

Respect on Set

A Treaty 7 Film Production Guide for
Indigenous Engagement



Calgary Economic
Development



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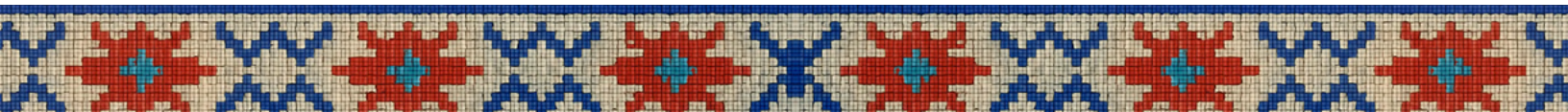


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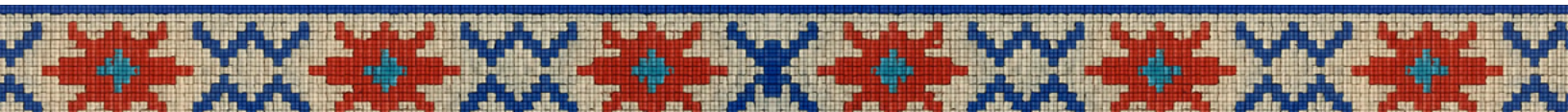


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Introduction



Two Canoes with Holly Fortier directing; Alicia Gladue, Grant Lacombe; Matt Hanley; Geordie Day; and Caleb Zarn

Filming in Treaty 7 territory is more than just securing a beautiful location, it's entering a living community's home. This guide, part of Calgary Economic Development's Film Friendly Southern Alberta initiative, was created to help filmmakers engage respectfully and meaningfully with Indigenous communities across Treaty 7. Calgary Economic Development recognizes that reconciliation and inclusion are critical to the future of Alberta's screen industries, and that building trust, obtaining consent, and

ensuring cultural safety must form the foundation of any production taking place on Indigenous land.

This guide was developed in collaboration with Two Canoes Media (led by Cree/Dene educator and filmmaker Holly Fortier) and shaped through dialogue with Treaty 7 Elders, knowledge keepers, filmmakers, and community members. Across these conversations, a clear message emerged: meaningful relationship building isn't optional, it's the work.

Protocols are not one-size-fits-all; every Nation has its own practices, history, and boundaries. As Tsuut'ina Elder Hal Eagletail explained, "I don't speak for other Nations. I can only speak for my own. That's our way."

Drawing on Treaty 7 consultations led by Two Canoes Media, this guide walks you through each stage of production, planning, on set, and wrap. Offering tools, stories, and best practices to ensure your work honours the people and the land at every step.

Story is Relationship

In Indigenous worldviews, storytelling and relationship go hand in hand. Holly Fortier often emphasizes that to move forward together, we must first understand our shared past and present. “Understanding the past is essential for making sense of the present, and both are prerequisites for informed, meaningful action toward the future,” she says. For a filmmaker working here, this means learning about Treaty 7’s history and the legacy of colonization, not to dwell on the past, but to appreciate why proper protocols and respect matter so much today. By learning how Treaty 7 came to be, noting the impacts of laws like the Indian Act and the Residential School system, and acknowledging the ongoing work of reconciliation, you’ll see that these production protocols are part of righting relations that have long been imbalanced. Truth telling about history is the first step to building trust now.



Two Canoes filming with Amber Paquette



Know Whose Land You're On

Treaty 7 territory is the homeland of several distinct Indigenous Nations, each with its own culture, language, and protocols. There is no single “Indigenous culture.” Even neighboring Nations have distinct traditions. Before beginning your project, take time to learn whose land you are on and the appropriate ways to acknowledge, engage, and involve them. Below is a brief overview of the Nations within Treaty 7:

Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Piikani, Kainai)

The Niitsitapi (Blackfoot people) have lived on these plains since time immemorial, and their cultural, linguistic, and spiritual presence continues to shape the land now called Southern Alberta. Although the three Treaty 7 Blackfoot Nations share a common language and certain ceremonial practices (such as the Sun Dance), each nation maintains its own leadership, Elders, knowledge keepers, and ways of doing things. Blackfoot

protocol often begins with offering tobacco when approaching an Elder or knowledge holder, emphasizing respect for the responsibility they carry in sharing teachings. Spiritual life is not separate from daily life; it underpins governance, kinship, land stewardship, and creative expression. Blackfoot filmmaker Trevor Solway reminds us that it's "not just a Sunday thing or a 'checked box'." Some places within Blackfoot territory, including the Sand

Hills at Siksika and traditional burial grounds, are deeply sacred and strictly protected. These sites must not be filmed, entered, or disturbed under any circumstances. Because Calgary lies within traditional Blackfoot territory, any production working in and around the city should begin by acknowledging Blackfoot custodianship and by engaging Blackfoot advisors early – not as a formality, but as a recognition of relationship.

Original Blackfoot territory



Source: Office of Indigenization and Decolonization, Mount Royal University.



Stoney Nakoda

(Bears paw, Chiniki, Goodstoney)

The Îyârhe Nakoda (Stoney) are the original “peoples of the mountains” within the wider Nakoda/Assiniboiné family, with their own Nakoda language, teachings, and cultural protocols. Their communities are centred in the foothills and mountain valleys west of Calgary, with reserve communities at Mîni Thnî (Morley), Eden Valley, Rabbit Lake, and Bighorn that stretch along the Bow and North Saskatchewan river systems. The three Stoney bands, Bears paw, Chiniki, and Goodstoney (formerly Wesley), were signatories to Treaty 7 in 1877 and today come together as the Stoney Nakoda Nations. They maintain ties to specific peaks, passes, river crossings, and campsites throughout what is now Kananaskis and Banff, where Îyârhe Nakoda people historically guided visitors, ranched, hunted, and held ceremonies. Elders continue to speak of the mountain parks as sacred Stoney Nakoda land.

Tsuut’ina Nation

The Tsuut’ina Nation are a Dene (Athabaskan) people, unique among the Treaty 7 Nations. By the early 1800s they had settled near the Bow and Elbow Rivers and forged an alliance with the Blackfoot Confederacy for mutual protection. This migration and alliance did not diminish Tsuut’ina’s distinct cultural identity; they retained their own language (Tsuùt’ìnà) and spiritual traditions, setting them apart from their Blackfoot and Stoney Nakoda neighbors. Today, the Tsuut’ina reserve borders the southwest edge of Calgary, placing the Nation’s community at the threshold of a major urban centre while still rooted in their ancestral lands. Elders and knowledge keepers continue to guide community life so that the Tsuut’ina language and ceremonial practices thrive. Smudging, sweat lodges, and the annual Sundance remain central to cultural life, and certain sacred spaces (such as the Sundance grounds) are strictly off limits to filming. Film crews and other visitors are expected to show respect

by participating in blessings or prayers and following local protocols. As Elder Hal Eagletail notes, “We smudge before everything on the first day with the entire crew, have a blessing, and explain how to be respectful to the land.”

Métis

The Métis are a distinct Indigenous people with their own history, rights, and identity, tracing their roots to First Nations (often Cree or Ojibwe) and European (often French or Scottish) ancestry. In Alberta, under the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, Métis cultural life includes fiddle music and jigging, beadwork and sash making, and the Michif language, which blends Plains Cree verb structures with French nouns. While Métis communities are not reserves under the Indian Act, Alberta is home to Métis Settlements – distinct, self-governing Métis land-based communities established in law, with local councils and a defined land base, alongside a broader Métis population with strong local governance and a significant urban presence.

If your project involves Métis stories or participants, connect early with Métis Elders and local Métis organizations. Protocols are situational, and many Métis follow Cree-style protocol, so offering tobacco to an Elder is often appropriate. Calgary has a deep Métis history. Do not treat the Métis as an “add-on.” Include them where relevant – and respect their unique, self-determined identity.

As former Métis National Council president Cassidy Caron once said in an interview, “We can lead with our values and our principles and lead the way that our ancestors wanted us to.”

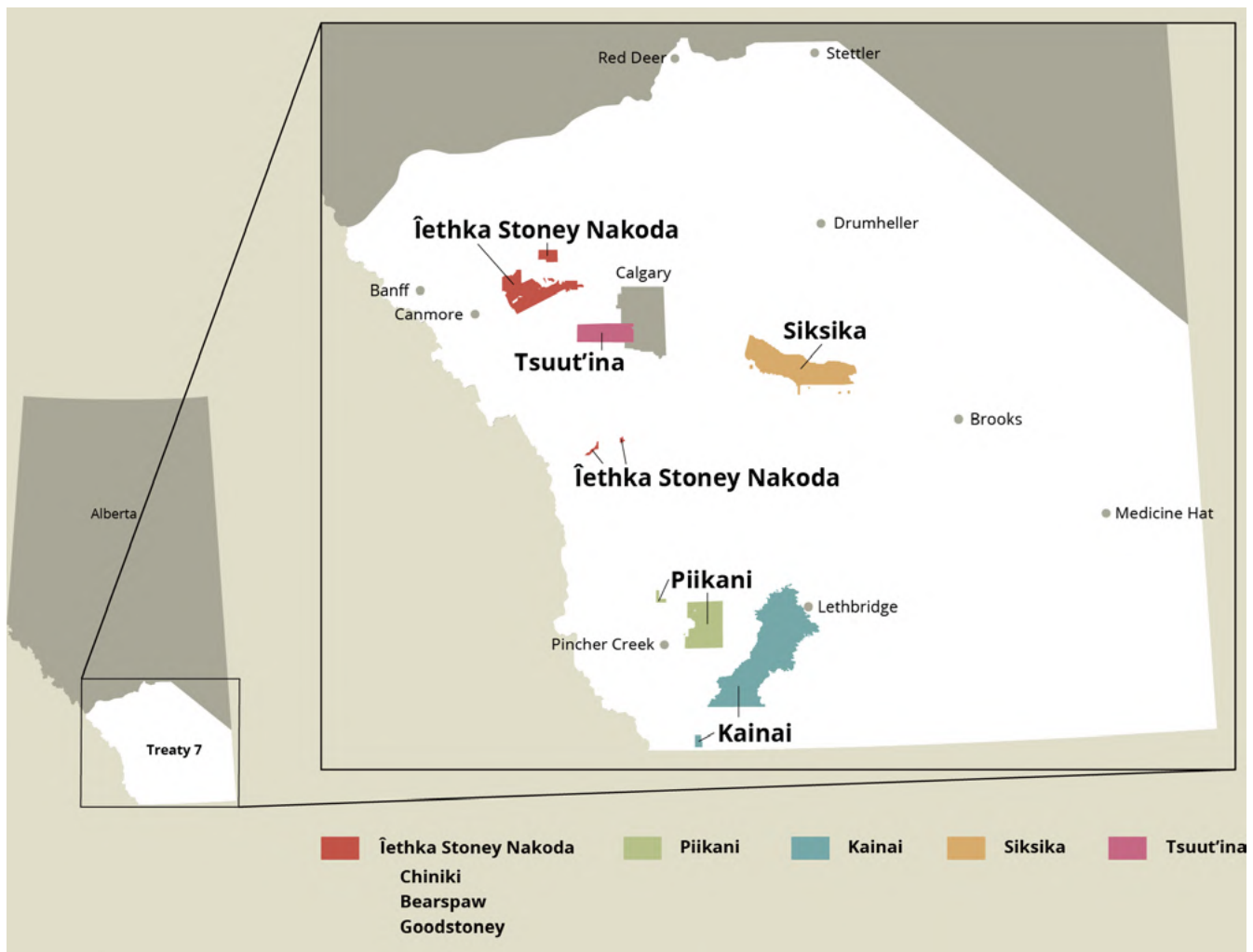
Inuit

Inuit are the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic, with cultures distinct from the First Nations and Métis of the prairies. Historically, Inuit do not have ties to Treaty 7, but today many Inuit individuals and families live in southern cities like Calgary. If your production includes Inuit characters or stories, engage Inuit advisors. Understand that what is culturally appropriate

for some First Nations (like powwow ceremonies) may not be for Inuit. Engage Inuit on their own terms, through Inuit drum dancing, throat singing, or sharing country food and stories of the land. Remember that Inuit perspectives are not monolithic. As Natan Obed, President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, reminded us, “We are all on different journeys.” Even gifting protocols differ. Inuit may appreciate generous,

shareable gifts. As curator Sophia Lebessis joked, “Don’t just bring a tiny jar of jam as a token. Bring a big pail of jam.” In Inuit culture, a gift that can be shared widely with family and community carries more meaning than a small token. In the end, don’t assume what works for one Indigenous group will work for another. Ask, listen, and follow the lead of the people whose heritage you are working with.

Current Treaty 7 reserves



Source: Office of Indigenization and Decolonization, Mount Royal University.

Using This Guide

The sections below mirror the trajectory of a film project, from early planning through production to wrap, highlighting protocols and best practices at each phase. Real quotes and stories from Treaty 7 advisors are included to illustrate why these protocols matter. We encourage you to treat this, not as a checklist to tick off, but as a mindset to carry through your project. If you approach your production in Treaty 7 with humility, respect, and a willingness to learn, you will find doors opening, partnerships forming, and your story growing richer for it. As Blackfoot filmmaker Trevor Solway observed, “Meaningful exchange, sitting down with Elders over tea, offering tobacco, listening for hours, is the only way to truly learn protocol, and it cannot be substituted with a quick internet search or a phone call.” There’s no shortcut to doing it right, but the journey is well worth it.



Setting up for an interview with Otipemisiwak Secretary Grant Lacombe.

FOUNDATIONS:

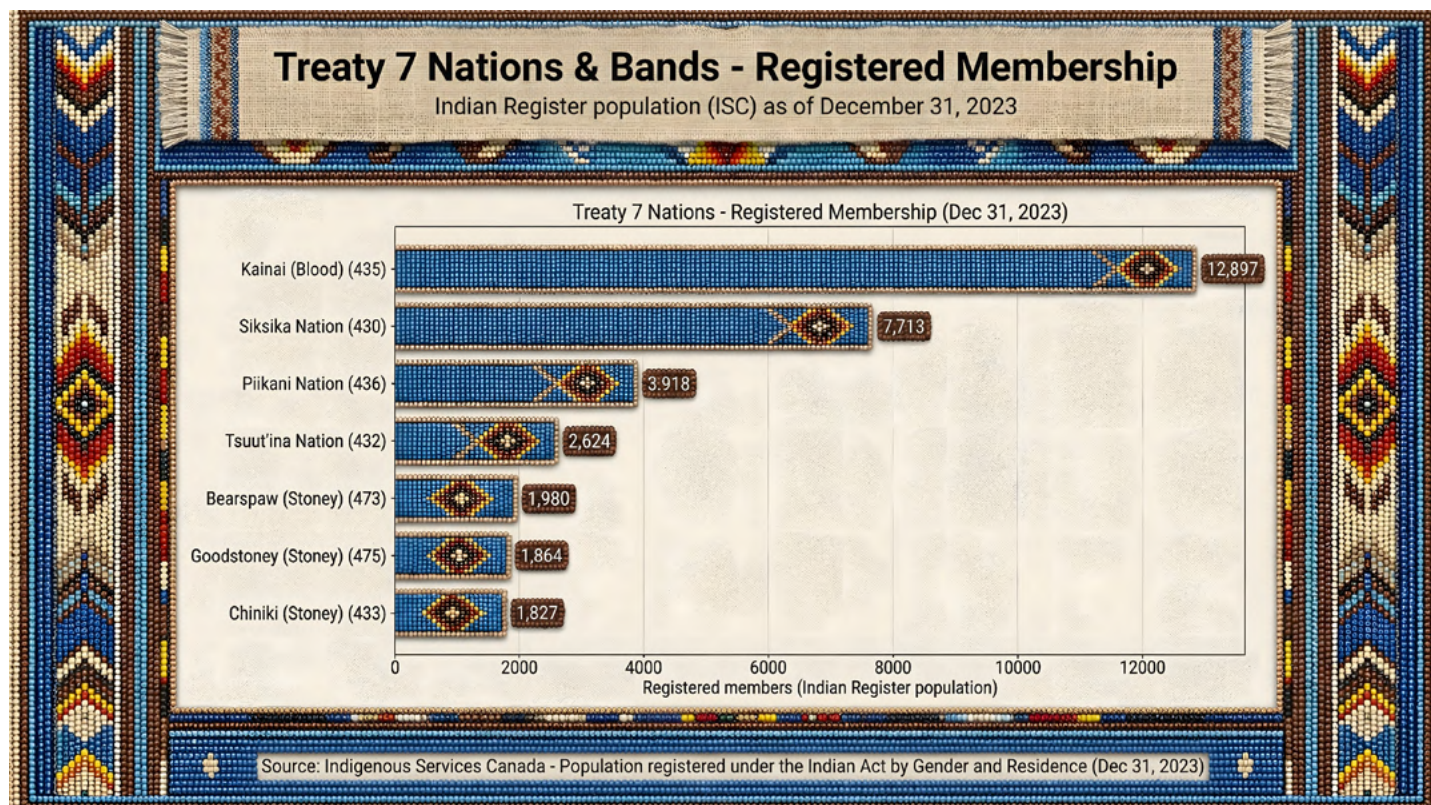
Honouring History & *Navigating Present Realities*

Before we get into what to do on set, it's crucial to ground yourself in why these protocols exist. Treaty 7 communities, like all Indigenous peoples in Canada, carry the history of broken treaties, colonization, and resilience. As a storyteller working here, you become part of that narrative. Showing that you've taken the time to understand Indigenous perspectives, even at a basic level, goes a long way in building trust. This section provides a brief grounding on Treaty 7's historical and legal context and the ongoing work of reconciliation that frames any project today.



Filming with Kiciwapa Cree Nation Landman Floyd North

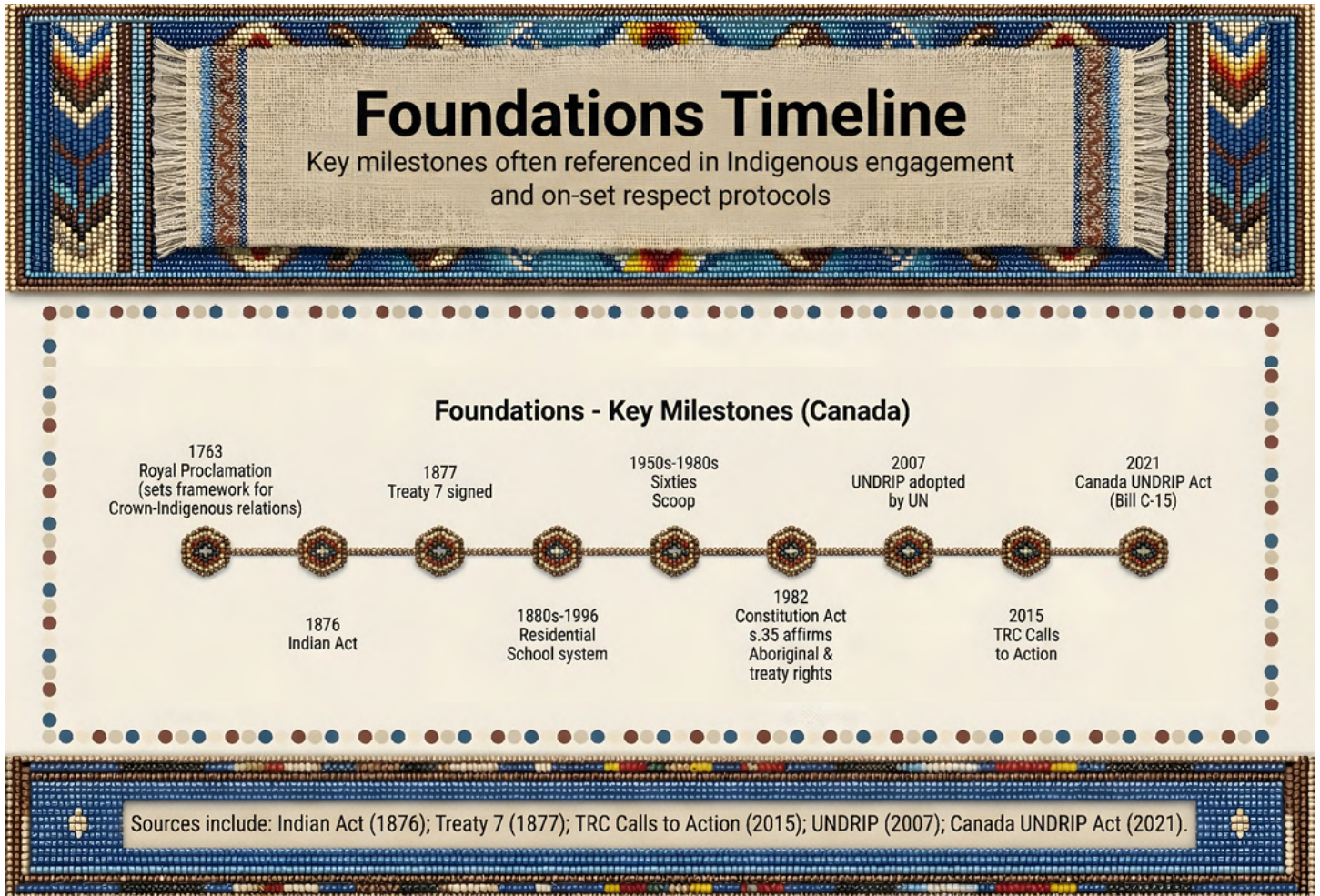
Treaty 7 and Traditional Territory



Treaty 7 is the 1877 agreement between the Canadian government and the five First Nations in this region: the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani Nations (the three Blackfoot Nations), the Stoney Nakoda Nation, and the Tsuut'ina Nation. The Stoney Nakoda Nation includes the Bearspaw, Chiniki, and Goodstoney bands. Under Treaty 7, these Nations agreed to share their lands with settlers in exchange for promises like reserve lands, payments, and certain rights. Calgary and the surrounding area exist based on this treaty. When you

film here, you are literally on treaty territory, a land sharing arrangement that requires ongoing respect and renewal. Unfortunately, the spirit of Treaty 7 was betrayed in many ways by subsequent government actions. Understanding that history gives context to why proper protocol, like asking permission to use land or stories, is not just a formality but a matter of respect and legal cultural importance.

Colonial Laws and Cultural Suppression



Not long after Treaty 7 was signed, Canada enacted the Indian Act (1876), a sweeping law that dramatically altered Indigenous lives across the country. “The Indian Act imposed foreign governance systems and severely restricted Indigenous life. In addition, the Department of Indian Affairs enforced the extra-legal ‘pass system,’ which restricted First Nations movement off reserve, outlawed spiritual ceremonies (such as the Sun Dance and potlatch), and enforced a strict reserve system. It even dictated who was legally “Indian” through a status registry, often splitting families apart. All of

this was done without Indigenous consent and set the stage for generations of cultural suppression and socio-economic hardship.

