

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

**A GUIDED
WORKBOOK**



**BC MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The opportunity to support and expand organizations' work towards relationship building is an honour for the BC Museums Association. The work laid out in this document is a result of a national survey, a working group, and collaboration with partners like the Musqueam Archives.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the BCMA and the archives department at Musqueam First Nation began chatting about ways to collaborate. The two organizations found common ground in their frustrations; a lack of meaningful momentum in relationship building despite years of discussions, conferences, and workshops on the topic. Through these conversations, the idea of offering a survey was formed, to get at the root of what barriers exist from the perspective of people working in heritage institutions to achieving relationships with Indigenous communities.

Out of this survey, resources and programming priorities have been created and future projects will be pursued. Many of the survey responses suggested a lack of self-reflection and self-directed learning ahead of reaching out to Indigenous communities, a lack of continuity in relationship building through staff turnover, and a need to center Indigenous experiences and priorities.

This workbook was created to help address the self-reflection that non-Indigenous institutions can be doing to help alleviate some concerns and to lay a foundation for better relationships to be created when the opportunity arises. Organizations may be rushing to create relationships without learning, questioning, and reflecting on their own practices and histories, therefore expecting Indigenous communities to reflect for them, creating inequality in labor, both physical and emotional.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING?

In the business world, a stakeholder is a “party that has an interest in a company and can either affect or be affected by the business.” Oxford dictionary defines a stakeholder as “a person with an interest or concern in something, especially a business.” The term **stakeholder** is often not the most appropriate term to use when discussing Indigenous communities. Used in reference to economic capital, usually gained through environmental exploitation and off of the work of labourers, it is a value-driven term. In a colonial context, the term stakeholder directly relates to the theft of land and territories from Indigenous communities by colonizers. **Indigenous people are not stakeholders, they are rights holders.**

A **partnership** is defined by Merriam-Webster as “a legal relation existing between two or more persons contractually associated as joint principals in a business” or “a relationship resembling a legal partnership and usually involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities”.

A partnership is also not a relationship, it's a transaction.

Relationship building means being in relation to one another; to be bonded through a caring connection. This involves feelings, emotions, care, and trust. This relationship takes time and commitment.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

Use this workbook as guidance to assess any steps that your organization might need to take prior to relationship-building efforts with Indigenous communities. These questions are for a self-assessment that promotes awareness and understanding as an institution of any past actions and current issues. **This is not exhaustive** but provides some points of consideration that may not have been discussed as an institution and will result in some actions your organization can undertake to create a foundation for relationship-building work.

The questions for exploration are listed on the left, with space on the right for your notes, ideas, and action items that could help your staff and organization explore those thoughts more fully. Make note of any sticking points or areas of resistance that come up as you work through the prompts and try to address these without blame. Reflecting on practices and behaviours of the past will not be comfortable or easy, but it is important to know how things happened so that you can improve in the future.

PREPARE

Reflecting on practices and behaviours of the past will not be comfortable or easy, but it is important to assess past actions so that you can improve in the future.

STEP ONE

Be mindful to not attack or place blame directly on others as you work through the reflections.

STEP TWO

Prompts where staff or volunteers push back or feel a need to defend the work done are great opportunities to explore bias, staff culture, social shifts or knowledge gaps that might need to be addressed.

STEP THREE

Make action plans to address any prompts that you could not respond to, or had trouble responding to. Use the progress tracker to chart a plan forward.

GETTING STARTED

Let's start by looking at what you already do or already know. Its okay to be starting at the beginning and to not have answers to the questions below.

List what you know about the Indigenous communities around you.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

What does relationship building look like to you?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

CONSIDER

Consider past actions and what you have in your collection

	Notes	Actions
Have there been past and/or failed relationship-building efforts?		
Explore what happened, and think about why that outcome occurred.		
Complete an audit of belongings, ancestors, and archival data in your collection. This includes research into how it arrived in your possession, its affiliation with community/ies, if repatriation has occurred before, etc.		

CAPITAL

Consider how you will fund and support this work.

