Dalhousie University – Elder-in-Residence Program

Protocol

Purpose: The Elder-in-Residence Program is in place to provide support and counsel to students. The purpose of this Protocol is to assist faculty, staff, and student organizations who express an interest in the services of an Elder for events such as workshops, conferences, celebrations, or other gatherings.

Approach: When contacting the Elder-in-Residence program (Elders@dal.ca or 494-6803), be clear about your need. Respect that Geri Musqua-Leblanc, our Elder Coordinator, will know the appropriate ceremony to fit your needs. The Elder Coordinator will suggest an Elder based on your requirements. Elders have certain gifts and carry knowledge around specific ceremonies (Pipe Ceremonies, Opening/Closing prayers, Sweat Lodge, etc.). Not all Elders carry the same knowledge/gifts.

The Elder Coordinator is there to ensure that:

- You are guided appropriately;
- You understand the respectful offering of gifts;
- We ensure the respectful treatment of Elders;
- We build an awareness of other services that may be available upon request.

Indigenous Elders Council – this council is comprised of the Elders participating in, and guiding, this program.

We feel very strongly about the respectful treatment of our Elders and the Indigenous knowledge they carry. Therefore, we have created this protocol document to assist the university community with knowledge about how and when to consult traditional Elders in a way that is respectful to our traditional peoples, cultures, and our communities. The Indigenous Elders Council role is to assist and protect both the Elders and Dalhousie University.
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In order to maintain a respectful attitude towards the Elders, the following protocols need to be followed:

**Extending invitation to Elders**

Elders understand modern technology. It is perfectly acceptable to make an initial request and to confirm Elder availability by phone or e-mail, but once you meet the Elder in person you must then offer tobacco.

Elders are offered tobacco when asked to share their knowledge. The exchange of tobacco is similar to a contract between two parties where the Elder is agreeing to do what is asked. The one offering the tobacco has obligations to respect the Teachings and the Teacher.

**Preparing a tobacco pouch.**

Tobacco can be given in a pouch that is prepared by wrapping the tobacco in a piece of cloth or even in the form of a cigarette. The minimum amount of tobacco is the amount needed to use in a Ceremonial Pipe. Tobacco is a sacred medicine and only commercial tobacco or tobacco in its natural form (kinikinik) is acceptable. Some people have asked if a mixture of “healthy” herbs or other medicines can be used instead of tobacco – the answer is NO. Whatever your views are on tobacco, it is still a sacred medicine to Indigenous people.

Please contact the Elder Coordinator if you need guidance on how to do this. Geri is happy to help you prepare tobacco pouches if needed.

**Asking an Elder in Person:**

If you meet with the Elder Coordinator in person to request services, bring a tobacco pouch. The Elder Coordinator will accept or decline on behalf of the Elder who will do the ceremony, and the Elder Coordinator will advise what next steps you should take.

Place the pouch of tobacco in front of the Elder Coordinator and state your request. Always speak to the tobacco when making your request. If Elder Coordinator cannot accommodate your request, they will say so and not accept the tobacco. The Elder Coordinator indicates acceptance of your request by picking up the tobacco. If you hand it directly to the Elder you do not give the Elder the opportunity to accept or pass on your request – it takes away their choice. It is perfectly appropriate to ask for a referral if the Elder is unable to comply with your request.

NEVER request to have Traditional Teachers/Elders/Medicines/Ceremonies if alcohol is present at your event.
It will be the University’s responsibility to provide appropriate space based on your stated need.

**What to do at the time of your event.**

Elders are never paid for their knowledge but can be paid to provide help and guidance for your event. A monetary gift in the range of $225 is to be provided when you greet the Elder and can be discreetly placed in their palm. If you have not already personally met with the Elder Coordinator you can make your tobacco offering at this time.

Before the modern era, Elders were given food, clothing and other necessities in exchange for their help. Therefore monetary gifts are acceptable if presented as a gift for their help and not payment in exchange for their knowledge.

**Elders must never be asked to sign a receipt.**

When offering the gift (at the event), if it is financial, make sure you have a witness sign your paperwork to ensure accountability for the money provided to the Elder.

**Expectation for Your Role at the Event**

Always ensure there is a host/escort for the Elder attending the event. Meet the Elder at the door with a taxi chit. Take the Elder into the room, and do the introductions. Include the Elder’s name and where the Elder is from, and state the purpose of the Elder’s visit. The Elder will then take over and request that people either sit or stand. When the Elder is finished with their teachings, they will hand it back to you. Again, do not impose a time limit on the Elder, they know what is appropriate. Never interrupt the Elder.

**Smudging**

If you request a Smudging Ceremony, know that there is limited space on campus where smudging is permitted.

The Elder will know the protocol to follow. The Smudging Ceremony is a purifying ceremony for individuals, gatherings, and space. During this ceremony, it is important to have a window that will open, or a fan that will draw out the air.

Personal smudging is available upon request.

**NOTE: ELDERS ARE RESPONSIBLE TO RAISE AWARENESS OF ALLERGIES OR SENSITIVITIES**