For a filmmaker, it’s important to grasp that many protocols (prayers, ceremonies, offering tobacco, etc.) had to go underground for decades under these policies. Yet communities kept them alive in secret at great personal risk. Today, when an Elder teaches you how to behave properly on their land or around a ceremony, realize that this



knowledge survived despite government efforts to erase it. Also understand that many Indigenous people in front of your camera or on your crew might be the first generation in their family free to openly practice their culture. That context should inspire extra care on your part. For example, if you're asking someone to dress in traditional regalia or speak their language on film, know that not long ago those acts could have gotten their grandparents jailed or worse.

Another outcome of colonial policy was the isolation of reserves and the exclusion of Indigenous people from many industries, including film and television. Several Indigenous filmmakers noted that on big productions that came to reserves, local people were rarely hired beyond a few extras. Nearly all specialized crew were brought in from elsewhere. This legacy of exclusion is something we now have a chance to correct (more on hiring and inclusion later). The Indian Act and related laws created a power imbalance where outsiders extracted resources and stories from Indigenous lands without involving or benefiting the people. Every time you include the community and treat them as partners rather than simply “resources”, you help turn that history around.

Residential Schools and Intergenerational Trauma

No discussion of Indigenous context is complete without acknowledging the Residential School system. From the 1880s through 1996, Indigenous children across Canada, including those from Treaty 7 Nations, were forcibly removed from their families and sent to church run boarding schools with the explicit goal “to kill the Indian in the child.” Children were punished for speaking their languages or practicing their culture, and many experienced severe neglect and abuse. The trauma of Residential Schools has echoed through generations, deeply affecting language transmission, parenting, mental health, and trust in institutions. In Treaty 7 communities, nearly everyone over a certain age has a family connection to this experience.

It is also essential to recognize the Sixties Scoop, another form of child apprehension that continued the destructive intent of Residential Schools. From the late 1950s through the 1980s, thousands of Indigenous children were taken from their families and placed into non-Indigenous foster homes or adopted by non-Indigenous families across Canada, the United States, and overseas. Many lost their languages, cultures, and identities entirely. The Sixties Scoop compounded the intergenerational impacts of earlier policies, leaving lasting grief, disconnection, and mistrust toward government systems. For Treaty 7 Nations, these histories are not abstract. They are lived experiences that continue to shape community dynamics and expectations around respectful engagement today.

Why does this matter to a film crew? Because it underlies the principle of cultural safety. Indigenous community members may have personal or familial trauma related to outsiders coming in and asserting authority (as teachers, government officials, media, etc.). They may be understandably wary of filmmakers who parachute in, take what they need, and leave without a word. It can feel like a smaller repeat of historical abuses. To build trust, you must demonstrate the opposite behaviour; humility instead of authority, listening instead of telling, giving instead of taking. Also, some specific protocols tie into healing from this past. For example, the act of offering tobacco or a gift when you ask an Elder to share knowledge is partly to recognize the value of what they give, because for so long, Indigenous knowledge was taken without consent or thanks. Offering a gift creates balance. It says, “We see you and appreciate you,” countering how Residential Schools and colonial officials failed to show basic respect.

“*Everyone has the right to know the truth, but it is quite something else, once you know the truth, to go right through reconciliation.*”



Be mindful, too, of content that might touch on these traumas. If your project in any way involves Residential School stories or other sensitive history, consulting survivors or their families is critical. Even if not, something as simple as filming in a school on a reserve or depicting an Elder character can evoke these issues. Always approach with empathy and ask, “Is there anything about this scene or topic that could be hurtful or offensive, given our history?”

Reconciliation and Rights: Today’s Landscape

We live in an era of reconciliation, an ongoing process to repair relationships between Indigenous Peoples and settlers in Canada. As Dr. Willie Littlechild reminded us in an interview, “Everyone has the right to know the truth, but it is quite something else, once you know the truth, to go right through reconciliation.”

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which concluded in 2015, gathered testimony from thousands of Residential School survivors and issued 94 Calls to Action, several of which relate directly to media and culture. The TRC calls on Canadian media to support Indigenous filmmaking, and on storytellers, to faithfully reflect Indigenous experiences.

As a production entering Treaty 7, aligning with the spirit of the TRC means actively seeking Indigenous involvement and telling the truth of Indigenous experiences, even if your film is not directly “about” those issues. It means rejecting harmful stereotypes and tropes and instead creating content that Indigenous community members can feel pride in, not pain. This is reflected in Dr. Littlechild’s reminder of the resilience of Indigenous Peoples: “What I see is they didn’t break our spirit. Collectively, many were harmed, but our spirit was never broken.”

Another key framework is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which Canada has committed to implement. UNDRIP affirms Indigenous

Peoples’ rights to maintain their culture, to their lands, and to have a say in any activities that affect them, embodied in the principle of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). In practical terms, if you are filming on Indigenous land or using cultural heritage, you must seek consent before doing so, following the protocols laid out in this guide.

UNDRIP also affirms Indigenous Peoples’ rights to maintain, protect, and develop their cultural heritage and cultural expressions, including how stories, knowledge, and images are shared. These principles were shaped through decades of Indigenous leadership at the United Nations, including Dr. Wilton Littlechild, who has worked on the Declaration since the 1970s and later served in UN Indigenous rights mechanisms. Dr. Littlechild’s words reinforce why this matters: “We were separated from our families; our communities were traumatized. But to truly move forward, we must honour and respect that sacred relationship with the land.”

This underscores why having Indigenous advisors, and ideally Indigenous crew in decision-making roles, is not just ethical but necessary. It’s not a “nice to have.” It is part of upholding human rights, building trust, and contributing to the broader national project of truth and reconciliation.

Finally, local municipalities like the City of Calgary have their own Indigenous relations strategies. For example, Calgary’s Indigenous Relations Office and the White Goose Flying Report (the city’s local response to the TRC) outline actions the city is taking to honour Treaty 7 people, from public art and signage in Indigenous languages to education programs. As a film production, you’re an unofficial ambassador in this space. If you conduct yourself well, you contribute to reconciliation by building positive relationships. If you disregard protocol or cause offence, you set things back. The good news: when you do things right, you’ll often find open arms. By weaving reciprocity and respect into how you work, your project will thrive, you’ll gain community support, avoid pitfalls, and maybe even discover creative inspiration you’d have missed otherwise.



TRC Calls to Action & UNDRIP: Reconciliation as production responsibilities

These frameworks translate into concrete expectations for film and television from development through release. The goal is to move from “good intentions” to clear, rights-based steps that protect people, land, culture, and story.

Key TRC Calls to Action that most directly connect to filmmaking

Call to Action 84 (Media)

Increase Indigenous representation, languages, and perspectives in programming and strengthen equitable access to media jobs and leadership.

Call to Action 92 (Business)

Adopt UNDRIP as a reconciliation framework in core operations. For productions, this means seeking free, prior, and informed consent, supporting equitable jobs and training, and educating staff on Indigenous history, Treaties, rights, and anti-racism.

Calls to Action 13 and 14 (Language)

Affirm Indigenous language rights and support revitalization. On productions, this means doing language work properly, hiring language keepers, and budgeting for translation and coaching.

Calls to Action 6 to 12 (Education)

Support culturally appropriate learning and close opportunity gaps. Productions can contribute through paid mentorship, set visits, and skills pathways when communities invite it.

UNDRIP articles that show up on set and in the work

Articles 18 and 19

(Participation and consent)

Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decisions that affect them, and free, prior, and informed consent is required for measures that may affect their rights.

Articles 31 and 32 (Cultural heritage, intellectual property, and land)

Treat Indigenous stories, designs, songs, names, knowledge, and locations as governed by the Nation. Secure permission, set clear use limits, credit properly, and plan for land protection and restoration.

Articles 11 and 12 (Culture and ceremony)

Protect cultural expressions, sacred sites, and ceremonial objects. Some knowledge and ceremony is not meant for cameras. Follow Nation guidance and keep the sacred sacred.

Articles 13 to 16 (Language, identity, and media)

Support Indigenous languages and accurate representation, and avoid prejudice and stereotypes in content, publicity, and workplace culture.

Article 20 (Economic and social development)

Ensure Indigenous communities share in benefits through fair pay, local procurement, training, and lasting capacity building.

With these foundations in mind, let's move into the practical protocols for each phase of your production. Remember, every project is different, but the goal in all cases is to build a genuine partnership with the community. Keep that as your compass and refer to these guidelines as needed.



Respect on Set

Quick Start Summary



Two Canoes filming with Siksika Elder Ruth Scalplock

If you film in Treaty 7 territory, you are entering living communities' homelands. Plan for relationship building, Nation-specific protocol, consent, cultural safety, and reciprocity as core production work.

Non-negotiable principles

TRC & UNDRIP note: The “non-negotiable principles” below align with TRC Call to Action 92 and UNDRIP Articles 18, 19, 31, and 32. They translate rights and reconciliation commitments into daily set practice.

- Know whose land you're on. Treaty 7 Nations: Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika,

Piikani, Kainai), Stoney Nakoda (Bears paw, Chiniki, Goodstoney), and Tsuut'ina. No one “Indigenous protocol” fits all.

- Relationship first. Engage early, with humility; ask, listen, and follow local guidance.
- Free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). Permission is required for land access and cultural heritage; “No” is final.
- Cultural safety & reciprocity. Prevent harm on set; hire locally; pay/credit fairly; give back and stay in touch.

BUILDING RESPECT INTO EVERY PHASE.

DEVELOPMENT



Learn local history



PRE-PRODUCTION



Hire Indigenous advisors



PRODUCTION



On-set protocols



POST-PRODUCTION



Contextual titles

Community feedback where appropriate

WRAP & RECIPROCITY



Honoraria & giving back

Community screening

Engagement is a throughline, not a single checkbox.



Producer actions (by phase)

Before you scout and crew up

Hire a Nation-specific Indigenous liaison/cultural advisor in development; budget for fees, honoraria, and time.

Use proper channels (band office/administration), don't cold-email Chief and Council. Meet the Elders/knowledge keepers who hold cultural authority.

Ask what protocol looks like (gifts/tobacco/cloth, prayers/smudges, greetings, meeting order, dress, photography rules) and brief every department.

Be transparent about your story, locations, schedule, and what you are asking of the community.

Locations and land use

Identify sacred/sensitive sites early; accept "No-Go" zones; plan buffers/alternate angles and strict no disturbance rules.

Treat the land as sacred: minimal impact, waste plan, fix damage immediately; follow permit/deposit requirements.

Never move prayer ties/markers/cultural items; if it's in frame, consult the liaison.

Shoot days and set culture

Run a crew cultural orientation; enforce zero tolerance for racist/derogatory remarks (including "jokes").

No personal photos/social posts on Nation land or around community members/sacred items, unless explicitly cleared.

If sacred or culturally sensitive items are present (pipes, bundles, medicines, regalia), do not handle them as props. Identify the appropriate cultural authority/caretaker and follow their direction on who may touch, move, or store them.

Prioritize Indigenous hiring/mentorship; use local vendors where possible.



Story and cultural content

Do not film sacred ceremonies (e.g., sweat lodge, pipe ceremony, Sun Dance) unless the appropriate cultural authorities invite/oversee it.

Use creative alternatives (imply, cut away, show before/after) rather than exposing what should remain private.

Consult from script through edit; avoid stereotypes and historically inaccurate portrayals; respect hair/regalia protocols.

Wrap and reciprocity

Pay promptly (honoraria, wages, location/land fees) and deliver on promises.

Credit the Nation(s) and contributors; plan a community screening/premiere if welcomed.

Leave a positive legacy (donations/materials, training, approved footage/stills), and keep the relationship alive.

Don'ts

last minute outreach; token “paper advisors”; filming without permission; pushing for sacred access or “shopping for a yes”; disappearing after wrap.

Build into budget/schedule

liaison/advisor & Elder honoraria; orientation/ceremony time (if invited); land fees/deposits; local hires/mentorship; community screening/give-back.



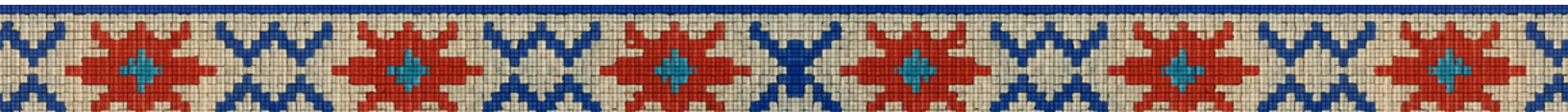
Pre-Production:

Building Relationships Before the Cameras Roll

Every successful Indigenous engagement starts well before the film shoot. In this context, “pre-production” isn’t just about budgets and scouting, it’s about relationship building. Treaty 7 advisors unanimously stressed the importance of early and ongoing engagement with the Indigenous community relevant to your project. If you’re even thinking of filming on Nation land or portraying Indigenous characters or culture, you should start outreach and consultation in the development phase. Practically, it means, hiring a community liaison and finding the right cultural advisors, contacting the Nation’s leadership, and learning the dos and don’ts specific to that community. Approaching in the right way will set a positive tone for everything that follows.



Courtesy of Taqramiut Nipingat Incorporated





TRC & UNDRIP lens for pre-production (build it into budget, schedule, and decision-making)

TRC Call to Action 92

Treat UNDRIP as an operational framework. Plan for consent, equitable hiring and training, and staff education as core production work.

UNDRIP Articles 18 and 19

Treat cultural knowledge, designs, songs, stories, and language as protected. Confirm what can be used on screen and what must remain private.

UNDRIP Articles 18 and 19

Identify who needs to be at the decision table and how free, prior, and informed consent will be sought and documented.

TRC Calls to Action 13 and 14

If language is involved, budget for language keepers, translation, pronunciation support, and respectful naming.

Lay the groundwork in pre-production:

Consult Early

Engage an Indigenous cultural advisor or liaison from the specific Nation as early as possible, ideally during development. This person will connect you with the appropriate Nation departments, administrators, or leadership. Once the Nation is aware of your project, your liaison can help identify who you need to meet next. Administrative or political approval is only the first layer of protocol. As Piikani ceremonialist and consultant Karli Crowshoe explains: “Chief and council are in charge of the political landscape of the community; the people who are the stewards of the traditional knowledge are your Elders.” In other words, getting leadership’s acknowledgement is important, but the next step is asking: “Who are the Elders or knowledge keepers we should speak to?” and getting an introduction through proper channels. Cultural authority rests with those knowledge keepers, and connecting with them early ensures you proceed respectfully. If your story or location involves Siksika, bring on a Siksika advisor; if you are filming on Stoney land, work with a Nakoda advisor, and so on. The right advisor is essential, no amount of online research can replace lived, Nation-specific knowledge. Be sure to budget for this role just as you would any other key crew position.

Ask about Protocol and Listen

It’s perfectly okay if you don’t know the proper protocol for a given community – as long as you ask. In fact, asking is often the first protocol itself. Demonstrating humility and a willingness to learn sends a powerful signal of respect. When you meet or speak with community contacts, ask questions like: “Are there specific protocols we should follow when we come to meet or film? Do we need to begin with a prayer? Should we bring a gift like tobacco? Are there any gestures we should know? Do meetings start in a circle, and if so, do we go clockwise?” These were real examples shared by Indigenous consultants. By asking such questions, you show that you’re aware you might not know everything. Come prepared to follow the guidance given and be adaptable. If an Elder says, “Actually, in our community we do X, not Y,” then gratefully do X. Every Nation has its own customs, so never assume that what worked on a previous project will apply here.



Come Bearing Gifts

In many Indigenous cultures, when you request knowledge or a blessing, it's customary to offer a gift. In Blackfoot, Cree, Dene or Stoney Nakoda communities (among others), offering tobacco is a common gesture symbolizing respect. In Treaty 7, most advisors said carrying tobacco is a good idea whenever you meet an Elder or knowledge keeper, even for a business meeting, because it shows you recognize the value of their time and wisdom. Some Elders prefer that tobacco be offered with the left hand, as the left side is associated with the heart and sincerity. Others may have a specific protocol, such as wrapping the tobacco in cloth or presenting it in a certain way. Not all Elders use tobacco, and some cultures prefer different gifts altogether. Some might appreciate a piece of cloth, a small honorarium, or, in Inuit contexts, a gift of tea or useful supplies rather than tobacco. When in doubt, ask your liaison what's appropriate to bring. The guiding principle is to offer something of sincere value along with your request. As Métis entrepreneur Colby Delorme said, "It's a small gesture from a Western lens, but a big gesture from an Indigenous one." The act of offering, whether tobacco, cloth, or other items, acknowledges that the knowledge or permission you're requesting is precious. It also starts the relationship on a foundation of reciprocity rather than expectation. Always present your gift respectfully, and never mail or drop off a gift without personal interaction. The exchange and explanation are part of the protocol. For productions looking to purchase ceremonial tobacco, consider sourcing from Indigenous-led suppliers such as Imagination Group, which provides organically produced ceremonial tobacco and guidance on gifting protocols through its online store. (imaginationgroup.ca)

Be Transparent and Honest

When you first approach the community or its representatives, clearly explain your project and intentions. Don't hide the ball. If you want to film on their land, say so. If your script involves sensitive Indigenous content (ceremonies, historical events, etc.), let them know early. Introduce who you are, who's involved in your production, and why you're interested in working with that community. Also clarify what you are asking of them, permission to access a location, input on a storyline, hiring local people, etc. Communities appreciate knowing what they're getting into. Being upfront builds trust. Be honest, not only about your intentions, but also about who you need guidance from. Going to leadership might be the necessary administrative step, but true cultural guidance comes from Elders and knowledge keepers. Filmmaker Trevor Solway shared that when you go in with humility, "come in with a gift... and be aware of your ask." It shows that you recognize you are a guest and not entitled to anything. If parts of the production are uncertain, for example you're considering locations on their reserve but haven't locked anything yet, be honest about the possibilities, and commit to keeping them informed as decisions unfold.

“
*You're not there to violate anything...
you're there in a friendly way, wanting to
make friends. The relationship is one of
our important values,*”

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY ROLES



Chief & Council are not the only authority.
Cultural protocols come through
Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Be Transparent and Honest

Build Real Relationships: As Blackfoot Confederacy CEO Carol Mason advises, filmmakers can't just show up at the last minute. You need to invest time upfront in building genuine friendships. Otherwise, community members will see through any performative gestures. Early, authentic relationship building is the work. "You're not there to violate anything... you're there in a friendly way, wanting to make friends. The relationship is one of our important values," echoes Piikani Elder Shirlee Crow Shoe. Maintain respect after the first meeting. If you smudged and behaved formally when you met the Chief and Elders, continue to observe those customs. Nothing looks worse than a crew that acts ceremonious during the opening meeting and then behaves badly later. It comes off as insincere. Show that you mean it for the long haul.

Plan Visits Respectfully

Once initial contact is made, arrange any meeting or scout visit on the Nation as an important event, not an afterthought. Do not roll up unannounced with your crew. Coordinate with your liaison or a band office contact about when and where to meet. Often, it's appropriate to first check in at the band office or administration upon arrival, even if you have prior permission. Relationship comes first, who your team is and where you're from will likely come before business. It's about building a human connection. Some communities may offer a welcoming gesture for significant projects, such as an opening prayer by an Elder or a short welcome ceremony. If they offer, graciously accept. Always follow your liaison's lead. At minimum, ensure your entire team understands they are guests on someone's homeland, and must act accordingly. Small courtesies, handshakes, introductions, and saying thank you in the local language, go a very long way.



Holly Fortier interviewing Genevieve Bruised Head



Dress and Demeanor

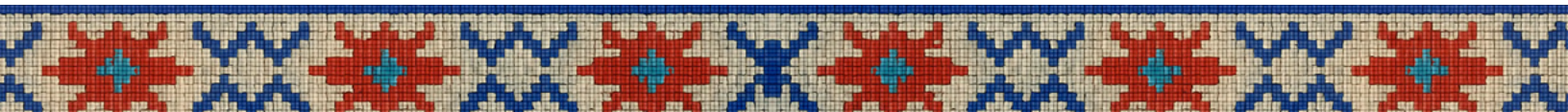
When meeting community members, advise your team to dress modestly and respectfully, especially if visiting a more traditional community or a sacred site. For instance, in many communities it's respectful for women to wear pants or a longer skirt instead of shorts, and to cover their shoulders. Blackfoot Elder Genevieve Bruised Head noted that in her community they "always tend to cover", and appreciate when visitors do too. Avoid clothing with offensive logos or slogans. Basically, present yourself as if you're meeting your partner's family or attending a place of worship. Also, be patient and courteous. Things may not run on the clock like you're used to. Conversations might meander, and silence might occur as people think. Take it in stride. You're building a long-term relationship, not running a sprint meeting.

Language and Greetings

It's respectful to learn a few basic words in the community's language, even if it's just "Hello" or "Thank you." For example, in Blackfoot you can say "Oki" (Hello); in Nakoda, "Aba wathtech"; in Tsuut'ina, "Danit'ada." Check with your liaison for correct usage and pronunciation. Don't worry if it's not perfect, as the effort is what counts. Tsuut'ina filmmaker Kevin Littlelight noted that one of his crew members learned a few phrases in Tsuut'ina, which Elders deeply appreciated and which helped put everyone at ease. Also be mindful of non-verbal communication. Many Treaty 7 Elders prefer a gentle handshake instead of a firm grip. A soft handshake is seen as respectful. Likewise, avoid holding prolonged direct eye contact, especially with Elders, since in many Indigenous cultures it's more respectful to glance briefly rather than stare. Follow the lead of the people you meet. For instance, if an Elder offers only a light handshake or doesn't maintain eye contact, do the same. Finally, pay attention to how people introduce themselves. Indigenous people often share their name, community, and sometimes a clan or traditional name during introductions. When you introduce yourself, you can reciprocate by mentioning where you come from, your community or ancestry, not just your company, to build a more personal connection beyond job titles.

