why it is critical to:

- Ensure that the trained individual from the organization shadows the Knowledge Keeper (and their helper) for the day (or days). This individual will greet/meet and provide assistance/support in terms of food, beverages, rest, comfortable chairs, WIFI logins/passwords, transportation/directions between locations and regular check ins. Ensure that the individual also provides their cell number in case of emergencies.
- Provide a detailed agenda or scope of practice at the beginning of the day (and/or each day) that clearly highlights their times/spaces for involvement. This agenda can also include an accessible map of specific places (e.g. bathrooms, emergency exits, cafeteria or lunchroom, help centre, other). Be prepared for a level of flexibility as well in terms of time when it comes to Knowledge Keeper involvement.
- Do regular check-ins to assess needs, next steps and supports. It is important to view and treat the Knowledge Keeper as you would a beloved family member in a respectful and kind way.

AFTER THE EVENT

It is important to follow up in a timely manner with the Knowledge Keeper after an event. You can do this by:

- Calling, mailing or using the preferred method of communication (e.g. email; social media) to extend gratitude and share strengths-based feedback from the participants,
- Using this time as an opportunity to ask what the organization can do to improve the experience for them (and potentially other Indigenous community members),
- Once again, providing the name and contact information of a consistent staff member that can assist them with problem solving administrative issues (e.g. reimbursement, contact info, other),
- Asking if they would be interested in participating in future events and if your organization can keep their contact information (and their helpers) on file.



SPECIFIC TOPICS



ALCOHOL

Some Knowledge Keepers may not attend an event that has alcohol where they are being asked to work. Ensure that you are upfront about this issue with them and make necessary adjustments if required by the individual. For example: if your event is a dinner you may want to remove the alcohol or close the bar until the prayer or song is completed.



CANNABIS

Cannabis is a controlled substance. However, some Knowledge Keepers may not attend an event that has cannabis use close to the event spaces. Ensure that you are clear about how your organization addresses cannabis use and the policy that you have in place. Discuss alternatives with the Knowledge Keeper.



CONFIDENTIALITY AND PATIENT INFORMATION

Some Knowledge Keepers may be asked to conduct welcoming ceremonies in the maternity wards or end-of-life ceremonies in critical/long-term care facilities. If this is the situation in your setting, it is important to respectfully review your policy regarding confidentiality and patient info with them. This is why it is key to have Indigenous Patient Navigator/s in meaningful roles that can translate this type of administrative language in a good way (and be present for follow ups).





GIFTS

Gifts are typically given before, during and after the event. Gifting is a traditional norm of most Indigenous societies and represents the affirmation of a relationship. Gifts can range from organizational swag, crafts, practical items and others. You may want to ask the helper of the Knowledge Keeper for potential ideas. For example: gifts from local Indigenous community vendors is welcomed and seen as a way to build capacity and honour Indigenous contributions.



HONOURARIUMS

Knowledge Keepers offer knowledge, skills and services that cannot be replicated by non-Indigenous entities or resources. This is why it is critical to offer fair and meaningful compensation. For example suggested rates for consideration are:

- \$800.00 per day (8 hours) plus expenses,
- \$400.00 per half day (4 hours) plus expenses,
- \$150.00 for openings (or closings) plus expenses,
- \$1250.00 for keynotes or panels (as this requires a certain level of preparation and meetings prior to this type of event) plus expenses, or,
- \$75.00 per hour plus expenses for longer commitments.

It is crucial to point out that these rates are suggested only, but, if your organization is receiving funds (public or private) specific to/ for Indigenous communities, then you need to allocate respectfully and equitably.⁹



INSURANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Ensure that you have your insurance carrier cover the work of the Knowledge Keeper. This is tied into your plans for risk management that are implemented for all staff, patients, clients and visitors already. This step of insurance coverage provides a safety net for all in a good way.

⁹ Refer to Note 3.



INTELLECTUAL AND SACRED PROPERTY

It is important to know that the knowledge, experiences, skills and values being shared at your event are the sacred and intellectual property of the ancestors of the Knowledge Keeper. This is why it is critical to be clear about expectations in terms of photos, video and products coming out of the event. The copyright of ancestral knowledge stays with the communities. This is why you need to ask the gifted individual what quotes/content are ok to share in a public forum beyond this event. See Photography, Video Recording and Use for more details.



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Land acknowledgements are really for non-Indigenous peoples to take responsibility in the treaty relationship as settlers or descendants of settlers living/working in Indigenous traditional lands. This is why it is key to ask the Knowledge Keeper about whether an institutional representative should be the one saying it OR does the Knowledge Keeper prefer to say it instead. For example: Haudenosaunee Elders may prefer to open with a Thanksgiving Address rather than a territorial acknowledgement.



PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEO RECORDING AND USE

It is really important to ask the Knowledge Keeper (or their helper) when taking photos (and recording of videos) is appropriate. It is also critical to be clear about the length of use (e.g. 60 to 90 days to set amount of years—perpetuity or exclusive use is not acceptable), for what audiences (e.g. participants, staff, community) and for what purposes (e.g. future professional development, marketing, information). This is why providing a detailed agenda or scope of practice is critical. For example: photos and videos are not allowed during particular ceremonies, sharing circles, songs and other instances.



REFERRALS FROM INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

It is critical to know that often, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers may be asked by families to recommend another Knowledge Keeper to perform a service that they do not do (e.g. Cedar Baths for the dying; Naming Ceremonies for babies; Life Stages Teachings for youth; Pipe Ceremonies). This particular scenario is specific to acute care wards, maternity wards/birthing centres and long term care facilities.

It is important that these referrals be followed up on and that the same protocols be applied to the additional (and recommended) Knowledge Keeper as detailed in this guide (e.g. follow the protocols BEFORE, DURING, AFTER, Honourariums).



SACRED ITEMS

Some Knowledge Keepers may bring their sacred items with them for the event. These sacred items can range from bundles, pipes, medicines, drums, blankets, feathers and other materials. Ensure that you ask the individual if you (and others) can touch or interact with these, especially when asking to assist with carrying them, e.g. women that are menstruating typically don't touch these items as they are considered to be very powerful during that time and are in a time of sacred cleansing.



VIRTUAL EVENTS

There will be times that your events will be held virtually. Although this is not ideal, it may be necessary for a variety of reasons. The same face-to-face protocols still apply, however, there needs to be tech support person to navigate the software, platforms, hardware and internet requirements being utilized.

This tech support person will need to reach out to the Knowledge Keeper and establish a relationship to move forward with this way of engaging. The tech support can ask for a helper or family member to assist with setting up the technology for the event if the Knowledge Keeper is not comfortable with this mode of meeting.

SAMPLE FORM

Request for Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Involvement	
Name of Organization and Address Making The Request	
Contact Person at the Organization and Contact Details	
Event	
Date	
Time/s	
Location	
Purpose/Goals/Rationale for Event	
Who is the trained staff member that will be the primary contact for the Knowledge Keeper? Name and Contact Info here.	

Name of Indigenous Knowledge Keeper	
Preferred Contact Information for Indigenous Knowledge Keeper	
Do they have a helper? Name and Contact Info here.	
Particulars for the Event (e.g. how to be addressed; role; gifting; sacred objects; dietary; beverages; rest area; medicines; transportation; accommodations; intellectual/sacred property rights; other)	
Administrative Considerations (Departments Involved and Contacts)	
Honourarium/s OR the name/ address of the Indigenous governed organization that will be invoicing (as detailed in your MOU)	
Insurance Coverage and Potential Waivers	
Confidentiality	
Other items not listed here	



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