

# INDIGENOUS CULTURAL COMPETENCIES

## 2018 Pre-Conference Workshop Summary

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As the BCMA Roundup Editorial Committee representative, I had the unique opportunity of attending the 2018 BCMA Conference pre-conference session on Indigenous Cultural Competency. Located in Kelowna, BC on the traditional territory of the Sylix/Okanagan territory, museum professionals, collaborators, and influencers came together to learn best practices from leading industry professionals on how to practice reconciliation and de-colonization within our communities.

The day opened with a powerful message from Chief Robert Joseph, Ambassador of Reconciliation Canada: “May the waters stay clear, and the trees stay here for generations to come.” His message anchored the session’s theme: our industry’s role in reconciliation through providing living, safe spaces for dialogue, collaboration, and innovation. Angela Marstin from the First Peoples’ Cultural Council continued this

message through highlighting the importance of innovative, collaborative, and inclusive institutional practices developed with indigenous communities. She emphasized the importance of indigenous stakeholders’ involvement and direction when it comes to creating interpretive educational material about their own cultures. Our institutions can facilitate conversations about a difficult past while developing hope for the future through establishing trust, understanding, and open communication. To see this work in practice, look to the Exhibit Spotlight on the Body Languages exhibit at the Bill Reid Gallery featured later in this issue.

The day took form with sessions lead by representatives from multiple stakeholder groups. In direct response to a request from the community, Dr. Rob Hancock from the Office of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement from the University of Victoria lead a training session on Indigenous Cultural Competency. For the Cultural Acumen Training portion of

the day, Dr. Rob Hancock provided an abridged version of the Indigenous Cultural Acumen Training (ICAT) program at the University of Victoria. He spoke poignantly about relationships being at the heart of reconciliation, humanizing the work ahead through the development of skills and knowledge shared around Indigenous culture by deepening relationships based on common threads of family, trust, love and hope. His 90-minute session focused on delivering a foundational primer on the colonial context of Indigenous people in Canada, providing insights on how to engage with Indigenous topics by looking to the past, present, and future. For the past, he challenged us to consider the living communities tied to the land through stories, histories and traditions. For the present, to consider our responsibility to strive to learn more about being in the land of other people by thinking of our own histories. For the future, he urged us to consider the implications of the legacy will leave behind by engaging in reconciliation and truth-telling.

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**“If we are moving from what we’ve always done in the past, then we should move in a direction where we find that museums are the conduits of the message of reconciliation and change. That everything is living, culture, language, ideas. And the future is ours to hold.”**

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— Chief Robert Joseph

The afternoon sessions continued to address questions on how to speak the truth, repair broken trusts, and address decolonization efforts through innovative, collaborative cultural practices. Paula Amos from Indigenous Tourism BC spoke on authentic indigenous tourism, Ursula Pfahler, Senior Heritage Planner debriefed current Heritage Branch initiatives as a senior planner with the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations. A panel of industry leaders including Jordon Coble from the Sncewips Heritage Museum, Wendy Write from Smithers Public Library, Elizabeth Shaffer from the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre, Genevieve Weber from the Royal BC Museums Archives, and Raymond Frogner from the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation presented on current work being done with within their institutions. As a group of archivists, heritage planners and cultural leaders, the panel shared on the resounding theme of collaboration to share important messages on the histories, language, traditions, and governance of First Nation communities.

A clear takeaway from the day was that museums have a transformational opportunity to live the values of reconciliation by weaving them through the programs and initiatives created within their communities. The resounding themes of the session echoed throughout the next three days and continued to provide foundations for dialogue about innovation and technology’s uses in addressing reconciliation as a value within institutional walls. As reconciliation continues to be a topic at the forefront of current political, cultural, and social platforms in Canada, museums are well-positioned to educate on shared histories through the interpretation of stories that will continue to form our understanding of people and place. To quote Chief Robert Joseph, who eloquently provided the words to carry our head and hearts forward: “If we are moving from what we’ve always done in the past, then we should move in a direction where we find that museums are the conduits of the message of reconciliation and change. That everything is living, culture, language, ideas. And the future is ours to hold.”

# Additional Resources

## TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

Find the commission's calls to action and other resources at [nctr.ca](http://nctr.ca)

## THINK BEFORE YOU APPROPRIATE

This booklet from IPinCH provides advice to designers and marketers on why and how to avoid misappropriation. [www.sfu.ca/ipinch/resources/teaching-resources/think-before-you-appropriate/](http://www.sfu.ca/ipinch/resources/teaching-resources/think-before-you-appropriate/)

## LOCAL CONTEXTS

Local Contexts is an initiative to support Native, First Nations, Aboriginal, and Indigenous communities in the management of their intellectual property and cultural heritage specifically within the digital environment [localcontexts.org/](http://localcontexts.org/)

## CONTINUED READING

Paulette Regan’s *Unsettling the Settler Within*

*Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*

Janice Williamson’s *Sounding Differences: Conversations With Seventeen Canadian Women Writers*