Understand Community Protocols

Each Nation will have specific cultural protocols. Some examples: In Blackfoot territory, you might be expected to participate in a smudge, a cleansing ritual with smoke, before meetings or events. In Nakoda territory, you might be invited to sit in a circle, and each person might speak in turn. Follow what others do, and if unsure, quietly ask your liaison. Gender norms can also play a role in certain ceremonies. For example, some ceremonies ask that women on their moon time refrain from certain areas, or ask men to wear long pants in a lodge. These details might feel unfamiliar, but they are important in the culture. If someone gently pulls you aside and says, "By the way, it's our protocol that you do X," accept it without defensiveness. It's not a personal critique. They're helping you fit into their space appropriately. In some Treaty 7 communities, productions may even begin with ceremony as part of proper protocol. For example, on Tsuut'ina Nation, Hal Eagletail shared that producers, lead actors, and key crew are often brought into ceremony, sometimes even a sweat lodge, before filming starts, followed by a smudge and blessing with the full crew on the first day. In Blackfoot communities, similarly, initial ceremonies or prayers might be conducted to set the production off on the right foot. Be open to these experiences.





Pre-Production, What to Do

Hire a community liaison/cultural advisor from the specific Nation during development (not at the last minute).

Initiate contact through appropriate community channels, and follow their process for introductions.

Ask what protocol to follow for meetings/visits (prayer, circle order, gifts, tobacco/cloth, etc.).

Budget for gifts/honoraria and plan for any blessings/ceremonies requested before filming begins.

Be transparent about your project, what you're asking for, and what's still uncertain – no surprises.

Plan respectful visits (no unannounced scouting); brief your team on dress, demeanor, and patience.

Document Nation-specific guidance, so it carries through to the whole production team.

Pre-Production, What to Avoid

Don't Assume Uniformity

What is considered a respectful gesture on one Nation's reserve may not translate the same way on another. For instance, if a filmmaker had success in a Blackfoot community by greeting people with "Okí" and referencing Blackfoot stories, that approach won't resonate in a Stoney Nakoda community with a different language and cultural framework. Each Nation has its own way "to do things in a good way," and it's crucial to follow the local lead rather than import what worked elsewhere.

Don't Bypass Leadership

It's extremely disrespectful to try to film on Indigenous land without informing or involving the Nation's leadership. Do not attempt a "guerrilla shoot" on a reserve or sacred area, thinking you can fly under the radar. Not only could that be illegal trespass, but it also completely betrays trust. Always work through the proper channels your liaison and the community set for you.

Scouting Locations and Land Use: "Take Only Pictures, Leave Only Footprints"

When it comes to filming on Indigenous land, whether reserve land or traditional territories, the mantra should be: respect the land as if it were a church. Or more to the point, treat the whole land as you would a sacred site. For many Indigenous peoples, the land itself is both church and cemetery, a place of worship and the resting place of their ancestors. In Treaty 7, the land holds deep spiritual and historical significance for its people. Certain hills, rivers, and even swaths of prairie carry stories and sacred meaning that a newcomer may not see at first glance. Location scouting and filming plans must be undertaken in close consultation with the community to ensure you do no harm – physically, culturally, or spiritually.

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DOP Geordie Day playing back footage for Jingle Dress dancer Reanna Whiteknife



UNDRIP on land and locations (permits do not replace consent).

UNDRIP Article 32

Indigenous peoples have rights to make decisions about their lands and resources. Get Nation permission for access, routes, basecamp, and any ground disturbance.

UNDRIP Article 12

Respect privacy around cultural sites and sacred places. “No-go” zones are final.

TRC Call to Action 92 (Business)

Apply free, prior, and informed consent before proceeding with activities that affect Indigenous lands or resources.

Identify Sacred Sites Early

Before you lock any shooting location, ask the community about sacred or sensitive areas in and around your intended site. This includes known places such as burial grounds, ceremonial lodges, and Sun Dance arbors, but also less visible cultural or spiritual sites. On Siksika, Elder Eldon Weasel Child emphasized that areas like the Sand Hills, the Badlands, and places where people have fasted or where medicine men “are at rest” must be approached with great care. He explained that filmmakers should bring someone who can speak to the land, offering tobacco and informing the spirit of the place what is happening. As he put it, crews need to let the land know “we don’t mean to disrupt or interfere”, and that they will leave respectfully when the work is done. Elder Genevieve Bruised Head added that filmmakers must also consider what appears in wide shots. Certain landmarks, distinctive buttes and ridgelines, are instantly recognizable and carry deep cultural meaning. Including these sacred landmarks inaccurately in a story not set in Blackfoot territory can feel disrespectful or misleading to the community. As she noted, even the background “matters,” because the land itself is part of the story. What matters most is this: consult early with local advisors so you know which landscape features are sensitive or sacred, and adjust your locations, camera angles, or narrative framing accordingly.

Zones

Accept “No” for an answer. If the community tells you a certain place is off limits, don’t push, and definitely don’t try to sneak in later. Many Treaty 7 members have strong feelings about protecting sacred places from being filmed or trampled by crews. Our advisors had clear consensus: filming sacred ceremonies or sites is taboo unless explicitly and extraordinarily approved by the community. Even then, many Elders feel it’s better left alone. If your story calls for such a location, you’re better off recreating it on a set or finding a way to imply it without using the real thing. In the end, when a community says, “Don’t go there,” don’t go there.



Buffer Zones and Workarounds

In some cases, the guidance won't be an outright "No," but clear conditions for how to work respectfully in a sensitive area. You might be allowed to film nearby as long as you don't film the site directly or disturb it. Or you might get permission to film by a sacred river only at certain times of year, or times of day, when ceremonies aren't happening. Communication is key. Local land users or Elders may give very specific direction, like, "You can go here, but stay away from that knoll," or "Don't point the camera at that tree with the prayer ribbons on it." That last example matters because protocols can apply to what you record, not just what you touch. Piikani Elder Shirlee Crow Shoe explains that prayer ties are offerings placed for the spirits, so you should never move or remove them for a shot, and you should not film them unless you've first put down tobacco and followed the proper protocol.

Environmental Stewardship

Every crew prides itself on leaving a location better than they found it, but in Indigenous territory you need to be extra diligent. Community members are deeply connected to their land and will notice even minor damage or messes. Plan for minimal impact. Stick to existing roads and paths instead of blazing new ones, avoid polluting land or water, and have a rock-solid waste management plan. A large production can inadvertently leave a big footprint, "garbage, tracks, people," as Blackfoot filmmaker Trevor Solway noted. He warned that if not managed well, a crew can leave literal and figurative scars on the land. Don't let that happen. Some communities might require an environmental damage deposit, or have a land use permit process. Embrace that, since it shows they care. One tip: if you damage something like a fence or create ruts with a vehicle, fix it immediately and visibly. Even small repairs demonstrate respect. Show that you understand you're not on a backlot, you're on somebody's home, a place many consider sacred. If you treat the land as a living relative rather than just a "set," you're on the right track.

Ceremonial Permission for Land Use

In some communities, permission isn't only administrative, it includes spiritual protocol. On Tsuut'ina Nation, Elder Hal Eagletail described that a sweat lodge or pipe ceremony should be held before filming. These ceremonies are sacred, and are meant to seek blessing, protection, and a good path forward for the work. Productions should follow the Elder's guidance on what is appropriate, who may participate, and what should not be filmed. Productions should be open to such rituals if the community suggests them. It could be as straightforward as a prayer at sunrise on day one of shooting, or it might be a full sweat ceremony with Elders and key crew. Participating shows solidarity and an understanding that in Indigenous worldviews the land is a living entity, not just a backdrop. Hal shared that when a production filmed on a historically sensitive part of Tsuut'ina, a former military site with potential hazards, they did a sweat with Elders beforehand to pray for everyone's safety. Many crew members, initially unfamiliar with the practice, later told him how much they valued the experience. Whether or not you personally hold spiritual beliefs, recognize that these ceremonies carry real weight for the community. Embrace the opportunity if it arises.

Accuracy in Portrayal of Place

Be mindful if you are using one Nation's land to stand in for another location on screen. This happens often in film. For example, shooting on a Canadian reserve to portray a U.S. reservation in a story. Treaty 7 advisors have mixed feelings on this. Many understand the practical need and are okay with it, so long as you don't show distinctive sacred landmarks and misattribute them. However, a strong recommendation was to acknowledge the real Nation in the credits or publicity if you do this. For instance, if you shoot a scene on Nakoda land, but on screen it's portraying an unrelated location, you should still include a credit like "Filmed on location in Stoney Nakoda Territory" to honour the real place. Modern audiences, and certainly the community itself, will appreciate this transparency. Don't erase the real people and places that made your production possible. You might also include an on-screen text at the end, like "Filmed in Treaty 7 Territory in partnership with [Nation]." Such gestures of acknowledgement cost nothing, but earn a lot of goodwill.

Land Use, What to Do

Consult the Nation before locking locations to identify sacred/sensitive areas and landmark considerations.

Secure permissions/permits and follow any land use, environmental, or damage deposit requirements.

Establish and enforce "No-Go" and buffer zones, accept "No" without pressure or workaround attempts.

Plan low-impact operations (stay on roads/paths, pack out all waste, protect water, repair damage fast).

If requested, schedule prayers/offerings/ceremonies to ask the land for permission and safety.

If land stands in for another place on screen, avoid misattribution, and credit the real Nation/territory.



Caleb Zarn and filmmaker Madden Running Rabbit filming with Siksika Elder Bryan Little Chief



Land Use, What to Avoid

Don't film sacred symbols or markers casually, e.g., avoid putting a sacred mountain in a random shot for scenery, or filming prayer flags, gravesites, etc., unless it's integral and you have permission.

Don't ignore local directives, if told "Do not enter that area" or "No filming past this point," absolutely obey it. Even if the light looks perfect over that forbidden hill, find another way.

Don't move or alter anything sacred; do not remove prayer ties from trees; do not pick up sacred stones or artifacts as props. If something is in your way, discuss with the liaison. They'll advise whether it can be moved. Never assume you can rearrange things on sacred ground.

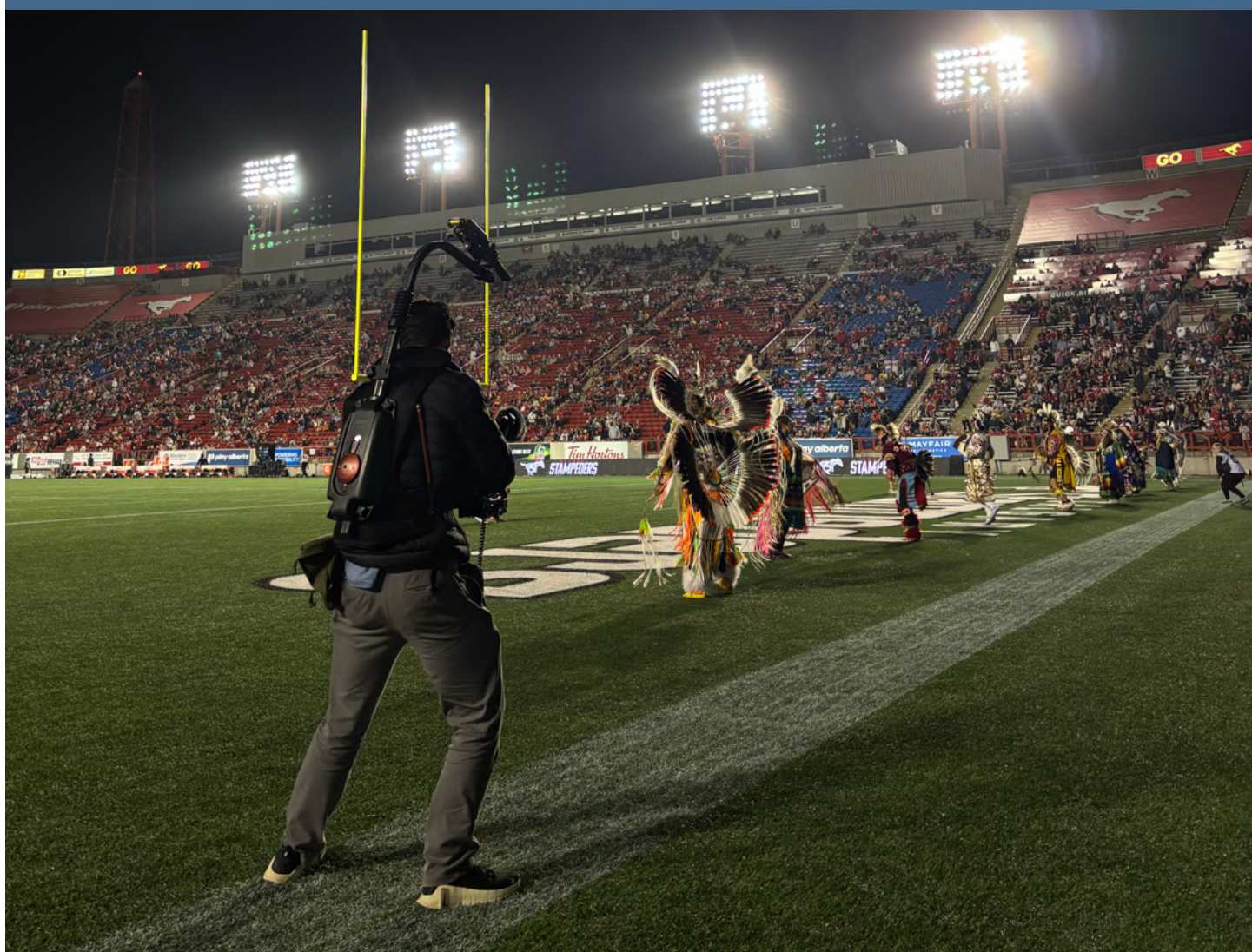
Don't treat the land as just a backdrop. Refrain from loud disrespectful behaviour (no yelling curses at nature if shots go wrong, etc.). Remember – many beliefs hold that the land hears you.

Don't leave a mess, obvious but vital. No trash, no damage. If accidents happen (someone spills fuel or a structure digs into soil), inform the community and remediate it. Trying to hide an impact is worse.

If you approach location scouting and filming with this level of care, you demonstrate that you "get it." You respect those who were here before. Many Indigenous partners have said they're happy to share their beautiful land if visitors show genuine respect. By following these protocols, you ensure the land and the people remain happy long after the shoot wraps, which is the true measure of success in community engagement.

On-Set Culture: *Creating a Culturally-Safe Production Environment*

Once you move into production, with crew on the ground and cameras rolling, the focus shifts to day-to-day behaviour. This is where all the preparation can either shine or fall apart. Indigenous advisors spoke at length about what we call cultural safety on set, making sure that Indigenous people, whether they are actors, crew, or local community members, feel respected and safe in the filming environment. It's about preventing those insensitive comments or actions that wound people, often unintentionally, but sometimes through ignorance or prejudice. Your film set should model the same respect you intend to show in the final film itself.



Two Canoes filming the Indigenous night halftime show for the Calgary Stampeders

TRC & UNDRIP set culture commitments (make cultural safety enforceable)

TRC Call to Action 92

Provide education for management and staff on Indigenous history, Treaties, rights, UNDRIP, and anti-racism, then reinforce it through daily practice.

UNDRIP Article 15

Actively prevent discrimination and stereotypes in language, behaviour, and creative choices.

UNDRIP Article 16

Support Indigenous participation in media without discrimination, including space for Indigenous voices in creative decisions.





Maintain cultural safety and respect during production

Crew Orientation and Education

Before filming starts, hold a cultural sensitivity orientation for the whole crew. If possible, bring in an Elder, cultural advisor, or a trainer like Holly Fortier or Hal Eagletail to speak to the team. Topics to cover might include basic dos and don'ts in the community, relevant historical context, and reminders about respectful behaviour. Even a 30-minute session can open eyes. For instance, explain why there may be many roaming dogs on a reserve and that it's normal, so no one makes a snide comment, or mention that some houses might not have the same upkeep as a city suburb due to various factors, but that's not for outsiders to judge. Emphasize to everyone: if you wouldn't say or do something in your own home or church, don't do it here. As Piikani consultant Karli Crowshoe noted, "You can go into a community with the best of intentions, but if you don't understand the history and educate yourself... you can still cause harm." Make it clear that respect isn't just an HR policy; it's a non-negotiable part of the work here.

No Tolerance for Mockery or Racism

This should go without saying, but unfortunately, issues still occur. Set a zero-tolerance policy for racist or derogatory remarks on set. Even "jokes" can be hurtful. State upfront that any such behaviour is grounds for removal. And follow through. If someone can't respect the host community, they don't belong on the job. For example, Blackfoot director Trevor Solway overheard some non-Indigenous crew making ignorant remarks while on the reserve: "Why are there so many dogs everywhere?" "This place looks messy." Those comments deeply hurt local youth working on the set, leaving them demoralized about their own home. As he noted, "It doesn't make them feel good about their community... doesn't make them feel good about [the filmmakers] being there." Similarly, actor and stunt performer Eugene Brave Rock recalled an assistant director calling out to a group of Indigenous women extras: "All the squaws over here." "Squaw" is a racist slur. Eugene stepped in and explained that the term is offensive and unacceptable. The AD had wrongly assumed it was okay to use. Incidents like this are exactly what good training and clear protocols are meant to prevent. Remember – the community is doing you a favour by hosting you. Remind your team of that.

Lead by Example, Top Down Respect

The director, producers, and department heads must model respectful behaviour. If local Elders or community members are around, greet them, thank them, and take a moment to chat, if appropriate. When the crew sees leadership treating Indigenous visitors or staff with warmth and respect, they'll follow suit. Conversely, if the above-the-line folks act like aloof outsiders who don't engage, others might copy that. Set the tone. You're not just here to get a job done. You're here to build relationships.



Respectful Communication

Remind the crew that normal professional courtesy applies when communicating with Indigenous colleagues or community members, plus an extra layer of cultural courtesy. That means actively listening, not interrupting Elders, and being patient if someone's accent or speaking style is different. Also encourage humility. Many Indigenous cultures value a humble demeanor. Ask your team to avoid the brash, "know-it-all" attitude that film crews sometimes project. For example, if an Elder comes to set and offers a suggestion or critique related to culture, everyone should treat that input with serious consideration, not roll their eyes because it wasn't in the call sheet. Show gratitude for knowledge shared. Park the ego at the door when you enter an Indigenous space.

Photography and Personal Space

On any set, one should ask permission before taking photos of people. Crew should not photograph community members or cultural items without clear permission. Even taking selfies with interesting backgrounds could inadvertently include someone's home or a sacred object. Implement a rule: No personal photography of the community or on reserve locations unless cleared by the liaison. And absolutely no posting on social media about the reserve or its people without approval. What might seem like a harmless, behind-the-scenes Instagram could violate someone's privacy or the community's protocols. When in doubt, don't shoot. Follow cues and your cultural advisor's guidance. If you are invited to a ceremony or into someone's home, treat it with the formality you would afford a VIP event, because it is.

Attire and Appearance on Set

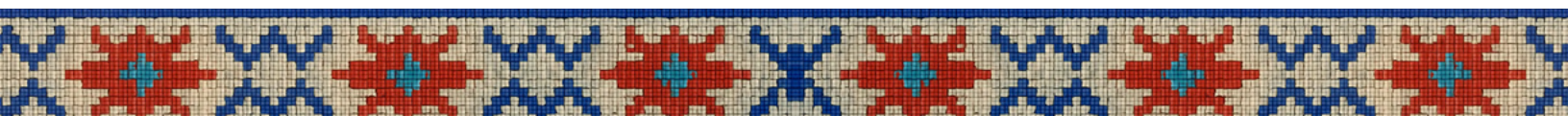
We touched on dress code for visiting the community. The same applies on set if you are filming within the community or if locals are around. Avoid overly-revealing attire. Additionally, consider the context. If you're shooting in a ceremonial lodge or a community centre, do crew need to remove hats? In some cultures, keeping a hat on during a prayer is disrespectful. Ask your liaison. Are there any taboos about clothing? These details can be sorted out in advance with your cultural advisor, so you can brief the crew.

Integrating Community Members

On-location shoots in a community often attract curiosity. Kids might bike over to watch, an uncle might wander by to see what's going on. Plan for this in a way that welcomes interest, without disrupting production. Rather than shooing onlookers away with annoyance, have a friendly system. Maybe set up a "viewing area" at a safe distance with a few chairs, and assign a production assistant or community liaison to engage with spectators. A little hospitality (offering tea or snacks to folks who come to watch) can turn an inconvenience into a goodwill moment. Of course, you can't have people walking into your shot, but manage that with polite boundaries. Use signage or friendly security to explain: "We're filming... could you please stay behind this line for safety? Thank you." Stoney filmmaker Marty Wildman noted that on past shoots, community members were usually kept at a distance, and not allowed to observe. He suggested finding controlled ways to let local youth watch – or even help. That kind of inclusion is not only exciting for them, but also shows transparency and respect. We'll talk more about youth engagement in the next section. In general, on set, treat community onlookers as hosts who have every right to be interested, rather than as trespassers. A welcoming wave, or a little chat at lunch can leave a great impression, whereas a scowl or harsh word will be remembered.



Two Canoes filming with dancer Tyla Tootoosis





Avoid Tokenism

If you have Indigenous people on your crew – which you should strive for – make sure they are genuinely included in decision-making, not just present for optics. At the same time, don't automatically treat any Indigenous crew member as the default spokesperson, or expect them to educate the production on “all things Indigenous.” That's exactly why you should hire a dedicated liaison and/or cultural advisor whose role is to guide the work. If you've hired a young local PA, for example, don't sideline them or assume they can speak for the entire community. Treat them like any other crew member, and check in to ensure they feel supported and comfortable on set. Conversely, if your film includes Indigenous elements and you've brought on a cultural advisor or liaison, listen to them, and give their input real weight in the process. One interviewee shared a disturbing example of what happens when productions don't. On a large show filming in Treaty 7, Indigenous actors were asked to perform a stereotypical “drunk Indian” scene that hadn't been in the script originally. They objected to the director and producer, who both shrugged. They then went to the cultural advisor on set, who said in frustration, “I've been telling them about this for weeks, and they haven't changed it.” In other words, the production had a cultural advisor, but ignored their guidance, and the Indigenous cast was left in a degrading situation. This is exactly what not to do. In contrast, Inuk curator Sophia Lebessis points to a small but powerful example of doing it right in the series *North of North*: a scene where two Inuit characters simply sit on a couch and share a glass of wine – just young Indigenous people relaxing like anyone else. She describes this as “groundbreaking,” precisely because it presents Inuit characters as full human beings in a modern context. If you're going to hire advisors, liaisons, or Indigenous talent, respect their perspectives and build a structure that allows those perspectives to shape the work. Otherwise, you risk re-enacting colonial dynamics, using Indigenous presence while silencing Indigenous voices. Make sure there's a clear, practical process for cultural concerns to be raised and addressed. If an actor says, “This line doesn't feel right culturally,” or an advisor flags a wardrobe issue, take it seriously. These aren't diva demands. They're the kinds of interventions that prevent harm and protect the integrity of the project. As the incident above shows, the difference between inclusion and extraction often comes down to power. If Indigenous contributors have no real say, you're not collaborating. You're just extracting their presence and image.

