

OVERVIEW: GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH / ABOUT INDIGENOUS PARTNERS

BACKGROUND

Nature United is a Canadian conservation organization that creates solutions for people and nature by building diverse partnerships to protect lands and waters and ensure nature is the foundation of healthy communities, economies and future opportunities. We are the Canadian affiliate of the world's largest conservation organization, The Nature Conservancy (nature.org).

Nature United believes the increased authority of Indigenous peoples to steward their lands and waters results in durable and lasting solutions for people and nature over time. As such, Nature United works in partnership to support Indigenous-led conservation, which is defined and implemented by Indigenous communities, grounded in Indigenous values and perspectives, and often focuses on the interconnected issues of supporting vibrant communities, strong cultures, viable economies, and healthy ecosystems.

Nature United has developed Communication Guidelines to direct and support our communications with and about our work with Indigenous partners.

The goals of Nature United's **Communications Guidelines** are two-fold:

1. To ensure that all communications work that is led or initiated by Nature United is done with utmost respect and transparency towards Indigenous partners and communities; and
2. To establish clear and agreed-upon guidelines and procedures to inform how this work is undertaken for the benefit of all partners involved.

Note that this overview document has been condensed from our full Guidelines for Communicating with/about Indigenous Partners, which includes Nature United's step-by-step processes and considerations for developing communications based on the above goals.

OUR APPROACH

Working with conservation staff and Indigenous partners, and based on a commitment to understanding the role of conservation organizations in colonialism, Nature United has developed an understanding of what has worked and not worked in developing communication materials about collaborative projects with Indigenous partners. Nature United's Communication Guidelines build on that understanding and reflect the trial and error of these working relationships, alongside the good will and commitment that keep them strong. As we continue to uncover insights and learn together, we will revisit and adjust these guidelines to ensure we communicate about collaborative projects with respect, mutual benefit and efficiency.

Our Communication Guidelines reflect and are guided by Nature United's broader work aimed at being a respectful partner to Indigenous communities. At Nature United, we recognize that what we communicate, how we develop communications materials, and how we communicate about shared work is a cornerstone of the trusted partnerships we build. If we fail at communicating respectfully, we fail these important relationships.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

At Nature United, we are committed to the following foundational principles in all communications related to the partnerships and projects between Nature United and Indigenous communities:

1. **Consent:** Nature United will obtain consent from Indigenous partners or any individuals represented in our communications, whether quoted, referenced or visually represented, prior to publication. We will follow a clear and transparent process for understanding and sharing the terms of consent, and obtaining and implementing consent.

2. **Respect:** Nature United will prioritize respect for Indigenous partners over all other communication objectives. We will create safe and open lines of communication, listen to partner needs and perspectives, and clarify and honour boundaries or conditions that partners and Nature United may set. We are also committed to establishing non-burdensome systems for the planning, development and review of communication materials.
3. **Authenticity:** Wherever possible, Nature United will develop communications centred around Indigenous partners telling their own story, in their own voice. We will always acknowledge the leadership and role of Indigenous partners; we will not claim ownership or full credit for work done in partnership. We acknowledge that Indigenous peoples are the owners of any Indigenous knowledge that may be shared through our joint project work.
4. **Reciprocity:** Nature United recognizes that developing communication materials often requires considerable time, energy and resources from Indigenous partners. Nature United is committed to supporting the communications priorities, needs and capacity of our partners related to our shared work, such as through capacity building or creating communications materials for Indigenous partners.

CONSIDERATIONS

Relationship Building & Management: Partnering with Nature United involves developing communications about the joint work that is being undertaken or supported by Nature United. As we establish relationships with new Indigenous communities and strengthen existing relationships, we strive to have clear and upfront conversations about the need for Nature United to communicate about the work. This is necessary for reporting to funders, educating the public about Nature United's joint work with Indigenous partners, and attracting new resources to support ongoing work. As part of relationship-building, it is equally important to understand the communications needs and desires of Indigenous partners about the joint work, as well as clarify who the main contacts are from the community that Nature United staff will be working with.

Communications Goals: It is important that Nature United and Indigenous partners share and understand each other's respective communications goals and requirements. These goals may be included in a high-level Partnership Agreement, or can be shared during communications-specific discussions. We recommend recording the outcomes of these discussions, and when possible, formalizing them in a communications agreement between Nature United and the Indigenous partner.

Process: When it comes to developing communications materials, it is important that Nature United staff and Indigenous partners have a shared understanding of:

1. What communication material is being produced and why? (Description and Purpose)
2. How will information be gathered? (Content Development)
3. What will the review process be? (Content Review)
4. What is required with respect to consent and approvals? (Approval and Consent)
5. Who will have access to and use of communications materials? (Use and Distribution)

Developing communications will inevitably be both planned and opportunistic. We will strive to be nimble and responsive as opportunities arise. However, regardless of the opportunity, we will maintain our commitment to the principles of consent, respect, authenticity and reciprocity, as well as honour any agreements that have been made between Nature United and an Indigenous partner.

Content Development: In most cases, content for communications will be developed by Nature United staff. We acknowledge that it can take a significant amount of time to develop content. We look for opportunities to build on existing work, instead of always starting from scratch.

Content Review: Together with Indigenous partners, we will establish who will be involved in reviewing communications material at draft and/or final stages. This will vary by the project and the partnership but will typically include Nature United staff, project lead(s) from Indigenous partner, and others who are represented and/or have indicated that they want to review materials prior to final production/publication.

Approval and Consent: Obtaining consent is a mandatory step prior to the publication of any materials. Nature United has developed forms for the consent and release of information gathered via quotes, interviews, photographs and video. Please note that special consent forms are required for minors.

Use and Distribution: We are committed to informing Indigenous partners about how communication materials will be used and distributed. We will also ensure that Indigenous partners have access to and copies of any communication materials that are developed.

CONTRACTORS AND OTHERS WORKING ON COMMUNICATIONS MATERIALS

In many cases, Nature United relies on contractors (e.g. photographers, videographers, writers) to support the creation of communications materials about joint work between Nature United and Indigenous partners. We require all contractors to comply with our Communications Guidelines.

Photography and Videography: When it comes to photographers and videographers, we take great care to ensure the photo or video shoot is conducted in a respectful way that maintains good working relationships with Indigenous partners and upholds the principles and commitments outlined in the Communications Guidelines.

We are also committed to ensuring the respectful use of all photos/videos across our organization and global affiliate. In most cases, Nature United staff will work with the Indigenous partner to determine which photos/videos are used and how they are shared beyond the initial purpose.

External Groups: In some cases, external groups (e.g. journalists, filmmakers, writers, etc.) may request or be solicited to document and/or create stories about shared projects. Once Nature United and Indigenous partners have determined that there is a benefit to the coverage, we will clarify expectations on both sides and prepare external groups. The goal of any preparation is to help ensure stories or communication materials are reflective of the perspective and realities of Indigenous partners and also mitigate risk surrounding the relationships between Nature United and Indigenous partners.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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