	Notes	Actions
<p>What does your organization hold that might need to be further researched?</p> <p>For example, do you need to hire a researcher to further provenance research? Will you need to undertake non-destructive testing for toxins previously used as pest control?</p>		
<p>Do you have funds to undertake relationship-building and repatriation work?</p>		
<p>How much does your annual budget allow for honoraria or fees, and do you have a set fee structure?</p>		
<p>How will the funds be provided to those you consult and whose time and knowledge you utilize?</p>		

CONDUCT

Consider your existing policies and plans, and how those might need to be adapted to support relationship building.

	Notes	Actions
Do you have a repatriation policy in place?		
Is the policy flexible and publicly available?		
Are there existing policies and procedures that might cause conflict?		
Have you integrated relationship building into your staff and volunteer onboarding? Have you provided training for existing staff?		
Does your team know the strategic plans and priorities?		

COMMUNITY

Consider the priorities - known and unknown - of the local Indigenous community and the impact of your work.

	Notes	Actions
How might your organization's plans and priorities differ from what the Indigenous community prioritizes?		
How can you align plans and priorities to maximize the positive impact of repatriating and collaborating?		
Can you work with the community to ensure plans and priorities are effective in the long term for all parties?		
Have you done your own learning and research?		
Do you know which communities have connections to the region you cover in your mandate, have you looked at the community newsletters and events?		

COMMUNICATE

How will you move forward if things don't go as you hoped?

	Notes	Actions
When you know who you want to reach out to, do you know how you will contact them, or if they have culture departments, and how they prefer to communicate?		
What will you do if you don't hear back?		
What will you do if their priorities lie elsewhere in their community?		
How will you continue your work without their input?		

PROGRESS TRACKER

This work may not be completed within a set timeframe but assigning work monthly may aid you in maintaining progress in your relationship building.

	Task	Assigned	Done
Jan			<input type="radio"/>
Feb			<input type="radio"/>
Mar			<input type="radio"/>
April			<input type="radio"/>
May			<input type="radio"/>
June			<input type="radio"/>
July			<input type="radio"/>

PROGRESS TRACKER

	Task	Assigned	Done
Aug			<input type="radio"/>
Sept			<input type="radio"/>
Oct			<input type="radio"/>
Nov			<input type="radio"/>
Dec			<input type="radio"/>
Jan			<input type="radio"/>
Feb			<input type="radio"/>

FINAL THOUGHTS

Completing the workbook won't make relationships happen; relationships are built through time and commitment, trust and care. This workbook does not magically make you an ally, a collaborator or an organization of importance. There will be many reasons Indigenous communities choose not to work with you when you are ready, including competing priorities, capacity, funding, trauma, etc. The act of continually reflecting and learning will help your organization be ready to build a relationship when the opportunity arises.

The BCMA encourages you to continue to prioritize your own learning and internal capacity building long before (and after) you make connections with Indigenous communities. Continual growth will help you to remain informed, sensitive and reflexive to community needs. We encourage you to expand your knowledge by looking at resources that are already available; Indigenous activists and museum professionals have had their voices published in numerous reports, papers and books over the decades and we encourage you to seek out these resources and dedicate time to reading them. We include a resource list below with some options that are free online.

We also encourage you to expand your exposure through day-to-day engagements with news, local websites, or your social media feeds. When you check your favourite news outlet, take a moment to also read Indigenous-led news sources like APTN or IndigiNews. If you check your municipal website for updates, browse the local Band office website for a community newsletter or events update. If your social media feed is full of local community members and organizations, ensure you follow Indigenous organizations, makers and community members too. When you choose books to read, pick up Indigenous authors.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It is ultimately your responsibility to expand your understanding and to prioritize this work. You must do the work yourself and with your own organizations so that Indigenous People, your Indigenous staff, and Indigenous volunteers are not burdened with educating about and correcting the trauma that our sector has been responsible for. We must dedicate ourselves to this work to ensure that the next generation has a stronger foundation to continue.

This workbook is a living document, if you have edits or suggestions for additional resources please email bcma@museum.bc.ca.