Emotional Safety and Stereotypes

Even if your film isn't explicitly about an Indigenous story, be mindful of how Indigenous people are treated. Avoid any imagery that plays into harmful stereotypes. If an older script or an uninformed writer included something questionable, flag it and change it. You might think, “Well our story isn't about that, it's just one scene,” but one bad scene can do a lot of damage. This includes the long-standing and deeply offensive trope of portraying Indigenous people as dirty or unkempt, a stereotype still experienced on Treaty 7 sets. Kainai Elder Genevieve Bruised Head shared an experience working as an extra, “where they smeared my face with a lot of oil and streaks. They painted us as dirty Indians. And we're not.” Eugene Brave Rock echoed the same issue: “That's a stereotype that's been brought about by film and television. You're making me look like I haven't bathed for a month. That's historically inaccurate. We were very clean people... we brushed our teeth, we washed, and we actually taught the Europeans how to wash and bathe while living on the land.” These examples underscore why productions must scrutinize makeup, wardrobe, and direction to ensure they are not perpetuating harmful or invented imagery.



Culturally Appropriate Content

Always consult your cultural advisor on any portrayal to ensure it feels right. And as a rule, don't make Indigenous culture a spectacle or a prop. For example, don't have non-Indigenous characters randomly don "war paint" or quote ceremonial chants for dramatic effect. These things have real meaning. If your story involves a ceremony or cultural element, handle it as respectfully and accurately as possible. More on this in the next section about on-screen content. If in doubt, leave it out or get explicit permission. Keep the sacred sacred.

On-Set Culture: Creating a Culturally Safe Production Environment, What to Do

Build cultural safety into your safety meeting: consent expectations, photo/social rules, and the escalation pathway, repeat on key days.

Hold a short mandatory cultural safety orientation for all cast/crew before Day One (Nation-specific guidance, history context, practical etiquette).

Set and enforce a zero-tolerance policy for racism, slurs, mockery, and stereotyping – "jokes" included.

Ensure leadership models respect: greetings, gratitude, patience, and relationship-building with Elders and community members.

Route cultural questions and decisions through the designated liaison/cultural advisor.
Don't put random Indigenous crew in the spokesperson role.

Protect privacy: no personal photos or social posts about the community without clearance.

Confirm attire and space protocols (hats, modest clothing, ceremonial spaces) with your liaison, and brief the crew.

Assign a responsible handler for sacred items; nothing is touched or moved without permission.

Plan for community onlookers with hospitality and safe viewing boundaries; treat people as hosts, not intrusions.

Treat cultural concerns as legitimate safety issues: pause, consult, fix, and close the loop.



Even with strong intentions, there are some major “don’ts” to keep in mind

Don’t make ignorant comments (even in private); you are guests. Comments like “Why do they do X?” or “This place is messy!” can be deeply hurtful and are unprofessional.

Don’t treat local people as nuisances or as props: Don’t bark at community members like they’re in your shot, and don’t assume you can grab “background” B-roll of people or homes without consent.

Don’t appropriate or play-act culture; no casual smudging, “trying on” regalia, or copying ceremonial practices because you saw someone else do it. Cultural expression on set must be guided by the Indigenous people responsible for it.

Don’t isolate or tokenize Indigenous crew. Don’t keep local hires only on low-value tasks, and don’t use them as symbolic proof of inclusion. Integrate them into real work and learning opportunities.

Don’t put cultural responsibility on the wrong people. Don’t repeatedly put one Indigenous crew member on the spot as “the representative.” Use your liaison/cultural advisor for cultural guidance.

Don’t gloss over issues, address them. If an Indigenous cast/crew member flags dialogue, wardrobe, behaviour, or direction as culturally harmful, don’t dismiss it as “just the script.” Pause, consult, and fix it.

Don’t ignore your advisor. Having a cultural advisor in name only, without power or follow-through, creates harm and re-enacts silencing dynamics.



Two Canoes filming with Hal Eagletail

If you cultivate a culture of respect and openness, your set will not only avoid harm, but it will also become a more joyful, collaborative, and creative place. Many crew members who have worked on productions with strong Indigenous engagement describe the experience as profoundly positive, often more meaningful than a typical gig. Hal Eagletail, who begins every production with a pipe ceremony, recalled a non-Indigenous crew member saying after participating, “It made me realize how special this project was. It wasn’t just another day at work.” That kind of collective buy-in elevates everyone’s work.

For Indigenous participants, a safe and respectful set means they can give their best without the emotional burden of navigating microaggressions or disrespect. Ultimately, it’s about creating a space where everyone’s dignity is upheld. Do that, and you’ll see the benefits on screen and in the relationships built along the way.

Casting, Hiring, and Collaboration: *Including Indigenous People On- and Off-Camera*

The phrase “Nothing about us without us” has been popularized in modern social movements, and is highly relevant here. If you’re filming on Indigenous land or telling Indigenous stories, people from that community should be involved, not just as subjects, but as partners and beneficiaries. This goes beyond courtesy. It’s about equity and opportunity. Historically, too many productions came onto reserves, shot their scenes using the land and maybe a few extras, and left behind nothing but tire tracks. That approach is no longer acceptable. Instead, plan to hire Indigenous talent and crew, engage local businesses, and provide mentorship. Doing so not only spreads the benefits around, it also enriches your production with skills and perspectives you might otherwise miss.



Holly Fortier directing a shoot at the Strathmore Rodeo



TRC & UNDRIP in hiring and collaboration (from tokenism to shared benefit)

TRC Call to Action 92

Ensure equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities, and build long-term sustainable benefits for the community.

UNDRIP Articles 18 and 20

Include Indigenous partners in decisions, and ensure the project creates economic opportunities through fair pay, local procurement, and capacity building.

How to approach hiring and collaboration

Employ Local Talent (On Camera and Behind the Camera)

From the earliest stages, look for ways to fill roles with local Indigenous people. This could mean casting Indigenous actors from the community for speaking or background roles, and just as importantly, hiring crew or support staff from the Nation. Every Treaty 7 Nation has members with a variety of skills. There may be carpenters, drivers, makeup artists, or medics from that community or nearby who could work on your production. Spread the word through the band office or your liaison about job opportunities. As Stoney Nakoda filmmaker Marty Wildman explains, big shows often come to Morley and “bring in their own security. They bring in their own wranglers, they bring in their own people, but they never train anybody else to gain that kind of knowledge.” Don’t repeat that pattern. Even if it’s a short shoot, you can hire local production assistants, day labour for set building, security personnel (many reserves have their own security companies), etc. If it’s a larger project, consider more skilled crew roles. Is there a camera assistant from the Nation? A wardrobe person? The answer might be yes if you ask around. There’s an emerging Indigenous film workforce in Alberta, tap into it. Aim to have Indigenous presence across departments, not just as “cultural advisors” or actors playing Indigenous roles. And be mindful of Nation specificity. If you’re in Stoney Nakoda territory, it’s great to hire any Indigenous crew, but it’s important to include Stoney Nakoda members specifically.

Mentorship and Training Programs

If some local hires are green, that’s fine. Think of it as an investment in the future, and a contribution to reconciliation through capacity building. Pair inexperienced local crew with seasoned crew members who can mentor them. Many interviewees were eager about mentorship. For example, if you bring on a young person as a camera trainee, ask your Director of Photography to take them under their wing for the shoot. Most pros are happy to teach a keen learner. Even if you don’t have time for a full workshop, on-the-job learning is invaluable. There are also existing programs you can collaborate with. The principle is: don’t just use Indigenous people as background dressing. Help them gain skills, so next time they might be in your job (or higher!)



Youth Engagement on Set

(We'll dive deeper into youth in the next section, but it's worth noting here). Consider having a structured way to let Indigenous youth observe and assist in the production. For instance, you could coordinate with a local school or college to let a couple of students spend a day rotating through departments, a few hours with camera, then sound, then art, etc. This kind of exposure can literally ignite a career. As Marty Wildman notes, big shows often come through and "it'd be nice if they could take our youth group, teach some of our youth how to get into this business." Don't let it end there. Build in real learning opportunities. Let youth shadow crew, sit in on safety meetings, and see how different departments collaborate. Programs like Trevor Solway's Napi Collective have already produced multiple films by young Blackfoot filmmakers, giving them hands-on experience as directors, camera operators, writers, and editors. Across Treaty 7, there are also training initiatives like Marty Wildman's Stunt Nations. If you invite youth onto your set, prepare your crew to welcome them (even something as simple as assigning a "buddy" in each department helps). And small gestures, like letting a youth clap the slate or call "Action!" on a take, can leave a lasting impression and signal that there is a real place for them in this industry.

Local Vendors and Services

It's not just people. Look at your budget and see where the money is going. Whenever feasible, use the Nation's own businesses or individuals for services. Need catering? Maybe there's a community caterer, or the band office runs a cafeteria that can provide meals. Need accommodation? Some reserves have a hotel or lodge (for example, Tsuut'ina has the Grey Eagle Resort). Renting trucks or ATVs? See if the Nation's public works department or a local entrepreneur has equipment for rent. Hiring security? Many Nations have security firms or local peacekeepers who could use the work. Productions often spend thousands on rentals and accommodations in the nearest city. Try to channel some of that into the community hosting you. It's part of the principle of reciprocity, and will be noticed and appreciated. It shows you're not just coming to take pretty pictures; you're investing in the people. For additional suppliers beyond the Nation itself, you can also search the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business (CCIB) online directory of Indigenous-owned businesses.

Credit Where Credit's Due

Make sure that any Indigenous person who contributed to your production is properly credited on screen (if they wish, some may choose not to be named, but most will appreciate the acknowledgement). This includes cultural advisors, translators, community liaisons, and local crew. Don't lump people under generic labels. For example, if you have a local trainee doing grip work, credit them as "Grip Trainee, [Name] (Stoney Nakoda Nation)" or similar. It's a source of pride for the community to see their members acknowledged in a production. This also helps them build a résumé for future work.

Creative Collaboration (Not Just Labour)

Inclusion isn't only about filling crew slots. It's also about collaborating creatively. Are there Indigenous artists who could contribute to your project's costume design, music, or set decoration? For instance, if you need artwork for a set, consider commissioning a local Indigenous painter instead of buying a generic print. If you need background music and you're portraying Indigenous characters, consider using local Indigenous musicians for an authentic sound. If you have a writers' room or story development involving Indigenous themes, hire Indigenous writers or consultants to help shape the narrative. These creative roles ensure the story is more authentic and help avoid missteps. Plus, they send a message that Indigenous voices are valued at the core of the storytelling, not just as an afterthought.

Empower Decision-Makers

Whenever possible, put Indigenous people in positions of influence on the production. This could mean hiring an Indigenous producer or production manager, or simply making sure the Indigenous liaison is included in department head meetings. Inuk producer Julie Grenier described that on Inuit-led productions, the creative team often had to push back when non-Indigenous executives said, “You can’t do that,” in order to keep everyday Inuit realities on screen. She emphasized that one production “worked because they have people who are very passionate about their culture and from the community at that consultation table,” and that without them, “there’s no way you’re going to be authentic about that culture or the land you’re talking about.” These decision-makers can flag issues early and suggest better options: “That location is considered sensitive,” or “This line might offend people, how about we do it this way instead?” It’s much better to catch those things in prep than to hear about them after harm has been done. A diverse decision table also sets a tone of mutual respect and curiosity, which tends to improve the work on screen.

Avoid Tokenism in Hiring

When you hire Indigenous, be mindful not to make it a “photo op.” For example, don’t hire a couple of First Nations PAs just to stand around while all the real work is done by others, simply so you can say you did it. People can tell when they’re being tokenized. Give them real tasks (within their comfort and training), and if they’re observing as trainees, make sure someone is actively teaching them, not ignoring them. Also, do not use the presence of Indigenous crew for PR while sidelining them in practice. For instance, don’t have them do an interview about how inclusive your set is, if behind the scenes they feel underutilized or disrespected. Walk the talk.

Follow Through on Promises

If, during community negotiations, you promised jobs or training slots, deliver on that. Broken promises spread fast and breed cynicism. One caution raised by community members was not to dangle opportunities and then drop them once you have what you need. For instance, if you said “We’ll hire five local youth as PAs”, but then budget cuts happen, don’t quietly cut those and hope no one notices. Communicate and try to find alternatives (maybe shorter internships instead of full hires, etc.). It’s better to scale back honestly than to not do it at all after raising expectations.



*Holly Fortier working on set
with Larry Day*



Casting, Hiring, and Collaboration, What to Do

Post jobs through community channels and hire local Indigenous talent and crew where possible.

Create mentorship/shadow roles in key departments and pair trainees with experienced crew for real learning.

Use Indigenous-owned/local vendors for catering, security, rentals, and services whenever feasible.

Credit Indigenous contributors accurately (verify names, Nation affiliations, and whether they want to be named).

Pay local hires, extras, and advisors promptly and fairly; track and fulfill all commitments.

Include Indigenous partners in public-facing communications, and share credit for collaboration.

Casting, Hiring, and Collaboration, What to Avoid

Don't bring an all-white crew to an Indigenous shoot and think you're covered because you hired one local guide. Optics and impact matter. It's demoralizing for a community to see zero representation of themselves.

Don't hire "paper advisors", i.e., an Indigenous advisor in name whom you ignore in practice. Engage with them actively.

Don't forget to pay people. It should go without saying, but ensure any local hires or extras are paid promptly and fairly (at least union minimums, or whatever was agreed). Unpaid labour under the guise of "experience" is exploitive unless it's a clearly volunteer mentorship with mutual agreement.

Don't give Indigenous hires only menial tasks. Let them shadow or assist in real roles, even if it slows things a bit.

Don't hog the spotlight. When doing media or Q&As about the production, involve your Indigenous partners. Let them speak to their experience. Don't sideline them when taking credit for how culturally rich your project is.

By consciously making your production inclusive, you do two things: you enrich your project with local knowledge and talent (often leading to a better final product), and you leave something tangible behind – skills, income, and a sense of pride. As Tsuut'ina Nation filmmaker Kevin Littlelight put it, "We're artists, we're actors or directors or DOPs. The talent is there." If you look and invest the time, you might discover your new favourite crew member or collaborator among the local community. And down the road, those folks might be making their own films. That's the goal: building an industry that includes Indigenous people at all levels.

Youth and the Future: *Inspiring the Next Generation*

One of the most uplifting themes from our consultations was the excitement around engaging Indigenous youth in film and TV production. Community members see tremendous value in using productions to broaden young people's horizons and inspire future storytellers. From a practical standpoint, involving youth can also create goodwill and even provide some helpful extra hands on set. It's about leaving more than footprints. It's about sparking dreams.



Two Canoes Media filming with Stoney filmmaker Marty Wildman



TRC & UNDRIP youth and training commitments

TRC Calls to Action 6 to 12 and 92

Support learning and opportunity through paid mentorship, set visits, and skills training that is planned with the community.

UNDRIP Articles 14 and 21

Support culturally-appropriate education and reduce barriers to training and employment opportunities for Indigenous youth.

Incorporate youth engagement into your production:

Hands-On Roles for Youth

Beyond just watching, if there are simple tasks a responsible teen could do, let them. Of course this needs supervision, but even small tastes of the action are thrilling for them. One advisor noted that even letting a youth yell “Action!” in a controlled situation, could leave a lifelong impression. The key is to ensure it’s fun and safe. Don’t put a 16-year-old in charge of heavy cables on an active set where they could get hurt or stressed. But there are many low-risk tasks if you think creatively.

Workshops and Talks

If time permits, host a mini-workshop in the community. This could be as simple as an evening at the school gym where a few of your crew set up stations: camera 101, makeup 101, acting improv games, etc. Or your cast could do a Q&A about how they got into acting. For example, during downtime, your makeup artist and costume lead might spend a couple of hours at the community centre showing interested youth how special effects makeup is done, or how costumes are designed. Bringing some spare equipment for them to try, (letting them hold the boom mic, etc.), can demystify the industry. Some communities run annual youth camps. If your schedule aligns, see if you can piggyback a session or volunteer at one. These gestures show you care about more than just your film. You care about the community’s growth.

Not Just Extras, Skill Building

Productions will often involve local youth as background performers if the story calls for it (school scenes, community gathering scenes, etc.). That’s great, but don’t let that be the only interaction. Being an extra is fun for a day but doesn’t necessarily teach skills or lead to future jobs. If you do cast youth as extras, maybe also invite them to a debrief or follow-up session where you explain what the crew jobs are, or give them a tour of the set equipment. The idea is to turn a momentary thrill into a potential pathway. If any of those extras show serious interest or aptitude, keep their contact info. Perhaps you can help them find training later, or even bring them back in a trainee capacity if the shoot continues.



DOP Geordie Day showing a First Nations youth how to operate a camera



Collaborate with Schools and Programs

All Treaty 7 Nations have schools, and some have colleges or strong connections with post-secondary programs. Work with those educators to structure the youth engagement. For example, a teacher might prepare students with some basic film terms before they visit set, or have them write about the experience afterward. Also, ask if any recent grads or college students from the Nation are already pursuing film or media. Those individuals would be prime to hire as trainees. One participant mentioned outreach ideas like posting on local Facebook groups or showing up at a powwow to recruit youth. Social media, local radio, and community events can be great channels to announce that your production welcomes youth involvement. Of course, coordinate these through official community channels to avoid confusion (e.g., have the school principal or youth program coordinator help spread the word).

Cultural Exchange

Youth engagement can be a two-way street. While you're teaching them about film, they can teach you about their culture. Don't hesitate to have an open dialogue: ask them what kinds of stories they'd like to see, or what movies they like/dislike in terms of Indigenous portrayal. Their perspectives can be very insightful and fresh. If you have Indigenous youth already on your crew or cast, highlight them as role models to local youth. For instance, if your lead actress is Indigenous, arranging a brief meet-and-greet with local girls who dream of acting can be hugely encouraging. Representation matters. Seeing someone who looks like them in that role can flip a switch in a young mind that says, "I can do this too."

Safety and Supervision

A quick but important note, when involving minors: follow all the usual protocols of waivers, permissions, and supervision. Ensure any youth on set has a designated supervisor (a teacher, a parent, or a responsible crew member assigned to them). They should get safety briefings too (Don't wander, don't touch equipment unless allowed, etc.). And make sure the content they're exposed to is age-appropriate. If you're filming a horror scene or something with heavy subject matter, that's probably not the day to have a bunch of kids on set. Use common sense. Schedule youth visits on "mild" days (daytime scenes, no intense stunts or inappropriate content happening).

Follow Up and Provide Resources

After the production, if you can, leave something behind for the interested youth. Perhaps donate some used production equipment or costumes to a school drama program. Or provide a list of film education resources (links to online tutorials, info on film schools, upcoming youth film contests, etc.). If any youth really shone during their time with you, consider a letter of recommendation for them or an invitation to visit your production office in the city. Some productions have even sponsored a student to attend a film camp or festival. For example, you could allocate a small budget to send a couple of youth to a local film festival in Calgary or a filmmaking workshop. And don't forget the power of a community screening of your finished film (more on that under Reciprocity). Inviting all the youth who participated to see the movie and be recognized can cement the experience and motivate them further.



Manage Expectations and Commitments

If you announce opportunities for youth, keep your promises. Don't get kids excited about a set visit and then cancel at the last minute without a very good reason. It's disappointing. Production logistics can change, but if you can't host a youth day as planned, offer a meaningful alternative (for example, a cast meet-and-greet in the community or a virtual Q&A). The main goal is to make sure young people don't feel forgotten. Communication is key: coordinate any schedule changes with the school or youth group so the updated message reaches the kids quickly.

Youth and the Future, What to Do

Coordinate with schools/youth programs to plan structured, supervised set visits or shadow days.

Offer safe, age-appropriate tasks and learning opportunities (with waivers, supervision, and safety briefings).

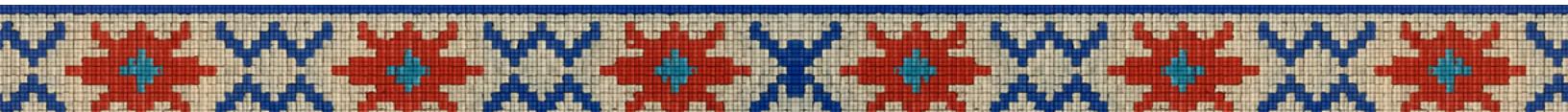
Host a workshop or crew/cast talk where youth can try equipment and learn what different departments do.

Make youth engagement about skill building, not optics. Create pathways and share resources afterward.

Follow up (invite youth to a community screening, acknowledge participation, provide references where appropriate)

Communicate schedule changes early and keep promises, or provide meaningful alternatives if plans shift.

In summary, engaging youth is one of the most rewarding things you can do. As one community member put it, the presence of a film crew can turn from an industry "intruding" to an exciting educational event, if you involve the young people. You're not just filming for today. You might be sowing the seeds for the Treaty 7 region's next Indigenous director, cinematographer, or star actor. Imagine years from now, one of those kids you hosted is making a film and remembers how you treated them!



Respecting Ceremony and *Cultural Content On Screen*

Perhaps the most delicate aspect of working in Indigenous contexts is handling sacred ceremonies, stories, and cultural symbols in the content of your film/TV show. Many a project has run into trouble by misrepresenting or outright exploiting Indigenous cultural elements. The consensus from Treaty 7 knowledge holders is clear: approach with caution, and when in doubt, leave it out. This doesn't mean you can never depict any Indigenous culture on screen, but it does mean you need to do so on the community's terms, with full permission, and ideally with Indigenous creatives leading that depiction.



Interview setup for Elder Leonard Bastien-Weasel Traveller

TRC & UNDRIP cultural content commitments (protect cultural heritage and story sovereignty)

UNDRIP Articles 11 and 12

Protect cultural expressions, sacred sites, and ceremonies. Do not film sacred ceremony unless invited and guided by the right cultural authority.

UNDRIP Article 16

Support Indigenous language use and accurate representation, and actively counter stereotypes in script, wardrobe, makeup, and marketing.

UNDRIP Article 15

Indigenous peoples have rights to control cultural heritage and intellectual property. Secure permissions for songs, stories, designs, names, and traditional knowledge, and agree on credit and limits.

TRC Call to Action 92

Media has a role in reconciliation through representation, language, and access. If you are telling Indigenous stories, Indigenous creative leadership is a best practice and a reconciliation action.



