

Indigenous Cultural Considerations

Cultural considerations within Indigenous contexts involves understanding and respecting the histories, values, and traditions of diverse Indigenous Nations while fostering meaningful collaboration. This framework addresses key areas critical to involvement in Special Olympics ongoing programming, food inclusion, traditional sports, and professional development (PD) and training.

It emphasizes actionable steps, the importance of working locally with Indigenous Nations, and integrating community-specific practices.





Appreciating Distinct Cultures and Identities

Recognizing that across the country there are hundreds of distinct Indigenous communities, who all have sovereignty and distinctiveness. Canada recognizes three groups of Indigenous peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, each comprising multiple Nations with unique identities, and learning about each community, and Indigenous person is a key role in developing cultural understandings.



Considerations:

- There is a **history of genocide** enacted by settlers on Indigenous peoples that has lasting impacts on relationship building.
- Program development and relationships should be built on **long-term goals**, be **reciprocal** in nature, and **respect the expectations** of the community leaders. Co-create these programs with the community for the strongest outcomes for everyone.
- Building relationships fosters **trust**, mutual **respect**, and long-term **partnerships**. Local engagement empowers communities to play an active role in decision-making, creating programs that reflect their values and traditions.
- Work developed based on relationships takes **time**.
- Engaging with local Indigenous Nations ensures that programming is culturally **relevant**, **respectful**, and **tailored** to community needs.



Actionable Steps:

- ✓ **Establish early and ongoing dialogue with local Indigenous leaders.** Learn about the territories where you live, work and play, and where you want to build relationships. Plan to take time for this.
- ✓ **Use Specific Names:** Refer to Indigenous groups by their Nation names (e.g., Anishinaabe, Tłıchǫ) or community affiliation (e.g., Red River Métis).
- ✓ **Acknowledge Sovereignty:** Include language in programming that affirms the Indigenous rights to self-determination and governance. Invest in building local capacity through leadership development initiatives and partnerships.
- ✓ **Tailor Engagement:** Develop community-specific approaches to ensure cultural alignment and respect. Adapt programs to reflect the traditions and priorities of local Nations.



Resources:

[Government of Canada: Working with Indigenous Peoples](#)



Programming

Each Indigenous Nation in Canada possesses unique languages, governance systems, and traditions. As you embark on programming that is supportive of Indigenous participants, it is important to consider how to connect culture into programming. This is an opportunity to work with Indigenous leaders and participants to co-create these approaches.



Considerations:

- **Representation:** Equitably include Indigenous athletes, coaches, and facilitators. Avoid assuming that practices from one Nation apply universally.
- **Cultural Safety:** Tailor activities, ceremonies, and acknowledgment practices to reflect the specific Nation's traditions. Create discrimination-free, culturally welcoming environments.
- **Collaboration:** Engage Indigenous leaders to shape programming, and Engage Knowledge Keepers and Elders from each Nation to understand their customs and protocols.
- **Connection to Culture:** Incorporate traditional games, foods, community culture, and land-based teachings specific to the local Indigenous territories.



Actionable Steps:

- ✓ **Provide cultural orientation sessions** focusing on local Indigenous histories and protocols.
- ✓ **Partner with local Indigenous communities** to co-create team ceremonies.
- ✓ **Highlight Indigenous athletes** from local communities and their contributions.
- ✓ Planning programming around the Holistic Model creates a supportive approach.
- ✓ **Offer spaces for spiritual practices** like smudging, in line with local customs.



Resources:

[Sport for Life: Indigenous Long-Term Participant Development Pathway](#)



Food Inclusion

Considerations:

- **Traditional Foods:** Incorporate culturally significant foods such as berries, wild game, and fish (Live Learn Canada).
- **Dietary Preferences:** Respect diverse dietary needs, particularly those tied to local Indigenous practices (Government of Canada).
- **Food Sovereignty:** Promote sustainable practices and educate participants about traditional food systems (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada).

Actionable Steps:

- ✓ **Partner with Indigenous chefs or food providers** to include traditional foods in catering.
- ✓ **Educate participants** on the cultural significance of traditional foods.
- ✓ **Adopt food sustainability practices** that align with Indigenous teachings, reducing waste and honoring the land.

Resources:

[Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada](#)

[Assembly of First Nations: Food Sovereignty](#)



Traditional Sports

Considerations:

- **Cultural Relevance:** Highlight traditional sports such as lacrosse, snowshoeing, or stickball.
- **Accessibility:** Ensure local Indigenous communities have resources and opportunities to engage in traditional sports.
- **Education:** Promote understanding of the historical and cultural significance of these sports.

Actionable Steps:

- ✓ **Incorporate traditional sports** into training programs and recreational activities.
- ✓ **Collaborate with local Indigenous organizations** to host workshops and demonstrations.
- ✓ **Celebrate and recognize Indigenous athletes** excelling in traditional sports.
- ✓ Connection to Dene Games and Arctic Winter Games.
- ✓ **Provide financial and logistical support** for Indigenous youth sports programs.

Resources:

[Canada Lacrosse Association](#)



Professional Development (PD) and Training

Recognizing that no individual can be an expert on all Indigenous Nations is crucial. While some teachings may transfer between Nations, it's essential to approach each new context with humility and openness to learning (Canada School of Public Service).



Considerations:

- **Cultural Awareness:** Equip staff and athletes with knowledge of Indigenous histories, protocols, and reconciliation efforts.
 - **Indigenous Anti-Racism Training:** Address systemic racism and unconscious bias in programming and decision-making.
 - **Community-Led Training:** Develop training programs led by Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and local experts.
 - **Adopt a Growth Mindset:** Be prepared to relearn practices and adapt approaches for each Nation.
 - **Engage in Reflection:** Incorporate regular reflection on your learning journey to identify gaps and areas for improvement.
 - **Seek Guidance:** Continuously consult with local Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and Elders.
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Actionable Steps:

- ✓ **Deliver the Aboriginal Coaching Modules** for all Coaches, and the Indigenous Long-Term Participant Development Pathways workshop for all sport leaders, staff and Board.
- ✓ **Implement mandatory cultural competency and anti-racism training** for all staff and athletes.
- ✓ **Host ongoing workshops with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers** on topics such as the Medicine Wheel and traditional healing practices.
- ✓ **Establish mentorship programs** pairing Indigenous youth with experienced team members or coaches.



Resources:

[Aboriginal Coaching Modules \(ACM\) | Aboriginal Sport Circle](#)

[Athlete Support | Aboriginal Sport Circle](#)

[San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Online Training](#)

[Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.](#)

[Reconciliation Canada: Education Resources](#)

<https://www.southernnetwork.org/site/seven-teachings>

Free Indigenous Canada Course – University of Alberta: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/indigenous-canada?action=enroll>