Two Canoes Media filming protests at the Calgary Courthouse for the documentary Ayoungman, about the murder of Kristian Ayoungman



Incorporating Respect and cultural content:

➤ **No Filming of Sacred Ceremonies Without Permission:**

This was stated unequivocally. If you wish to film an actual Indigenous ceremony (Sun Dance, sweat lodge, pipe ceremony, sacred healing ritual, etc.), you must have explicit permission from the appropriate Elders or cultural authorities. That permission is rarely granted for the most sacred rites. Many participants stressed that some things are simply not for public display. Others expressed more mixed views. For example, with smudging (the burning of sage or sweetgrass to purify), some Elders say it should be private, while others are comfortable with it being shown, as long as it is done respectfully and with the person's consent. However, ceremonies like the pipe ceremony, sweat lodge, and Sun Dance were almost unanimously described as off-limits to cameras. It can feel like a violation of spiritual privacy. Even in those rare instances where communities have allowed some ceremonial footage (for a documentary or archival purpose), it has been under strict oversight and with many elements deliberately kept off-camera. As a general rule, do not plan to film sacred ceremonies unless your Indigenous partners specifically suggest it, set the conditions, and guide the process – and even then, proceed with great care.

➤ **Creative Alternatives to Filming the Real Thing:**

Storytellers often want to include a powerful ceremony or spiritual moment for dramatic effect or authenticity. You can often achieve this without directly filming the sacred aspects. Solutions include:

- ⇒ **Show the lead-up or aftermath:** For instance, show characters preparing for a sweat lodge, then cut to after the ceremony with people emerging, instead of bringing a camera inside the lodge.
- ⇒ **Imply rather than show:** Use respectful cutaways. For example, during a prayer, focus on the rising smoke of the smudge or on an Elder's face rather than what's in their hands.

⇒ **Fictionalize or Simplify:** Tsuut'ina Nation Filmmaker Kevin Littlelight shared that in a comedy project, they had scenes with a sweat lodge, "but they're not real... we had to make a fake sweat." They built a prop lodge and did an abbreviated, fictional version of the ceremony, deliberately not using actual sacred prayers. By doing so, they told the story without violating any real ceremonial protocols. This route, creating a respectful facsimile, can be done if you have Indigenous writers/creators on board who know where the line is. They can invent a song or ritual that evokes the feel without using actual sacred language.

➤ **Use Culturally Approved Public Elements (Not Sacred Ones):**

Some songs or dances are intended for public sharing (for example, certain intertribal powwow songs performed in public spaces). But "public" does not mean free-for-all or public domain in the copyright sense. What is shareable is defined by the Nation, the drum group, and the culture keepers, not the production. Honour songs, memorial songs, and many other pieces are often considered sacred and should generally not be recorded, reused, or synced to picture unless an Elder, knowledge keeper, or the drum group explicitly invites that use. In all cases, ask first, "Is it okay to record this? How can we acknowledge and compensate you properly?" Even at public powwows, it is polite, and often required, to ask the drum group and MC before recording or using their songs in any production.

➤ **Work Closely with Cultural Advisors (Script to Screen):**

If your story requires a certain cultural element, involve community experts from the script stage all the way through editing. There is no single rule about filming smudging or ceremony. Views differ. Blackfoot Elder Eldon Weasel Child feels, "Once you start to smudge, it should not be filmed, because that's a very intimate relationship...It's between us and the Creator, and it's not for everybody to see." Others emphasized that opinions differ and that some people will allow parts



of a smudge to be filmed, especially when it's clearly for education. Stoney Nakoda Elder Duane Mark noted, "It's discretionary... Some people will allow it because they feel that it should be recorded and... presented as an educational tool... Another point of view is... they will not allow smudging to be recorded... It's good to ask." The consistent message from participants was: Ask permission first. As Kainai Elder Genevieve Bruised Head explained, "What is it we can film, cannot film... Asking questions is the number one thing," because ceremonies and protocols differ between Nations and societies. Shirlee Crow Shoe stressed that you need permission from the specific Elder, knowledge keeper, or society leading that ceremony, and they may set limits. You only get that kind of nuanced guidance if you empower cultural advisors to review scripts, rushes, and cuts. For projects with heavy cultural content, consider community scene reviews or at least sending ceremonial scenes to designated Elders or a committee before picture lock. It's part of the "Nothing about us without us" approach. If they see something off, they'll tell you, and you can fix it before it goes public. Once it's out in the world, you can't take it back, so do your quality control with the people who know best.

- **Specific Sensitive Elements to Handle with Care:** Protocols vary by Nation, community, and the specific item or practice. Some sacred bundles, pipes, masks, and other ceremonial objects may be restricted in who can see them, name them, depict them, or handle them. If your story involves anything that could be sacred or restricted, start by confirming with the appropriate rights-holder/custodian/cultural authority whether it can be shown at all and under what conditions, and keep consulting throughout the process. Where depiction is permitted, many productions use a clearly non-consecrated replica/prop developed with cultural input, rather than assuming a real sacred object is appropriate on camera.

⇒ **Regalia** (including feather headdresses/war bonnets) are not "costumes." Do not touch, move, place, or ask someone to wear regalia without explicit permission from the owner and, where applicable, the family, society, or group that holds the rights and responsibilities connected to it. Treat ceremonial interiors and moments as private by default: filming inside a sweat lodge, during a bundle opening, or other restricted ceremonies should happen only with clear, informed permission and an explicit invitation, with boundaries agreed in advance and respected on set.

⇒ **Hair and Personal Symbols:** In many First Nations, hair is sacred, and only certain people have the right to cut or braid someone else's hair. It's often a ceremonial role (having "transfer rights" to that act). If you have Indigenous actors with long hair, educate your hair and makeup department about this. They should ask permission before braiding or cutting an Indigenous person's hair, and not take offence if the actor prefers to have someone else (maybe a family member or an Indigenous hair tech) do it. One solution is a quick ceremony. The individual can offer tobacco to the hairstylist to symbolically grant them the right to braid/cut their hair just for this production. This was suggested as a simple handshake agreement with tobacco that honours the sacredness of the act. Hair is deeply personal. In some cultures, cutting hair is associated with mourning, so don't treat it as just another cosmetic choice. Similarly, if wardrobe requires an Indigenous actor to remove certain sacred items (like a medicine pouch they wear under their shirt), discuss that and handle it respectfully.

⇒ **Stories and Legends:** Some traditional stories are season-bound or context-bound. Among many Plains cultures, certain legends are only told in winter. If your script has a character telling a traditional story, check that it's appropriate for the time and medium. Also, some stories are not meant for public dissemination, or can only be told by designated knowledge keepers. Instead of lifting a real sacred legend from a book, it may be better to create a fictional story that sounds appropriate, but isn't an actual sacred tale. Or ask an Elder if they have a story they're comfortable sharing, and how it should be told. And absolutely avoid using real sacred songs or names without clearance. For example, a Flag song or a prayer song used in ceremony should not be recorded and inserted as your soundtrack. If you need something similar, perhaps a local musician can create an original piece for you.

⇒ **Names and Images of the Deceased:** In some Indigenous cultures, it's taboo to say a deceased person's name or show their image for some time after their passing, to allow their spirit to journey on. This is why you'll sometimes see notices on TV shows indicating that out of respect they will not show a recently-deceased Indigenous person's image, or in film credits you might see a warning for Indigenous viewers if a film will depict someone who has passed. If your film includes references to real deceased community members or shows historical photos, check the local custom. Sometimes they'll simply ask for a disclaimer or a ceremony to "release" the name for use. Other times it might be a hard "No" for a certain period.

➤ **Spirit and Protocol, Take it Seriously:** Several advisors mentioned that violating cultural protocols can have real consequences, not just socially but spiritually. As Siksika Elder and educator Eldon Weasel Child explained, "We still live in respect and coordination with everything around us," and it's important to talk to the land, the animals, and those who rest there before you

work in those places. He shared an example of a windy photo shoot on the cliffs above the river. He stepped away to speak to those buried there, explained what they were doing, and asked for a little time. "The wind died down... there wasn't any more wind after that." For many Indigenous people, that kind of experience is a reminder that you're not the only presence on the land, and that ceremonies, prayers, and offerings are part of keeping everyone safe. You don't want your production to be remembered as the one that ignored warnings, filmed something it was told not to, and then had people saying, "No wonder things kept going wrong." Whether or not you share those beliefs personally, your responsibility is to honour them. Err on the side of respect. Involve cultural advisors, follow the protocols they outline, and give time for prayers or offerings when requested. It keeps relationships strong and, in the view of many community members, keeps the spirits on your side. "If the land recognizes you and you recognize the land, you belong. If the land does not recognize you and you don't recognize the land, you don't belong... You must build a relationship, not just with the people, but with the land," noted CEO of the Blackfoot Confederacy, Carol Mason.

➤ **Consent and Context for Cultural Content:** Just like with locations and personal interactions, consent is key for cultural content. Always ask and be prepared to hear "No." If an Elder says, "No, you cannot show that ceremony," that doesn't mean your project is doomed. It means you must creatively find another way to convey the meaning. Many great films manage to handle cultural material with grace by focusing on character emotions or using metaphor. The audience doesn't need to see everything to understand it. What they do need is to feel that whatever you show is authentic and respectful. If Indigenous viewers watch your film and feel that you honoured their ways (even if you left things out), you've succeeded. If they watch and feel exposed or offended because you showed something that should have been kept private, then all your other good efforts may be overshadowed by that mistake.



Respecting Ceremony, What to Do



Flag all cultural elements in the script and consult Nation-specific advisors early (development to post).



Seek free, prior, and informed consent for any cultural content, and document what is approved and what is not.



Avoid filming real sacred ceremonies; use approved creative alternatives (imply, lead-up/aftermath, respectful props).



Get permission before recording or syncing songs, drumming, prayers, or stories, and agree on compensation/credit.



Brief hair/makeup/wardrobe on protocols (hair significance, regalia respect, no “dirty Indian” styling).



Check protocols around names/images of the deceased, and add warnings/disclaimers if requested.



Build a review step with advisors/Elders for sensitive scenes before picture lock and release.



Cultural Content, What to Avoid



Don't assume any Indigenous cultural element is “fair game” for your story. It's not public domain just because it exists. Sacred means sacred.



Don't pressure community members to allow filming of something they're uncomfortable with. If one Elder says no, don't shop around for a yes from someone else. That's disrespectful and will likely backfire, as people in the community talk to each other.



Don't record sacred songs, prayers, or ceremonies on your own. Even for reference, don't whip out your phone to record an Elder singing a prayer song unless you've explicitly asked and been granted permission for that purpose.



Don't include actual sacred objects or real names of deceased individuals in your script without clearance. If your script has, say, a character using a real sacred prayer or handling a real sacred object (like a particular pipe), change it or clear it.



Don't treat cultural advisors as censors you need to “get around.” Treat them as collaborators keeping your story honest. If they flag something, it's for a reason. Engage in dialogue. Maybe you can find a different way to convey the story beat.



Don't forget your broader audience: Indigenous viewers are not monolithic. What one community is okay with might upset another somewhere else. You can't please everyone, but aim for broad respect. For example, a Māori viewer in New Zealand might have different specific taboos, but they can tell if something was made with consultation and care versus thrown in ignorantly. Respect shows.



Holly Fortier interviewing Chief Raymond Powder of the Fort McKay First Nation

In essence, protect the sacred. Your film can still be rich and meaningful without exposing private cultural aspects. In fact, sometimes showing less makes a scene more powerful. It leaves an aura of mystery, and honours the idea that some knowledge is earned, not given away. As Blackfoot artist Star Crop Eared Wolf reminded us, “Whatever is being withheld is never going to be revealed.” Some teachings are meant to stay with the people who have earned them, not for the audience. Filmmaker Trevor Solway put it another way: “They don’t want our Blackfoot way of life to be easily put on a YouTube video for anybody to access... You need to really commit yourself and show up and be on the land in the community.” In other words, keep the sacred sacred. The screen doesn’t need to see everything. What’s more important is that the community behind the scenes feels their culture was treated with dignity. If you achieve that, your film will carry an integrity that audiences can feel, even if they don’t know exactly why. And that is the essence of true storytelling – conveying truth with integrity.

Wrap and Reciprocity: *Leaving a Positive Legacy*

As your production winds down, one phase ends and another begins: the legacy of your project in the community. How you exit a community is just as important as how you entered. In the past, many crews would finish filming, pack up, and drive off with a wave, never to be heard from again. This left communities feeling used and forgotten. Treaty 7 advisors emphasized the need for reciprocity, ensuring the relationship is two-way, and that the community tangibly benefits from your project. They also stressed basic professionalism, saying thank you and staying in touch. To do that, to wrap up right and give back in meaningful ways:



Holly Fortier interviewing Inuk artist from Nunavik, Julie Grenier

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PATHWAY



Initial contact via
Nation-approved channel



Meet identify
Nation-specific liaison



Meet political leadership
(Chief & Council / admin)



Co-create engagement
and location plan



Confirm consent,
timelines, and agreements



Ongoing communication
during production



Follow-up & reciprocity
after wrap

Plan for more than one meeting and more than one email.

TRC & UNDRIP wrap commitments (reciprocity, benefit, and ongoing relationship)

UNDRIP Article 20

Support Indigenous economic and social development by paying promptly, using local vendors, and leaving skills, resources, or infrastructure where agreed.

UNDRIP Article 31

Confirm that any ongoing use of cultural material in marketing, trailers, and future distribution aligns with what was agreed.

Proper Wrap and Reciprocity:

- **Honoraria and Payments:** By the end of the shoot, you should have tracked any promises of payment or donations, and be ready to fulfill them promptly. This includes:
 - ⇒ Paying any Elders or cultural advisors honoraria for their time and wisdom. Don't wait months. Give them the honorarium at the conclusion of their involvement (e.g., after their last day on set or at the final advisory meeting). It's both respectful and practical. You don't want them to feel they have to chase you.
 - ⇒ If you arranged a location fee or land-use fee with the Nation, make sure that's processed as agreed. Some Nations might not charge a formal fee, but consider offering a "land honorarium" anyway, a gift to a community fund or something similar as a thank you for the use of their land.
 - ⇒ Any wages for local hires or services should be settled before you go. Indigenous vendors have sometimes been burned by slow payments from film companies. Being the production that pays immediately and fairly boosts trust for any future projects.
 - ⇒ If you pledged a donation (say, to the youth centre or school), set a date for when you'll hand that over. If the donation is contingent on something (like film profits), communicate that clearly, and consider making a symbolic gesture in the meantime (like donating some equipment or resources as a placeholder).



Interview setup for Cassidy Caron, President of the Métis National Council

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- **Community Screening/Premiere:** Nearly every person we spoke with lit up at the idea of a community screening as a form of giving back. Once your film or show is ready (or even a rough cut if appropriate), organize a screening on the Nation or in a convenient local venue. Do this before or at least at the same time as the public release, so the community feels prioritized. You might say, “You get to see it first, on your land.” As Stoney Nakoda filmmaker Marty Wildman put it, if a production is going to shoot on his Nation, “we want a screening for a lot of our people.” He also noted he’s “never seen anybody come back to the reserve and say, ‘Here’s what we did on the reserve,’” underscoring how powerful that simple act of sharing the finished work would be. Ideally, bring some of the cast/crew to attend, have a little reception or Q&A, and most importantly, invite everyone who helped (leaders, Elders, extras, crew, youth, families). This event is a chance to celebrate together. It also allows the community a sense of closure and pride, seeing how their contributions fit into the final product. If you can, make it free and easy to attend. If people need transport to a theatre, arrange a bus. If possible, hold it on the reserve at a gym or hall to maximize comfort and attendance.
 - **Acknowledgements and Credits:** We’ve touched on crediting individuals, but also make sure to formally acknowledge the Nation(s) in your project’s credits. Some productions now include a land acknowledgement at the start or finish, or a line like “Filmed on the traditional territories of [Nations].” This is a classy move and helps educate audiences. Also, if the community contributed culturally (regardless of where filming took place), mention “In collaboration with the people of [Nation].” Many of our consultants said that ensuring proper credit is a key part of respect. It’s not about vanity. It’s about visibility and proper attribution. Imagine the pride when community members see their Nation’s name on screen. Conversely, imagine the hurt if they don’t and feel erased.
 - **Economic and Social Legacy:** Think of ways your production can leave a positive footprint. This could be: donating leftover materials (for example, if you built sets or had lumber, could that wood be donated to the Nation for building projects? Or could leftover wardrobe go to a local theatre group?) If you rented community buildings, leave them improved (maybe you installed extra lights or did a deep clean. Let the community keep any enhancements). Maybe donate aerial footage or photos you took of the land back to the Nation for their use, since you likely got beautiful shots that they might love for their own archives or tourism materials.
 - **Participate in the Community (beyond the film):** During production and at wrap, look for ways to be present in community life, not just on set. Kainai Elder Genevieve Bruised Head described how actor Gabriel Luna and his wife came to the Sundance camp, slept in her RV, and helped with everyday camp life as they broke down the lodge. She told them, “When you come to our camp, no matter what title you hold, we’re all equal.” For her, following protocol and showing up with a genuine heart meant people “adopted them into their houses... gave them a place to sleep, eat... introduced them to everybody.” Those informal moments – sharing meals, helping with camp chores, sitting in circle – turn a visiting crew into extended family. Inuk producer Julie Grenier shared a different but related example. On one production, what she “really, really appreciated” was a cultural sensitivity outing organized for the team. The crew was taken into the community and onto the specific land they were working on, given context about “where we are, what we’re doing, the importance of it,” and an activity “they can touch and feel and actually live through, so that they can fully understand.” She noted that even if it costs the production extra time and money, it also supports the local economy and community initiatives. Taken together, these stories point to the same principle: Don’t treat the community as a backdrop. If you’re invited, show up. Not just for the shoot, but for the camp, the outing, the meal, the game, the powwow. Offer to lend a hand. Those are the experiences people remember long after the cameras are gone.



- **Stay in Touch:** After you've gone, keep in touch. It could be sending a few DVDs or a private link to the finished film for the community archives or school, or an email update: "We got into Toronto International Film Festival! Thank you again for all your help. We'll be thinking of you on the red carpet." Little things like holiday cards to key contacts, or visiting the community months later if you're able (maybe to guest teach at a school for a day) can transform a one-time project into an ongoing relationship. As Treaty 7 First Nations Chiefs' Association CEO Anne Manyheads explained, in a genuine partnership "there's not really ever an exit, because a relationship will always continue if it's entered in a genuine way... There's no ending that relationship."

Don't treat the last day of filming as the finish line. Act as if you expect to see each other again. You have become part of each other's stories.

- **Accountability and Reflection:** It's also a good practice internally to reflect on how the Indigenous engagement went. Gather your team and discuss. What did we learn? What could we do better next time? Document protocols that were shared so others can benefit (bearing in mind each Nation is different, so note those specifics). Thank your crew for their efforts in respecting protocols. Positive reinforcement will make them ambassadors for this approach on future sets. If any issues arose, address them and think about how to avoid them in the future. This learning mindset ensures that respectful engagement isn't just a one-off checklist you did for this project because someone told you to, but a skillset you carry forward.

Wrap and Reciprocity, What to Do

Pay honoraria, location fees, vendor invoices, and wages promptly on wrap (or per written agreement).

Deliver any promised donations/give-backs and communicate timelines clearly if something is delayed.

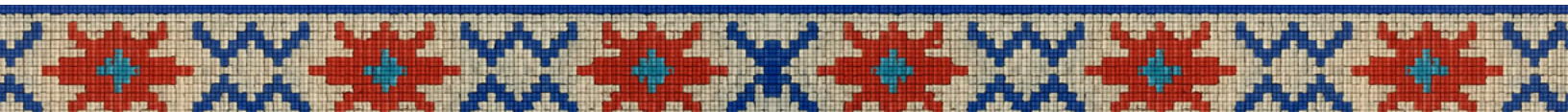
Organize a community screening/premiere and invite the Nation, Elders, local hires, and youth, ideally before public release.

Finalize credits/ acknowledgements with community review (correct Nation names and contributor preferences).

Leave a positive footprint (cleanup, repairs, donate useful leftover materials, share approved footage/ photos if requested).

Stay in touch after you leave (updates, copies/ links for community archives, thank you messages, ongoing relationship).

Hold an internal debrief to capture lessons learned and improve future Indigenous engagement practices.



Wrap and Reciprocity, What to Avoid

Don't disappear after wrap. If plans change or something's delayed, communicate and respond to the community.

Don't leave empty-handed. If the big give-back falls through, do a smaller meaningful thank-you instead of nothing.

Don't skimp on acknowledgements. Credit the Nation and contributors correctly and have spelling/wording reviewed if needed.

Don't treat wrap as transactional. Relationships continue after the shoot, so follow through materially and relationally.

When you wrap with respect and generosity, you essentially pay it forward. The next time a film crew comes to that community, they'll be compared to your example. If you did well, you make it easier for those who follow, and you contribute to a sustainable, positive environment for Indigenous participation in media. If you did poorly, the community will remember and will be twice as cautious or jaded next time. So, think of reciprocity as not just about this one project, but about building a legacy of collaboration.

To conclude this section, let's recall a quote from Métis entrepreneur Colby Delorme that encapsulates it: "How are they giving back to the community in the Western way, but also how are they participating in a traditional way? How are they contributing to the people, to who we are?" If you can look at your wrap process and answer those questions with tangible examples, you've done it right. You'll leave with not just a great film in the can, but with allies and friends who'll remember you and maybe even invite you back for a community meal down the road, just to catch up. That's when you know you didn't just make a film – you made a difference.



*– Director Damian Abrahams
interviewing Inuit architect
Harriet Burdett-Moulton at the
University of Calgary*



Colby Delorme, a Métis entrepreneur and co-founder of the Influence Mentoring Society, partnered with Ryan Reynolds in 2021 to support Indigenous youth in Canada. Also pictured with Dr. Marie Delorme and the Governor General of Canada, Mary Simon.

TRC & UNDRIP checklist cue:

The role checklists below are designed to make reconciliation practical. Where you see consent, cultural safety, hiring, and reciprocity tasks, those steps align with TRC Calls to Action (especially 84 and 92) and UNDRIP Articles (especially 11 to 16, 18 to 20, 31, and 32)]

Producers (EP/Producer), One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Treat the Nation/community as a partner, prioritize consent, relationship, reciprocity. ☐ Ensure an Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor is empowered to flag issues and stop work when needed. ☐ No filming of ceremonies/sacred sites/items without explicit permission from the right cultural authority. ☐ Set and enforce zero tolerance for racism, mockery, or stereotyping on set. ☐ No personal photography or social posting in community/ceremony/locations without approval.
Pre-Production	☐ Engage the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor early (development/prep) and budget honoraria. ☐ Start outreach through proper channels (via liaison/band office), do not bypass leadership. ☐ Budget for gifts/protocol (e.g., tobacco/cloth where appropriate), cultural orientation, ceremony time, land fees. ☐ Build consultation checkpoints: script, locations, wardrobe/HMU, props, and rough cut (as needed). ☐ Plan local hiring, mentorship, and Indigenous-owned vendors where feasible.
Production	☐ Model respectful behaviour, greet Elders/community members and make time to listen. ☐ Make space for opening prayers/smudges/blessings as directed; do not treat as a 'box check'. ☐ Support the 1st AD in enforcing respectful language and "no photo"/"no media" rules. ☐ Respond quickly to cultural concerns from cast/crew/advisors; adjust plan rather than pushing through. ☐ Track promises (jobs, training, donations, screening), so nothing is forgotten at wrap.
Wrap/Post	☐ Pay Elders/advisors/local hires/vendors promptly; close out location/land fees as agreed. ☐ Confirm credits/acknowledgements (spelling, Nation names, role titles) with partners before lock. ☐ Organize a community screening and share release updates (festival/news) with the community first. ☐ Return borrowed items; donate/leave behind agreed materials; provide deliverables promised to the Nation. ☐ Debrief internally: document learnings and what to improve next time.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any request to film or recreate ceremony, sacred objects, or restricted sites. ☐ Any change to script/story/marketing that affects Indigenous representation or history. ☐ Any conflict between schedule/budget and agreed protocol (ceremony, access limits, quiet hours). ☐ Any report of disrespect, slurs, or harmful behaviour, intervene immediately.

Line Producer / Unit Production Manager (UPM), One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Build Indigenous engagement into the plan, it is not 'extra' or optional. ☐ Confirm who has authority for approvals (Nation leadership vs Elders/knowledge keepers). ☐ Keep a paper trail: permits, agreements, honoraria, and consent documentation. ☐ Enforce "no photo"/"no media" and respectful conduct policies across crew/vendors. ☐ Escalate early when schedule or budget pressures threaten protocol.
Pre-Production	☐ Create budget lines: liaison/advisor, honoraria, gifts, land fees, local hires, community screening/reciprocity. ☐ Set procurement rules for culturally sensitive items (props, wardrobe, art), require advisor sign off. ☐ Integrate cultural orientation into onboarding (call sheet notes & safety meeting plan). ☐ Coordinate with Locations on land use terms, environmental deposits, and restoration expectations. ☐ Build a clear payment schedule so Elders/vendors are not chasing invoices.
Production	☐ Track and resolve any on-set issues raised by liaison/advisor (log actions taken). ☐ Ensure vendors/crew follow community rules (parking, access, waste, noise, quiet hours). ☐ Support the AD team with additional PAs or signage for respectful crowd management. ☐ Confirm daily waste/fuel/spill plans are followed; repair damage immediately. ☐ Maintain one point of contact with Nation reps to avoid mixed messages.
Wrap/Post	☐ Close out all payments promptly (honoraria, extras, vendors, fees); confirm receipt. ☐ Deliver promised reciprocity (screening, donation, equipment/materials, training follow-up). ☐ Archive signed agreements and protocol notes (Nation-specific) for future productions. ☐ Send formal thank you letters/updates to key community contacts.
Stop/Ask	☐ Unplanned location move onto Indigenous land/traditional territory without clearance. ☐ Crew requests to "just grab a quick shot" where access is not confirmed. ☐ Requests to use music/songs/ceremonial audio without rights & cultural permission. ☐ Delays in paying Elders or community vendors.



Director, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Lead with humility: ask, listen, and follow community guidance. ☐ Avoid pan-Indigenous “mashups”, be Nation-specific and accurate. ☐ Never treat culture/ceremony as set dressing; protect what is sacred/private. ☐ Make it safe for Indigenous cast/crew to raise concerns without consequences. ☐ Assume the land and community are the host, behave accordingly.
Pre-Production	☐ Review script with cultural advisor early; remove stereotypes and harmful tropes. ☐ Plan creative alternatives when ceremony/sacred content cannot be shown. ☐ Work with DP/Locations to avoid filming sacred areas/markers (e.g., prayer ties, burial sites). ☐ Brief department heads on non-negotiables (no filming ceremony, consent, respectful set culture). ☐ Align with Casting/Costume/HMU on authenticity and dignity (no “dirty” stereotypes).
Production	☐ Model respectful communication; correct issues in the moment. ☐ Pause for prayers/smudges; do not roll cameras unless permission is explicit. ☐ Check with advisor before improvising dialogue/actions involving culture, language, or identity. ☐ Ensure community onlookers are treated with hospitality and clear safety boundaries. ☐ Back your advisor when they flag an issue; adjust blocking/angles/scene as needed.
Wrap/Post	☐ Support cultural review of sensitive scenes (as agreed) before picture lock. ☐ Confirm credits/acknowledgements are accurate and meaningful. ☐ Participate in community screening/Q&A if invited; show up with gratitude. ☐ Share final materials promised, and stay in touch after release.
Stop/Ask	☐ Actor or advisor says a line/action/wardrobe choice feels wrong or harmful. ☐ You want to show a ceremony, sacred object, or sacred site, stop and re-plan. ☐ Scene requires filming prayer ties/offering bundles or inside restricted spaces.

1st Assistant Director (1st AD), One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Build schedule buffers for protocol (introductions, prayers, ceremony, travel/check-in). ☐ Run set with respect, firm on safety and boundaries, never disrespectful. ☐ Enforce “no photo”/“no media” and zero tolerance conduct consistently. ☐ Treat Elders and community members as VIPs, adjust pace when needed. ☐ Coordinate daily with Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor.
Pre-Production	☐ Integrate cultural orientation into the first safety meeting and daily tailgates. ☐ Put key protocol notes on call sheets (access rules, dress, photography, quiet hours). ☐ Confirm a plan for community spectators (safe viewing area & a friendly point person). ☐ Coordinate with Locations on “no-go” zones and sensitive times/places. ☐ Ensure departments know who to ask before touching cultural items.
Production	☐ Start the day in a good way (as directed): acknowledge, prayer/smudge, introductions. ☐ Use respectful language when moving people; no yelling at community members/children. ☐ Hold the line on boundaries (“no-go” zones, drones, personal photos). ☐ If an Elder arrives or protocol changes, communicate calmly and reset the plan. ☐ Document and report any disrespect incidents; take corrective action.
Wrap/Post	☐ Confirm locations are cleaned/restored; complete community walk-through/sign-off. ☐ Ensure promised local hires/extras paperwork is accurate and paid quickly. ☐ Capture lessons learned for future call sheet notes/training.
Stop/Ask	☐ Schedule threatens to override agreed protocol or community restrictions. ☐ Crew asks to enter a restricted area or remove/move offerings/prayer ties. ☐ Any racist/derogatory remark or behaviour, intervene immediately.



Locations Manager, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Know whose land you are on; never assume protocols are the same between Nations. ☐ Scout with the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor when possible. ☐ Respect “No” immediately. “No-go” zones are final. ☐ Plan for minimal impact, take only pictures, leave only footprints. ☐ No drones, wide establishing shots, or background landmarks without clearance.
Pre-Production	☐ Confirm land status and proper contacts (band office/land dept) via liaison. ☐ Map sacred/sensitive sites and establish buffer zones & signage. ☐ Secure permits/fees/deposits in writing; confirm hours, access roads, parking, washrooms. ☐ Build a waste/spill/vehicle rut mitigation plan; brief all departments. ☐ Plan arrival protocol (check-in, gifts, prayer) and share with Production.
Production	☐ Keep crew within approved boundaries; monitor vehicles and foot traffic. ☐ Do not move prayer ties/offerings or disturb markers; call the liaison immediately. ☐ Manage community onlookers respectfully (chairs, shade, snacks when appropriate). ☐ Respond fast to damage/spills: stop work, contain, report, repair visibly. ☐ Enforce no personal photography/social posting at locations.
Wrap/Post	☐ Restore locations and repair any damage; do a final walk-through with Nation reps. ☐ Remove all trash, tape, stakes, and signage; confirm no micro debris left behind. ☐ Provide the Nation with any agreed location materials (photos/footage) and thank you. ☐ Keep contact info and notes for future respectful engagement.
Stop/Ask	☐ Director/DP requests a new angle/location not previously cleared. ☐ Discovering burial sites, ceremonial grounds, prayer ties, or culturally sensitive landmarks. ☐ Any instruction from community/Nation reps changes access or requires pause.



Production Designer / Art Department, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Do not appropriate sacred designs, stories, or objects, verify with advisor. ☐ Never use real sacred items (pipes/bundles) as props; use approved replicas only. ☐ Keep cultural items under the control of a designated handler/monitor. ☐ Commission or source Indigenous art where appropriate and credit/pay fairly. ☐ Avoid stereotypes in set dressing (poverty porn, “dirty” imagery).
Pre-Production	☐ Review all Indigenous related sets/graphics/symbols with cultural advisor. ☐ If depicting ceremony, design “implied” elements (lead-up/aftermath) vs filming sacred parts. ☐ Create handling/storage plan for sensitive props and wardrobe; limit access. ☐ Coordinate with Locations: do not attach/rig to sacred trees/structures; avoid disturbing offerings. ☐ Plan respectful use of community spaces (no drilling/alterations without permission).
Production	☐ Brief crew: do not touch cultural items unless assigned; ask before moving anything. ☐ Keep set dressing clean and secure; avoid leaving items on the ground in sensitive areas. ☐ No BTS photos of props/cultural items; coordinate with Publicist for approved stills only. ☐ If the advisor flags an issue, stop and adjust design immediately.
Wrap/Post	☐ Return borrowed items to owners/community; confirm condition and gratitude. ☐ Do not sell or repurpose replicas that resemble sacred objects without permission. ☐ Credit artists/advisors accurately; share photos of commissioned work, if agreed. ☐ Donate leftover materials to the community, if arranged.
Stop/Ask	☐ Asked to create or display sacred regalia/objects, or to “decorate” with real ceremony items. ☐ Any use of Indigenous language, symbols, or artwork without clear permissions/rights.



Director of Photography (DP), One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Film with consent, people, land, and culture are not 'B roll' by default. ☐ Do not capture sacred sites/markers/ceremony without explicit approval. ☐ Avoid pan-Indigenous visuals; keep Nation-specific context in mind. ☐ Control and secure footage (including monitors/playback) from casual sharing. ☐ No drones unless approved by the Nation and production.
Pre-Production	☐ Scout with Locations & advisor to identify restricted angles and sensitive landmarks. ☐ Create a "Do not film" list for camera team (markers, ceremony spaces, community homes). ☐ Align with Publicist on approved BTS plan; enforce no personal photos. ☐ Plan respectful coverage for prayers/smudges (often: no rolling; or implied coverage only). ☐ Coordinate with Sound on any planned recording of songs/prayers (permission first).
Production	☐ Confirm consent before rolling on community members; avoid filming kids/homes without clearance. ☐ Keep crew footprint minimal; do not trample or rig on sensitive ground. ☐ Stop rolling immediately if protocol requires privacy (ceremony, prayer, mourning). ☐ Flag any accidental capture of sensitive material so it can be removed in post.
Wrap/Post	☐ Work with Post on cultural review as required; ensure sensitive shots are omitted. ☐ Deliver agreed materials to the Nation (if any) through Production. ☐ Archive footage securely with access limits aligned to agreements.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any request for drone, long lens candid shooting, or capturing ceremony "just for reference". ☐ Discovering sacred markers/offerings in frame or on the ground.



Gaffer (Lighting Department Head), One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Rig respectfully, avoid sacred areas, offerings, and community property. ☐ Keep sound/light impact low when requested (night shoots, ceremony, elders nearby). ☐ No profanity or disrespectful behaviour directed at the land/community. ☐ Coordinate all generator/cable paths with Locations to minimize disturbance. ☐ Follow “no photo”/“no media” rules (crew often take BTS at carts/rigs).
Pre-Production	☐ Walk the location with Locations/Advisor to confirm where stands/cables/genny can go. ☐ Plan power distribution to avoid digging, staking, or damaging sensitive ground. ☐ Confirm protocol for hats/lighting during prayers (some spaces may require changes). ☐ Brief your team on boundaries and respectful behaviour in the community.
Production	☐ Keep gear off restricted areas; reset if new guidance comes in. ☐ Avoid lighting that intrudes into homes or community spaces beyond what was agreed. ☐ Maintain clean work area, no tape scraps, zip ties, or debris left behind. ☐ If asked to support ceremony, confirm what is permitted (often: no lights, no rolling).
Wrap/Post	☐ Remove all tape/stakes/rigging; repair/cover any ground disturbance. ☐ Confirm genny area is cleaned and no spills occurred; report and remediate if they did.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any lighting request that places equipment near sacred markers or inside ceremonial spaces. ☐ Any need to stake/drive hardware into ground on community land without approval.



Key Grip (Grip Department Head), One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Do not rig on sacred trees/markers or alter the environment without permission. ☐ Keep rigging safe and low-impact; avoid new paths/clearing. ☐ Maintain respectful communication; your team often works close to community members. ☐ No personal photography of rigs/locations in community spaces. ☐ Coordinate boundary changes immediately with Locations/AD.
Pre-Production	☐ Review rig plans with Locations/Advisor (where you can place track, cranes, anchors). ☐ Confirm permissions before drilling/bolting into community buildings or structures. ☐ Plan equipment transport routes to avoid ruts and sensitive areas. ☐ Brief team: do not move offerings/prayer ties; stop and call liaison.
Production	☐ Keep all rigging within approved zones; tape/mark boundaries for crew. ☐ Use ground protection where needed; avoid damaging grass/soil. ☐ Be mindful of cultural spaces, keep voices/behaviour appropriate. ☐ If conditions change (wind, weather), adjust safely without expanding footprint.
Wrap/Post	☐ Strike completely, remove stakes, tape, sandbags, track debris; restore area. ☐ Report any damage and support repairs immediately.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any last-minute rig request that expands into uncleared areas. ☐ Finding offerings/prayer ties where you planned to anchor or lay track.



Production Sound Mixer, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Audio is cultural material too, do not record prayers/songs/ceremony without permission. ☐ Respect privacy, avoid recording private conversations in community spaces. ☐ Ask before wiring Elders/knowledge keepers; follow comfort and protocol. ☐ Secure recordings; no casual sharing of audio clips. ☐ Coordinate with Post on rights and cultural approvals for any music/songs.
Pre-Production	☐ Confirm with advisor what can/cannot be recorded (songs, prayers, smudges, language lessons). ☐ Plan mic placement that respects personal space and ceremonial boundaries. ☐ Add a reminder to sound team: no phone recordings for 'reference' without consent. ☐ If using Indigenous language, confirm pronunciation/translation support and approvals.
Production	☐ Ask permission before rolling on cultural moments; stop if told to pause. ☐ Keep boom/wire work respectful (especially around Elders). ☐ Log any takes containing sensitive content so Post can review/omit if needed. ☐ Manage generator noise with G&E without moving into restricted areas.
Wrap/Post	☐ Confirm music/songs used are properly cleared and culturally permitted. ☐ Provide Post with accurate logs of sensitive content and approved usage. ☐ Delete or restrict any audio captured in error per Production direction.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any request to capture a sacred song/prayer, even "just for the edit". ☐ Any uncertainty about whether audio is public/shareable.



Costume Designer, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Be Nation-specific and accurate; avoid generic 'Indigenous' costume shorthand. ☐ Do not use sacred regalia as wardrobe unless explicitly approved and guided. ☐ Avoid stereotypes (e.g., portraying people as dirty/unkempt as a default). ☐ Source from Indigenous makers when appropriate and credit/pay fairly. ☐ Treat personal items (medicine pouches, jewellery) with respect and consent.
Pre-Production	☐ Review all Indigenous wardrobe concepts with cultural advisor early. ☐ Confirm what items can be worn, by whom, and in what context (especially headdresses/feathers). ☐ Plan respectful fittings; ask about any cultural boundaries around hair, jewellery, or coverings. ☐ Coordinate with HMU to avoid harmful 'looks' (oil, smears, 'war paint' tropes). ☐ Prepare an on set handling plan for sensitive items (clean hands, secure storage).
Production	☐ Brief team: ask before touching personal items or adjusting cultural elements. ☐ Keep wardrobe clean and off the ground in sensitive spaces. ☐ If the actor/advisor flags an issue, stop and adjust, do not pressure them. ☐ No BTS photos of costumes that include cultural elements unless approved.
Wrap/Post	☐ Return borrowed items; confirm condition; do not keep/sell culturally sensitive pieces. ☐ Credit makers/advisors and confirm correct Nation names/titles. ☐ Share wardrobe photos with community partners if agreed.
Stop/Ask	☐ Director requests a sacred item, generic mashup, or stereotypical styling. ☐ Any uncertainty about whether an item is ceremonial/sacred.



Hair Department Head, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Hair can be sacred, always ask before cutting, braiding, or altering Indigenous actors' hair. ☐ Respect personal boundaries; do not assume you can touch hair without consent. ☐ Avoid styling choices that reinforce stereotypes; prioritize dignity and authenticity. ☐ Coordinate with cultural advisor on any hair related protocol (e.g., who may braid). ☐ No photos/video of hair prep in community/ceremony contexts without approval.
Pre-Production	☐ Ask Indigenous performers if they have preferences for who styles their hair. ☐ Plan for a protocol-based approach if needed (e.g., offering tobacco where appropriate and welcomed). ☐ Confirm any culturally significant hair ties, adornments, or coverings are appropriate. ☐ Brief your team on respectful language and consent first practice.
Production	☐ Ask permission every time before touch/cut/braid (even if you did it yesterday). ☐ Keep styling private and respectful; avoid audience around Elders/ceremony spaces. ☐ If an actor requests a family member or Indigenous stylist, accommodate when feasible.
Wrap/Post	☐ Return hair pieces/adornments; ensure performers leave set feeling respected. ☐ Share notes with Post if continuity involves culturally sensitive hair elements.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any request to cut hair for story/continuity without prior consent and cultural guidance. ☐ Any discomfort expressed by the performer, stop and consult.



Makeup Department Head, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Do not use “war paint” or facial markings unless Nation-specific, approved, and story justified. ☐ Avoid “dirty/oily” stereotyping; maintain respectful, accurate looks. ☐ Ask permission before touching; respect Elders and cultural boundaries. ☐ Be aware smudging/prayer may affect makeup, plan respectfully. ☐ No BTS photos of makeup that includes cultural elements without approval.
Pre-Production	☐ Review all Indigenous makeup concepts with cultural advisor (markings, colours, context). ☐ If the story requires markings, confirm pattern meaning and who may wear them. ☐ Coordinate with Costume/Director to avoid harmful imagery or stereotypes. ☐ Plan hygiene/sanitation for on reserve work; bring what you need (do not ‘borrow’).
Production	☐ Ask consent before touch; explain what you are doing and why. ☐ Pause work for prayers/ceremony as directed; do not film/photograph smudging without permission. ☐ If the advisor/actor flags the look as wrong, adjust immediately.
Wrap/Post	☐ Remove makeup respectfully; ensure performers are comfortable before release. ☐ Provide Post with any notes about markings that must be handled carefully in publicity.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any request for stereotyped “dirty” looks or generic pan-Indigenous markings. ☐ Any uncertainty about whether a marking is sacred/earned/restricted.



Casting Director, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Nothing about us without us, prioritize authentic Indigenous casting and consultation. ☐ Be Nation-specific when relevant; avoid treating Indigenous talent as interchangeable. ☐ Ensure respectful audition process and fair pay/conditions for local hires/extras. ☐ Protect privacy and consent for names, images, and sensitive stories. ☐ Coordinate cultural concerns pathway so actors are heard.
Pre-Production	☐ Work with Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor to reach the right communities/talent pools. ☐ Share opportunities through Nation channels (band office, community posts) when appropriate. ☐ Review character breakdowns for bias/stereotypes; adjust language. ☐ Plan for interpreters/translation when Indigenous language is involved. ☐ Confirm protocols for approaching Elders/knowledge keepers if you need their participation.
Production	☐ Support Indigenous performers if on-set issues arise (wardrobe, dialogue, slurs, safety). ☐ Ensure extras are treated with dignity and clear direction (no derogatory group calls). ☐ If script changes affect representation, flag immediately to Director/Producers.
Wrap/Post	☐ Confirm accurate credits and titles for Indigenous cast/community contributors. ☐ Invite participants to community screening/thank you where appropriate.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any new scene/improv that introduces stereotypes or cultural content. ☐ Any report of slurs or disrespect toward Indigenous performers/extras.



Stunt Coordinator / On-Set Safety Lead, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Safety includes cultural safety, no intimidation, slurs, or disrespect. ☐ Plan stunts to avoid damage to land and sacred/sensitive sites. ☐ Coordinate emergency response with community resources when on Nation land. ☐ Ensure youth visits/trainees are supervised and kept out of hazard zones. ☐ No pyrotechnics/explosions without explicit land/community approvals.
Pre-Production	☐ Review stunt locations with Locations/Advisor for hazards & culturally sensitive areas. ☐ Confirm any restricted zones, and keep stunt footprint inside cleared areas. ☐ Brief stunt team on respectful conduct and community protocols. ☐ Plan animal/dog interactions safely and humanely; coordinate with community as needed.
Production	☐ Enforce lockups/boundaries respectfully; explain safety without barking orders at locals. ☐ If conditions change, re assess without expanding into uncleared areas. ☐ Immediately report and remediate any land damage or incidents.
Wrap/Post	☐ Confirm location restoration after stunts (ruts, broken fences, debris). ☐ Provide Production with incident reports and remediation actions taken.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any stunt/pyro request that risks land damage or is near sensitive sites. ☐ Any safety plan that conflicts with community rules or protocols.



Props Master, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Cultural items are not props unless explicitly cleared, verify everything. ☐ Never use real sacred bundles/pipes/ceremonial items; use approved replicas only. ☐ Limit handling to designated people; store securely and respectfully. ☐ No crew photos “playing with” props, regalia, or cultural items. ☐ Track provenance and permissions for any Indigenous designs/artifacts.
Pre-Production	☐ Run all Indigenous related props past cultural advisor (meaning, use, restrictions). ☐ Create a “Do not touch” list and brief the crew. ☐ Plan alternatives for ceremony scenes (implied elements, off-camera actions). ☐ Source from Indigenous makers/vendors when appropriate and credit/pay fairly.
Production	☐ Keep sensitive props covered when not in use; control who is present during setup. ☐ If you encounter offerings/prayer ties, do not move them. Call Locations/Advisor. ☐ Confirm with Director/DP what can be shown on camera and what must remain off-camera.
Wrap/Post	☐ Return items; confirm condition; do not dispose of culturally significant pieces casually. ☐ Archive prop approvals/notes for continuity and future use restrictions.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any request for a sacred object, real prayer text, or recording of ceremonial items. ☐ Any uncertainty about an object’s cultural status, stop and confirm.



Script Supervisor, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Track cultural accuracy and approved language/action across takes. ☐ Flag deviations that introduce stereotypes or unapproved cultural elements. ☐ Maintain a clear log of advisor notes and agreed restrictions. ☐ Ensure continuity does not force actors into culturally unsafe actions. ☐ Support a clear escalation path for cultural concerns.
Pre-Production	☐ Review script with advisor notes; mark restricted/approved cultural references. ☐ Create continuity notes for Nation-specific language terms, greetings, and protocols. ☐ Coordinate with Director/AD on when scenes require advisor presence.
Production	☐ Log any improv or script changes involving culture/language, and alert Director/Producer. ☐ Note if sensitive material is captured so Post can remove or handle carefully. ☐ If an actor raises a concern mid-take, pause and communicate respectfully.
Wrap/Post	☐ Provide Post with advisor notes & logs of sensitive scenes/lines. ☐ Support cultural review process by identifying relevant sequences quickly.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any on-the-day rewrite that touches Indigenous identity, history, or ceremony. ☐ Any line/action flagged by Indigenous cast/crew as harmful or inaccurate.



Post-Production Supervisor / Editor, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Honour agreements; remove or avoid any sensitive/sacred material captured. ☐ Build time/budget for cultural review of relevant scenes (as agreed). ☐ Do not use Indigenous songs/prayers without rights and cultural permission. ☐ Handle images/names of the deceased with care; add disclaimers if required. ☐ Control access to cuts/footage, privacy and consent still apply in post.
Pre-Production	☐ Confirm with Producers what review/approval steps were promised to community partners. ☐ Create a list of potentially sensitive sequences for early advisor review. ☐ Clear all music and archival assets; verify cultural permissions (not just copyright).
Production	☐ Remove unintended shots of restricted landmarks, offerings, or private community details. ☐ Avoid edits that heighten stereotypes (e.g., only showing hardship/poverty). ☐ Coordinate with Publicist on what can be used for trailers/BTS.
Wrap/Post	☐ Lock credits/acknowledgements accurately (Nation names, advisors, community partners). ☐ Deliver community screening materials and ensure the community sees it early (if promised). ☐ Archive project materials in line with agreements; restrict sensitive footage.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any use of ceremonial audio, sacred imagery, or community footage not explicitly cleared. ☐ Conflicts between creative goals and agreed protocol, escalate before lock.



Unit Publicist / Social Media Lead, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Assume no posting until approved, especially on Nation land or around ceremony. ☐ Get written consent for stills/interviews with community members and Indigenous contributors. ☐ Avoid geotagging or identifying sensitive locations. ☐ Centre Indigenous partners' voices (with consent) and credit accurately. ☐ Coordinate all messaging with Producers & Indigenous Liaison.
Pre-Production	☐ Draft a clear social media policy for cast/crew (what is prohibited and why). ☐ Confirm with the Nation/community what they want shared (and what they don't). ☐ Prepare respectful land acknowledgement language for press materials. ☐ Plan controlled BTS capture by a designated shooter only.
Production	☐ Enforce no personal BTS filming/photography in community spaces. ☐ Do not film/photograph ceremonies, prayer, or sacred items unless explicitly approved. ☐ If community members are present, ask before filming; respect "No" immediately.
Wrap/Post	☐ Share release info and assets with community partners first (if promised). ☐ Invite community to screenings, and highlight local hires/partners (with consent). ☐ Correct any public-facing errors quickly (names, Nation identification, credits).
Stop/Ask	☐ Any post that includes community faces/homes/landmarks or cultural items without clearance. ☐ Any press request that needs Nation/community approval.



Catering / Craft Service Lead, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Be a good guest: keep service areas clean, respectful, and low-impact. ☐ Confirm any dietary/cultural considerations with liaison (including ceremony related needs). ☐ Minimize waste and litter; pack out everything. ☐ Where possible, source food/services locally and pay promptly. ☐ Be kind to community onlookers; hospitality builds relationships.
Pre-Production	☐ Ask about appropriate locations for kitchen/serving (away from sacred/sensitive areas). ☐ Plan a waste/compost/recycling approach and daily cleanup responsibilities. ☐ Coordinate with Production if meals need to accommodate prayers/ceremony schedules. ☐ Check if the community has preferred vendors or restrictions (e.g., alcohol-free spaces).
Production	☐ Keep noise/traffic controlled; respect quiet hours and community spaces. ☐ Maintain a welcoming, respectful tone with everyone (no jokes about the community). ☐ Prevent wildlife/dogs issues safely (secure trash); do not mistreat animals.
Wrap/Post	☐ Leave the area cleaner than you found it; confirm disposal per community rules. ☐ Donate leftover food only if approved and safe; otherwise dispose responsibly.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any setup that requires entering restricted areas or impacts a sensitive site. ☐ Any complaint from community about waste, noise, or disrespect, address immediately.



Transportation Captain, One-Page Checklist

When in doubt: pause, ask, and follow Nation-specific guidance (via the Indigenous Liaison/Cultural Advisor).

Phase	Checklist (tick as you go).
Always	☐ Keep vehicles on approved roads/paths; avoid creating ruts or dust impacts near homes. ☐ Respect speed limits and community traffic patterns (kids, animals, elders). ☐ Carry spill kits; prevent fuel/oil contamination of land and water. ☐ Hire local drivers where feasible and ensure everyone knows protocols. ☐ No unauthorized scouting/parking; follow Locations plan.
Pre-Production	☐ Confirm parking, turnarounds, and access with Locations/Nation reps. ☐ Plan routes that avoid sensitive areas and minimize convoy disruption. ☐ Brief drivers on respectful conduct (no photos, no comments, no honking/yelling). ☐ Confirm rules for off road vehicles/ATVs (if any) and seasonal restrictions.
Production	☐ Monitor idling, noise, and dust; adjust if community requests changes. ☐ Report and repair any damage immediately (fences, gates, ruts). ☐ Keep pedestrian safety high around base camp and community roads.
Wrap/Post	☐ Ensure all vehicles remove all trash and equipment; restore parking areas. ☐ Support final walk-through if vehicle activity caused any ground disturbance.
Stop/Ask	☐ Any request to drive into an uncleared area or near sacred markers. ☐ Any spill, rutting, or property damage, stop work and notify immediately.



Key Contributors and *Moving Forward*

This guide would not exist without the wisdom and efforts of many Indigenous individuals who generously shared their experiences and knowledge. It's worth highlighting a few key contributors and the broader initiative behind this work, as their perspectives inform every page of guidance.

Holly Fortier (Cree/Dene, Fort McKay First Nation), Lead Cultural Advisor and Project Director. Holly is the driving force behind the Indigenous protocols training that informed this guide. A filmmaker and cultural awareness trainer, she was born in Treaty 7 Territory and raised by cultural leaders, academics, and activists. Since 2007, she has delivered Indigenous awareness training across Canada, educating thousands, from corporate executives and government officials to educators, service organizations, and frontline workers, on Indigenous history, rights, and cultural respect. In 2007, she founded Nisto Consulting, and later Two Canoes Media, an Indigenous-led production company dedicated to bridging cultures through story. (Two Canoes symbolizes two cultures paddling together in partnership).

Holly's commitment to sharing Indigenous history and culture is deeply influenced by her mother's powerful story of surviving childhood in an Indian Residential School. That courageous journey became the focus of Holly's debut film, *A Mother's Voice* (2019). Her approach to both training and filmmaking blends factual history with personal storytelling. As the daughter of a Residential School survivor, she speaks from the heart about the need for truth, understanding, and

healing, workshop participants often describe her sessions as "life-changing." Holly also appears on camera in the companion training modules that accompany this guide, leading learners through the themes of Past, Present, and Future. Her philosophy is woven throughout these pages: start with historical truth, engage with empathy, and find a good path forward together.

In addition to her training work, Holly is an award-winning filmmaker. Her documentary *Ayougman* (2022) won CIFF's Alberta Short Film Devon Bolton Memorial Award; Best Unscripted Production Over 30 Minutes and Best Non-Fiction Directing at the AMPA Rosie Awards; and Best Documentary Short at AmDocs (Palm Springs). It was also an official selection at the San Francisco International Film Festival. Since the early 1990s, Holly has contributed to major productions including *North of 60*, *The Assassination of Jesse James*, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, *The Revenant*, and numerous documentaries, often serving as a bridge between productions and Indigenous communities. Her contributions have been recognized with the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women Esquao Award for Culture (2016), the Alberta Aboriginal Role Model Award (2018), an Honorary Degree from Olds College (2022), and the Alberta Chamber of Resources Indigenous Leadership Award (2023). Above all, Holly considers her greatest blessing to be the opportunity to share meaningful stories that promote empathy, understanding, and reconciliation, work that lives at the heart of this guide.

Learning Integration

This guide is most useful when it becomes part of how people learn the work, not a PDF that gets read once and forgotten. The most effective path to that is wide industry adoption and distribution, especially through the unions, guilds, associations, and schools that already shape professional standards and training in Alberta.

Our goal is for this guide to be promoted, shared, and normalized across the screen industry in Treaty 7 territory, so that respectful Indigenous engagement is treated as a core production competency alongside safety, scheduling, budgeting, and creative excellence.

Priority adoption partners

We encourage formal adoption and distribution through:

Unions / Guilds / Professional Bodies: IATSE Local 212, ICG 669, ACTRA, DGC, ACFC West, Local 2020

Industry Associations: AMPIA; Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers, Keep Alberta Rolling

Film Schools / Training Institutions: Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT); Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity; Red Deer Polytechnic (Red Deer); Airdrie Film School; University of Calgary; Mount Royal University; Alberta University of the Arts; Bow Valley College; Calgary Arts Academy; VCAD.



Interview setup for Elder Shirley Rabbit of Montana First Nation



1) Industry Distribution and Adoption

A. Union, guild, and association distribution (make it standard).

Unions and industry organizations are positioned to make this guide “normal” by distributing it where members already look for required information:

Publish it as an official resource on member portals and public websites (with a short endorsement statement).

Include it in new member onboarding and “returning to set” orientation packages (digital and print).

Share it through dispatch/availability systems (e.g., a link included in dispatch emails, deal memos, or onboarding checklists).

Feature it in member communications (newsletter highlights, socials, a pinned post, or a quarterly “professional practice” spotlight).

Bring it into professional development programming (lunch and learns, webinars, or annual meetings) focused on practical application for crews working in Treaty 7 territory.

Add it to recommended set paperwork as a standard attachment (call sheet footer line, production start package, location packages, and wrap reporting templates).

What “adoption” can look like: a union or organization publicly states, “We recommend and distribute this guide to members working in Treaty 7 territory,” and actively integrates it into routine communications and onboarding, so it travels automatically with the workforce.

B. A shared industry commitment (optional, but powerful)

Consider a simple, consistent endorsement line organizations can use (website & email signature & training pages), such as:

“*We promote and distribute Respect on Set: A Treaty 7 Film Production Guide for Indigenous Engagement as a recommended professional resource for productions and crews working in Treaty 7 territory.*”

This creates visible alignment across unions, associations, and schools, without requiring every organization to build its own separate framework.



2) Using the Guide in Crew Orientations

1) Build it into onboarding.

- Add the guide to the start-up package (alongside safety docs, harassment policies, and location rules).
- Assign ownership: name an Indigenous Engagement Lead (often the producer, PM, or community liaison) responsible for ensuring orientation happens and protocols are followed.
- Make it role-specific: prepare short notes for departments with common touchpoints:
 - ⇒ Locations: permissions, sacred sites / “no-go” areas, community entry/exit etiquette
 - ⇒ AD team: set tone, manage onlookers respectfully, avoid “rush culture” around Elders/ceremony.
 - ⇒ Art/Props/Wardrobe/HMU: sacred items, regalia and hair protocols, avoid stereotypes.
 - ⇒ Publicity: consent; no casual BTS photos or posting from Nation land/community
 - ⇒ Production: budget lines for advisors, honoraria, gifts, and reciprocity.

2) Offer three orientation formats (so every production can do it).

- A. 15 to 20 minute “Toolbox Talk” (minimum standard)
 - When: first day on location / first day on Nation land
 - Focus: dos/don'ts, who to contact, photography/social rules, what to do if concerns arise
- B. 45-to-60-minute Full Crew Orientation (recommended)
 - When: tech scout week or first full crew day
 - Focus: practical protocol expectations & scenario discussion & reporting/escalation pathway

- C. Half-day Workshop (best practice for projects with Indigenous content or on Nation shooting)
 - Adds: deeper context, scenario practice, and department breakouts

3) Sample 60-minute crew orientation agenda (ready to use)

1. Welcome & why we're here (5 min)
“We are guests on Treaty 7 territory; relationship and consent guide our work.”
2. Know whose land you're on (10 min)
Nations, local context, why protocols vary by Nation.
3. Core expectations on set (15 min)
Cultural safety, zero tolerance for mockery/racism, respectful communication, humility.
4. Protocol and permissions (10 min)
Land access, sacred sites, gifting guidance (via liaison), when “No” means “No.”
5. Photography & social media (5 min)
No personal filming/photography in community or of cultural items without explicit approval.
6. If something feels off: reporting & stop/adjust process (10 min)
Clear pathway: who to tell, what happens next, how we correct course.
7. Q&A (5 min)



4) Make it measurable.

- Ask crew to sign an acknowledgement that they received and understood key protocols (like a safety sign-off).
- Do a short check-in (paper or QR):
 - ▷ Who is our liaison/contact for protocol questions?
 - ▷ Can we post BTS photos from the community?
 - ▷ What do we do if a location is identified as sensitive?
 - ▷ Who has authority over cultural items on set?
 - ▷ What does reciprocity look like at wrap?

5) Reinforce learning at wrap

- Hold a wrap debrief with the liaison/advisor:
 - ▷ What worked? What should change next time?
 - ▷ Did we meet commitments (payments, credits, community screening plan)?
- Capture “lessons learned” as a repeatable template, while remembering protocols remain Nation-specific.

3) Using the Guide in Film Schools and Training Institutions

1) Distribute it as a standard professional practice resource.

Film schools and training programs can normalize the guide by making it a baseline reference:

- Include it in student handbooks, production policies, and capstone requirements.
- Make it required reading.
- Use it as a reference across courses (producing, directing, locations, documentary ethics, casting, art, cinematography).

- Locations: land access, sacred site sensitivity, permits vs. consent
- Directing: set culture, leadership tone, accountability systems
- Screenwriting: representation, avoiding stereotypes, consultation points
- Documentary Ethics: consent, power, community benefit and accountability
- Art/Wardrobe/HMU: cultural items, hair/regalia protocols, authenticity vs. appropriation
- Capstone/Thesis: required engagement & cultural safety package for applicable projects.

2) Embed it across the curriculum (not just an “Indigenous week”).

Use it in:

- Producing and Production Management: engagement planning, budgeting, scheduling, stakeholder relationships

3) Assignments that make the learning real:

- Territory & Protocol Brief
- Stakeholder Map & Outreach Plan

- Budget Addendum (advisors/honoraria/gifts/reciprocity)
- Cultural Safety Plan (conduct, reporting, photography/social rules)
- Script/Scene Review for Representation
- Wrap & Reciprocity Plan (crediting, screening, follow-up, community benefit)

4) If an institution chooses to teach/“instruct” the guide

The guide can be distributed widely by anyone; however, when an organization or institution is delivering formal instruction (a workshop, module, or course), that instruction should be Indigenous-led, to ensure cultural authority, accountability, and Nation-specific context are handled properly, and to avoid institutions “teaching protocol” without the right leadership.

(Importantly: this point supports responsible instruction, while keeping the primary focus of this section on broad adoption and distribution through unions, associations, and schools).

4) A simple adoption checklist for partners

To make adoption easy for IATSE Local 212, ICG 669, ACTRA, DGC, ACFC West, Local 2020, AMPIA, Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers, and participating schools, here is a practical minimum set of actions:

- Host the document (or link to the official source) on your website/member portal.
- Promote it at least once per term/quarter (newsletter & social & onboarding page).
- Include it in onboarding (new members/ new students / first production class).
- Encourage productions to attach it to start packages.
- Name a contact within your organization for implementation questions.



Holly Fortier directing with DOP Caleb Zarn

Resource Links:

Indigenous Liaison Contacts, Training Programs, and Suppliers



Two Canoes filming Tony Toosick dancing at Telus Spark's Indigenous Night

Liaison Contacts

- **Siksika Nation Tribal Administration** Central administrative office for Siksika Nation. First point of contact for coordinating with the community or finding cultural advisors.
Website: <https://siksikanation.com>
- **Piikani Nation Administration** Governing office of Piikani Nation in Brocket, AB. Can direct filmmakers to appropriate cultural liaisons and protocol contacts within Piikani community.
Website: <https://piikanation.com>
- **Kainai (Blood Tribe) Administration** Administrative office for Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe) in Standoff, AB. Handles community relations, media inquiries, and can facilitate connections to Kainai Elders or departments.
Website: <https://bloodtribe.org/category/blood-tribe-administration/>
- **Stoney Nakoda Nations Administration** – Joint administration for Bearspaw, Chiniki, and Goodstoney First Nations (Stoney Nakoda), based in Mîni Thnî (Morley), AB. Provides a gateway for communications and cultural liaison with Stoney communities.
Website: <https://stoneynakodanations.com>

- **Tsuut'ina Nation Office** Administrative office for Tsuut'ina Nation on the southwest edge of Calgary. Coordinates inquiries related to Tsuut'ina lands and can connect productions with cultural advisors or the Tsuut'ina Arts Office.
Website: <https://tsuutina.com>

- **Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council** An inter-Nation organization led by the Chiefs of Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai. They can provide high-level guidance or introductions for engaging Blackfoot communities.
Website: <https://blackfootconfederacy.ca>

- **Treaty 7 First Nations Chiefs' Association (Calgary & Tsuut'ina – Treaty 7) Treaty 7 Leadership & Regional Connector:** The Treaty 7 First Nations Chiefs' Association (T7FNCA) serves as the political entity for the Treaty 7 First Nations Chiefs and leadership to collectively advocate for the rights and needs of the seven Nations (Bearsaw, Chiniki, Goodstoney, Blood Tribe, Piikani Nation, Siksika Nation, and Tsuut'ina Nation). *Not a training program itself*, but an important point of contact/partner organization when developing Indigenous-led film/media training initiatives or engaging Treaty 7 leadership and communities.
Website: <https://www.treaty7.org>

- **Eldon Weasel Child (Siksika Nation) Community Cultural Advisor:** Respected Siksika Elder, language keeper, and former council member. Eldon offers cultural education, often opens events with prayer, and can advise on Blackfoot protocol and traditions.

- **Karli Crowshoe (Piikani Nation) Community Cultural Advisor:** Piikani ceremonialist, artist and entrepreneur. Also known as "The Chief's Daughter", she is active in Piikani cultural revitalization. Karli can advise on Piikani Blackfoot ceremonies, traditional dance, and design.
Website: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/karli-crowshoe/>

- **Eugene Brave Rock (Kainai Nation) Community Liaison / Industry Advisor:** A Hollywood actor/stuntman from Kainai (Blood Tribe), known for WonderWoman ("The Chief"). With 20+ years in film, he advocates for authentic Indigenous representation. Available as a liaison or consultant on portrayal of Blackfoot culture and for coordinating local stunt talent.
Contact: Rainwolf.ca

- **Duane Mark (Stoney Nakoda Nation) Community Cultural Advisor:** Stoney Nakoda knowledge keeper and educator from Morley. A fluent Nakoda speaker and long-time tipi camp leader at the Calgary Stampede's Elbow River Camp. Duane is a go-to liaison for Nakoda language, cultural protocols, and community outreach in Stoney Nakoda territory. **Contact:** <https://www.linkedin.com/in/duane-mark-81596543>

- **Marty Wildman (Stoney Nakoda Nation) Liaison & Stunt Coordinator:** Stoney Nakoda actor, stunt performer, and youth mentor. A former rodeo cowboy turned stuntman, Marty co-founded "Stunt Nations", training Indigenous youth in stunt and film skills. He advocates for hiring and training local Indigenous crew. Marty can act as a liaison and on-set cultural guide, especially for action scenes. **Contact:** <https://loneeagleventures.ca>

- **Hal Eagletail (Tsuut'ina Nation) Liaison / Cultural Consultant:** Tsuut'ina Elder, knowledge keeper and renowned cultural awareness consultant. He runs Eaglestar Enterprises, offering guidance on Indigenous protocol, ceremonies, and cross-cultural understanding. Often serves as Master of Ceremonies for events and can lead smudges or blessings on set.
Contact: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/hal-eagletail-23785795>

- **Kevin Littlelight (Tsuut'ina Nation) Liaison / Indigenous Filmmaker:** Tsuut'ina filmmaker and community leader blending film and advocacy. A founder of the Tsuut'ina Arts Office and former media relations lead for the Nation, Kevin champions Indigenous voices in film. He can advise on working with Tsuut'ina community, and on local casting/locations (he helped develop projects like *Horse Warriors* on APTN).
Contact: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/kevin-littlelight-2a882a86/>
- **Sophia Lebessis (Inuit) Indigenous Art Advisor:** Inuit art curator and gallery owner based in Calgary. Sophia (Inuk/Greek heritage) runs Transformation Fine Art, Calgary's first Inuit-owned gallery. With 20+

years experience promoting Inuit art, she advises on bridging Inuit culture with southern audiences. Sophia can connect productions with Inuit artists, advise on art/design, or consult on Inuit cultural content.

Contact: [linkedin.com/in/sophia-lebessis-33767273](https://www.linkedin.com/in/sophia-lebessis-33767273)

- **Julie Grenier (Inuit) Media Liaison & Producer:** Inuk producer from Nunavik, now with strong Alberta ties. Julie is Director General of Taqramiut Nipingat Inc. (Nunavik's Inuit radio/TV network) and a vocal advocate for Inuit self-representation in media. She frequently speaks on Indigenous film and can serve as a liaison when Inuit characters or stories are involved in southern productions.

Contact: <https://www.tni-rtn.com>



Interview setup for Melodie Ayoungman, with Siksika rancher Carlon Big Snake's rare white bison in the background

Training Programs

(Film, Stunt, & Media – Southern Alberta)

- **Directors Guild of Canada (DGC) Alberta – Registered Permittee Program (Calgary) Production Assistant Pathway & Required Training:** A formal pathway for getting started in DGC-covered roles (commonly Production Assistant track) with required trainings/workshops and an application process.
Website: <https://www.dgc.ca/en/alberta/membership/join-the-dgc/registered-permittee-program>
- **IATSE Local 212 (Calgary) Crew Department Courses & Prerequisites:** IATSE 212's Education Committee posts scheduled courses and notes that some courses are prerequisites for department consideration and permittee status. Their training calendar is updated ongoing.
Website: <http://www.iatse212.com/education.asp>
- **Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers (CSIF) (Calgary – Treaty 7 territory) Workshops, Equipment Access, Mentorships & Indigenous Mentorship Link:** An inclusive, non-profit society offering workshops and resources for filmmakers at different levels (plus equipment access). CSIF has also partnered on mentorship opportunities supporting Indigenous artists/filmmakers in Alberta (including a CSIF/imagineNATIVE mentorship described in Indigenous media coverage).
Website: <https://csif.org>



Two Canoes filming with championship hoop dancer Dallas Arcand

- **imagineNATIVE Institute – Professional Development & Mentorship (Canada-wide) Screenwriting/mentorship labs & industry-facing training:** imagineNATIVE lists multiple professional development opportunities for Indigenous filmmakers/writers (including longer-form labs like an Indigenous Series Lab).
Website: <https://imagenative.org/institute/>
- **National Screen Institute – CBC New Indigenous Voices (Winnipeg-based, nationally recognized) Full-time film/TV/digital training & paid participation:** A 14 week full-time training program for Indigenous creators (18+) covering essential elements of working in film/TV/digital media, including producing a short film and an internship component (as described by NSI).
Website: <https://nsi-canada.ca>
- **Capilano University – Production Manager program for Indigenous filmmakers (online delivery) Short-form, online training for working creatives:** Capilano University announced an Indigenous Production Manager program delivered online over multiple weekends (designed to accommodate people already working in industry).
Website: <https://www.capilanou.ca>
- **Stunt Nations (Treaty 7 – Morley) Indigenous Stunt Training Program:** A grassroots organization co-founded by Stoney Nakoda stuntman Marty Wildman, focused on training Indigenous youth in stunt performing and film production skills. Based in Morley (Stoney Nakoda Nation), Stunt Nations provides workshops on safe stunt work (horse riding, fight choreography, etc.), and gives young people on-set experience.
Website: <https://www.stuntnations.com>
- **Pathfinders Film Institute (Alberta) Film Technician Training:** An industry-level film tech training program that partners with First Nations communities. In 2025 Pathfinders ran an “in-community” training for Tsuut’ina Nation, covering lighting, sound, camera and other crew roles. Indigenous actor/producer Julian Black Antelope leads this initiative to bring certification courses directly to Indigenous students. Website: Pathfinders Film Institute (offers programs in partnership with unions like IATSE 212):
Website: <https://www.pathfindersfilminstitute.ca/pfi>
- **Empowered Filmmaker (TELUS Storyhive) Mobile Filmmaking Workshop:** A five-day intensive filmmaking bootcamp that travels to communities across Alberta and BC. Since 2017, this program has equipped over 500 Indigenous participants with hands-on training – from script to screen, and culminates in a community screening of the short films created. It provides
Website: <https://www.storyhive.com/en/programs/empowered-filmmaker>
- **Tap Root Actors Academy (Kikino Métis Settlement) Indigenous Youth Acting & Film Academy:** Founded by acclaimed Métis actress Tantoo Cardinal, Tap Root is an acting and filmmaking academy for Indigenous youth based in Kikino Métis Settlement, AB. Students learn acting, directing, and production by creating their own short films each year. The academy emphasizes grounding storytelling in culture and community, giving youth in the Métis settlement hands-on experience in film.
Website: <https://www.taprootactorsacademy.com>
- **Banff Centre Indigenous Arts Arts Residencies & Media Training:** The Banff Centre (on Treaty 7 land) offers world-class Indigenous leadership and arts programs. Its Indigenous Arts department runs multi-week residencies in storytelling, digital media, dance, and more. For film/TV creatives, Banff Centre’s Digital Constellations program provides hands-on training in video production, audio, animation, and post-production within a supportive, culturally-informed environment. Scholarships up to 100% are available for Indigenous participants.
Website: <https://www.banffcentre.ca/indigenous-arts>
- **Making Treaty 7 Cultural Society (Calgary) Indigenous Arts & Theatre Training:** An Indigenous-led, settler-supported arts organization in Calgary. Making Treaty 7 uses theatre, film, and art to share knowledge and nurture Indigenous creatives. They host workshops, run youth arts programs, and an annual Indigenous Artist of the Month mentorship showcase. This is a great resource for filmmakers to connect with local Indigenous actors, performers, and knowledge keepers.
Website: <https://www.makingtreaty7.com>
- **Nakoda AV Club (Stoney Nakoda Nation) Storytelling**



Collective: A Morley-based Indigenous arts collective of emerging and established Stoney Nakoda creatives, the Nakoda AV Club engages Stoney youth in filmmaking, photography, and digital storytelling, often in collaboration with initiatives like Wapikoni Mobile and the Banff Centre. They provide mentorship in creating short films and videos grounded in Nakoda culture.

Website: Nakoda AV Club.

- **Creatives Empowered (Alberta) IBPOC Film & Media Alliance:** A professional community for Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour creatives in Alberta's screen industries. Creatives Empowered offers workshops, networking, and training opportunities to build capacity and advocate for diversity in film/TV. They have hosted Production Assistant training (with DGC & WarnerMedia) and creative leadership intensives, and maintain a directory of IBPOC crew and consultants. Website: Creatives Empowered – provides resources, events, and a supportive network.
Website: <https://creativesempowered.ca>

- **The Napi Collective / Napi Film Collective (Siksika Nation – Treaty 7) Reserve-based Filmmaking Club & Mentorship Model:** A grassroots filmmaking society/club founded and led by Blackfoot filmmaker Sinakson (Trevor) Solway. The collective focuses on empowering youth and community members through filmmaking, with an informal mentorship model where experienced makers support those who are newer to the craft; it's open to a range of ages/experience levels and includes ally participation as well.
Website: <https://www.facebook.com/NapiCollective>

- **BearPaw Media & Education (Alberta) – Educational Film Production:** An initiative of Native Counselling Services of Alberta, BearPaw Media produces culturally relevant films, videos and publications by Indigenous people, for Indigenous people. For over 40 years they've created documentaries, public service films, and training videos on Indigenous legal rights, health, and culture. BearPaw's Indigenous team can be contracted for documentary production, community engagement videos, or to access their library of Indigenous educational media.

Website: <https://www.ncsa.ca/programs/bearpaw-media-and-education>

- **REEL CANADA – Indigenous Film Program (Canada-wide; works well for Southern Alberta schools/programs) Indigenous Film Education & Screening Support:** A focused education initiative featuring a curated selection of Indigenous-made films from diverse Nations across Canada, designed primarily for Grades 9–12 (with some options for younger grades). It also includes nearly 100 film-specific lesson plans across subject areas, plus a Lending Library so teachers can borrow films for classroom screening.
Website/Contact: <https://reelcanada.ca/education/indigenous-film-programme/>



Suppliers

(Indigenous-Led Production Services & Consulting)

- **Canadian Council for Indigenous Business (CCIB) – Certified Indigenous Business Directory & Procurement Support:** A national, member-based non-profit that helps connect organizations with verified Indigenous-owned suppliers. CCIB runs the Certified Indigenous Business (CIB) program (for businesses that are 51%+ Indigenous-owned and controlled) and hosts a searchable directory to find Certified Indigenous Businesses for partnerships and purchasing. **Website:** www.ccib.ca
- **Two Canoes Media (Calgary) Indigenous Production & Consulting:** A First Nations-led production company founded by Holly Fortier (Cree/Dene) in 2018. Two Canoes produces films, documentaries, and provides Indigenous awareness training for crews. Holly and her team consulted Treaty 7 communities to develop Indigenous film protocols, they can be hired to facilitate community consultations, cultural training on set, or to produce content with an Indigenous lens. **Website:** www.twocanoesmedia.com
- **Eaglestar Enterprises (Tsuut'ina) – Cultural Consulting & MC Services:** An Indigenous consulting company run by Hal Eagletail (Tsuut'ina Elder). Eaglestar provides cultural awareness workshops, protocol guidance, and can supply experienced speakers or Elders for events and film productions. Whether you need a blessing ceremony, advice on respectful depiction of ceremony, or an event emcee fluent in local customs, Eaglestar Enterprises is a trusted provider. **Website:** www.eaglestar.ca
- **IndigeKin Productions Film & TV Production Company:** A 100% Indigenous-owned production company formed in 2022 by siblings Dr. Lolly de Jonge, Therese “Tag” Goulet, and John McDougall-Goulet. IndigeKin's mission is to create and produce Indigenous-led media content that sparks reflection and celebrates life. With projects ranging from TV series (The Sugar Mama) to documentaries in development, they are a growing force in Alberta's film industry. **Website:** <https://www.indigekin.com>
- **Prairie Dog Film & Television – Métis-Owned Production Studio:** An award-winning independent production company known for the series Blackstone and Tribal. Founded by Métis showrunner Ron E. Scott, Prairie Dog is 100% Indigenous-owned and has decades of experience producing drama series, documentaries, and digital content. They regularly collaborate with Alberta First Nations and can serve as a production partner or content producer for Indigenous stories. **Website:** <https://www.prairiedog.ca>
- **Stunt Nations – Indigenous Stunt Services:** In addition to being a training program, Stunt Nations (co-founded by Marty Wildman) is developing a roster of Indigenous stunt performers and coordinators in Treaty 7. Productions filming in Alberta can hire Indigenous stunt talent (horse riders, fighters, etc.) through this network, which understands local cultures and can ensure action scenes are done respectfully (for instance, wrangling horses on reserve land, coordinating powwow arena stunts, etc.). **Contact:** <https://www.stuntnations.com>

Each of these resources, whether individuals, programs, or companies, is a potential partner in ensuring your production engages Indigenous communities respectfully and effectively. From finding the right cultural advisor, to training your crew, to hiring Indigenous talent and services, these links will help you move forward in a good way with the peoples of Treaty 7 territory. Always remember to approach each Nation or individual with humility, reciprocity, and respect. The expertise they offer will not only prevent missteps, but can greatly enhance the authenticity and depth of your story. Enjoy the journey of collaboration!

Interviewees and Contributors:

The individuals below were consulted through interviews for this project, and their perspectives are synthesized throughout this guide. (Names with * indicate those who have expressed interest in serving as community liaisons, recommended for productions seeking local advisors. Titles and affiliations are current as of the time of consultation).



Carol Mason (Blackfoot Confederacy)

Chief Executive Officer of the Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council.

Carol is a Blackfoot leader from Siksika with extensive experience in Indigenous governance and inter-nation relations. As CEO, she works to advance the collective interests of Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai, and has been instrumental in cultural protocol initiatives at the organizational level. In addition to her leadership roles, Carol is also an accomplished fashion designer whose collections of Indigenous jackets, coats, ribbon skirts, and dresses have garnered global attention. She was recognized in 1993 as one of Canada's Top Ten designers and even designed a gown for actress Tantoo Cardinal.



*Eldon Weasel Child (Siksika Nation),

Elder and cultural educator from Siksika.

Eldon is a respected Knowledge Keeper and former elected Councillor of Siksika. He has dedicated years to preserving the Blackfoot language and traditions and often opens events with prayer and cultural reflection.



Trevor Solway (Siksika Nation)

Independent filmmaker and writer from Siksika.

Trevor is the award-winning director of films such as *Siksikakowan: The Blackfoot Man* and creator of the web series *The Four*. An alumnus of Capilano University's Indigenous filmmaking program, he has been recognized at imagineNATIVE and other festivals. Trevor's work often centres on Blackfoot stories, and he champions narrative sovereignty.



*Karli Crowshoe (Piikani Nation)

Piikani artist, ceremonialist, and entrepreneur.

Karli, also known as "The Chief's Daughter," is a traditional dancer and has been actively involved in Piikani cultural revitalization. She holds a Business Management degree and runs an Indigenous creative business focusing on beadwork and design.



Shirlee Crow Shoe (Piikani Nation)

Piikani Elder and oral historian

Shirlee Crow Shoe, whose Blackfoot name is Miisaminii'skim (Long Time Buffalo Rock), is known for her storytelling and cultural knowledge. She has been involved in cultural education initiatives (such as the University of Lethbridge's Iikaisskini gathering) and frequently shares Blackfoot stories at community events.



Genevieve Bruised Head (Kainai Nation), Kainai (Blood Tribe)

Elder and traditional Knowledge Keeper.

Genevieve is recognized in her community for her expertise in traditional practices. For instance, she has spoken about the sacred use of tobacco in ceremonies for Alberta Health Services' tobacco cessation protocol courses. She has also served as a teacher in Kainai schools. Genevieve comes from a family of filmmakers, several of whom have contributed to productions as actors and stunt performers within Treaty 7.



Star Crop Eared Wolf (Kainai Nation)

Artist and community member of the Kainai Nation.

Niitsitapi multidisciplinary artist and community member of the Kainai Nation, serving as Curator at The Confluence (an Indigenous art space in Calgary) where she helps shape Indigenous-led programming, exhibitions, and community engagement. A graduate of the University of Lethbridge with a BFA in Native Art and Museum Studies, her practice spans painting, sculpture, photography, video, and beading, exploring themes of land, memory, culture, and the social/political issues impacting Indigenous peoples. Alongside her artistic work, she has contributed to cultural consultation projects across southern Alberta, guided by her family's strong ties to Blackfoot Elders.



***Eugene Brave Rock (Kainai Nation)**

Actor, stuntman, and producer from the Kainai (Blood) Tribe.

Eugene is internationally known for his role as "The Chief" in Wonder Woman, among other Hollywood and TV roles. With 20+ years in the industry, he has worked his way from stunt riding on Hell on Wheels to acting in major productions. He also serves as an advisor advocating for accurate Indigenous representation in media.



***Duane Mark (Stoney Nakoda Nation)**

Stoney Nakoda Knowledge Keeper and educator from Mîni Thnî (Morley).

Duane is a fluent Nakoda speaker and a cultural coordinator who has been featured in initiatives to preserve Nakoda language and stories. He's also known as a long-time tipi holder at the Calgary Stampede's Elbow River Camp, representing Stoney culture to the public.



***Marty Wildman (Stoney Nakoda Nation)**

Stoney Nakoda actor, stunt performer, and youth mentor.

Marty is an accomplished rodeo cowboy turned stuntman who co-founded Stunt Nations, an organization that trains Indigenous youth in stunt and film skills. He has worked on productions such as North of 60 and Outlander and is a strong advocate for increasing Indigenous presence in the film industry. Marty emphasizes action over rhetoric, his focus is on "passing on critical film industry skills" to the next generation, pushing for productions to create hands-on opportunities rather than just speaking about inclusion.



***Hal Eagletail (Tsuut'ina Nation)**

Tsuut'ina Nation Elder, knowledge keeper, cultural consultant, and MC.

Hal is a member of the Tsuut'ina Dene and a well-known figure in Treaty 7 for bridging cultural knowledge with contemporary forums. He runs Eaglestar Enterprises, providing cultural awareness consulting, and often serves as Master of Ceremonies at events (from powwows to corporate gatherings). He's also a second-generation Residential School survivor and fluent in the Tsuut'ina language.



***Kevin Littlelight (Tsuut'ina Nation)**

Independent filmmaker and community leader from Tsuut'ina, known for bringing Indigenous stories to the screen.

He has directed episodes of the APTN series Horse Warriors and earned recognition for his short film Pizza Fiction, exemplifying his voice in indie cinema. Littlelight was instrumental in creating the Tsuut'ina Office of the Arts and serves on the Calgary Arts Development board, advocating for Indigenous representation in Calgary's cultural sector. Earlier in his career, he served as a Tsuut'ina media representative and band administrator, contributing to major Nation-led enterprises such as the Grey Eagle Resort and Casino. He continues to serve his community as Executive Director of Tsuut'ina's Community and Recreation Department.



Colby Delorme (Otipemisiwak Métis Government)

Métis entrepreneur and cultural advisor from Calgary (Red River Métis heritage).

Colby is President of The Imagination Group of Companies, which includes Imagination Tobacco, a company producing traditional ceremonial tobacco. He's a sought-after speaker on Indigenous business. He co founded the Influence Mentoring Society (IMS) and serves as its founding creator/chair. IMS was launched with support/seed funding contributions from Ryan Reynolds (and others).



***Sophia Lebessis (Inuit)**

Inuit art curator and strategic advisor (Inuk on her mother's side, Greek on her father's).

Sophia was raised partly in Arviat, Nunavut and is the owner of Transformation Fine Art, the first Inuit-owned gallery in Calgary. She has 20+ years of experience promoting Inuit and First Nations masterworks and has spoken at TEDx and Inuit Art Society events about bridging Inuit art with southern markets. She also consults on Indigenous arts in Treaty 7.



***Julie Grenier (Inuit, Nunavik)**

Inuk producer and media executive from Kuujuaq, Nunavik.

Julie is the Director General of Taqramiut Nipingat Inc. (TNI), the Inuit radio/TV network for Nunavik. She has produced and directed numerous Inuktitut language series and documentaries and is a strong advocate for Inuit self-representation in media. Julie also moderates and speaks on panels about Indigenous film.



Anne Many Heads (Treaty 7 First Nations Chiefs' Association)

CEO of the Treaty 7 First Nations Chiefs' Association (often termed the G4).

Anne is from the Many Heads family of Siksika and leads the Chiefs' technical and administrative arm in Treaty 7. With a background in policy and economic development, she works on initiatives that span all Treaty 7 communities.



Cassidy Caron (Métis Nation)

Métis leader and advocate from British Columbia best known for serving as President of the Métis National Council (MNC) from 2021 to 2024.

She made history as the first woman and youngest person elected to the role, guiding the MNC through a period of restructuring and renewed transparency. Caron previously served as the Métis Nation BC Minister of Youth, and has long been active in Métis cultural, governance, and youth initiatives. She remains a prominent national voice for Métis rights, Indigenous policy, and self-determination across Canada.



Natan Obed (Inuit, Nunatsiavut)

President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), the national organization representing Inuit across Inuit Nunangat.

Originally from Nain, Labrador, Obed has been elected and re-elected as ITK President since 2015, also serving as the national Inuit spokesperson and Vice President of the Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada. He has spent his career working within Inuit organizations to advance health, education, environmental policy, and Inuit rights. Obed is widely recognized for his leadership on climate change, housing, and the implementation of Inuit specific policy frameworks at the federal level.



Dr. Wilton "Willie" Littlechild (Cree, Maskwacis)

Cree lawyer, former MP, and internationally respected Indigenous rights advocate from Maskwacis, Alberta.

A Residential School survivor, he served as one of the three commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, helping lead national hearings and shape the TRC's Calls to Action. Littlechild has represented Indigenous peoples at the United Nations for decades and was instrumental in the development of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. He has also served as Grand Chief of the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations and remains a highly-regarded Elder and statesman in Treaty 6 and beyond.

Note to Reader

The interview remarks from Cassidy Caron, Natan Obed, and Dr. Willie Littlechild that appear in this project were not new consultations conducted specifically for this initiative. Rather, they are excerpted from past interviews that Two Canoes Media previously held with each individual. We have included their insights here to enrich the content, but readers should be aware that these conversations were part of earlier Two Canoes Media projects and not exclusive to this report.

All these individuals' insights collectively shaped the recommendations in this report. We acknowledge and thank them for sharing their knowledge and time. It is our hope that this summary honours their perspectives and will lead to concrete improvements in how southern Alberta's film industry engages with Indigenous communities.

We encourage filmmakers to view these community contributors not just as sources to cite, but as potential future collaborators. If you're working in Treaty 7, chances are some of these individuals (or people like them) could be the advisors, cast, or crew on your project. The guide you're reading is, in a sense, an introduction to them and to their values. The next step is to engage with them in person, with the same respect shown here.

Ultimately, the goal is that these protocols become a living document rather than a simple checklist, a way of working toward partnership and great storytelling. By following them, you won't just avoid missteps; you'll likely discover new creative avenues. Indigenous cultures are vibrant and full of stories, humour, and perspectives that can enrich any film. When a production takes the time to build trust, communities often respond with amazing support. Maybe an Elder shows the crew a special scenic spot no location scout knew about, or a craftsperson lends authentic props that make a scene shine, or a local actor steals a scene with genuine flair. These rewards come only when you've laid the groundwork of respect.

As Holly often says, reconciliation in film is about moving from a past of exclusion to a future of collaboration. We're starting to see more Indigenous-led shows and films, which is fantastic. Non-Indigenous filmmakers working in Indigenous territories have a responsibility to do so ethically, and an opportunity to do so beautifully. We hope this guide has given you both the inspiration and the information to engage in that process confidently.

Film and television at their best are about storytelling, and in Treaty 7, story has always been a sacred gift. If you're fortunate enough to be welcomed into that circle of stories, carry that honour with humility and gratitude. The protocols here are a compass to help you navigate the journey. When in doubt, remember the core principles we've touched on repeatedly: relationship, respect, consent, and reciprocity. If those are your North Star, you will find your way.

Happy filming in Treaty 7! May your project move in a good way – creative, honest, and rooted in friendship and respect with the people and Nations of this land. Each time you call 'Action!' you're also choosing to walk toward *miyo wîcêhtowin*, good relations, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the film industry. Our hope is that these protocols help you travel that road with humility, so that when the work is done, everyone can say we told this story together, in a respectful way.

kinanâskomitin (Thank you in Cree),

Holly Fortier and Two Canoes Media





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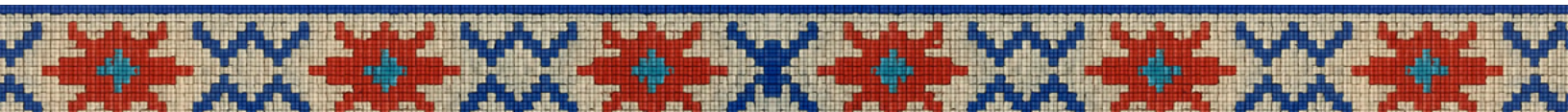
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