

# BUILD TOGETHER: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE BUILDING TRADES



**CBTU**  
CANADA'S BUILDING  
TRADES UNIONS

**INDIGENOUS ALLYSHIP**

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## **WHAT IS AN ALLY?**

An ally is someone who supports and advocates for others. Allyship is more than just tolerance—it means actively trying to break down the barriers and create better circumstances for others, including people in marginalized groups.

## **WHY BE AN ALLY?**

In the workplace, some people may face prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and harassment. This particularly affects racialized and marginalized groups, like Indigenous people. By being an ally, you are helping to create a work environment where your Indigenous colleagues can be healthy, happy, safe, productive, and empowered members of the team. You are also helping your workplace to attract, recruit, and keep workers that have a lot to offer. Workplaces that embrace diversity benefit from having different perspectives, experiences, and skillsets around the table and are better equipped to tackle complex problems and find unique solutions. Being an ally is one way to let Indigenous colleagues know that their contributions are valued in your workplace.

## **LEARNING TO BE AN ALLY**

The first step towards becoming an ally is recognizing the current and historical oppression of Indigenous people in Canada. In the past, this has taken the form of genocide, deprivation of land, eradication of culture and language, the horrific abuse of Residential Schools, and the forceful removal of Indigenous children from their homes and into the child welfare system. The impact of these acts is still felt by survivors and their descendants and will be felt by generations to come. Today, Indigenous people continue to suffer from systemic injustices, including underfunded infrastructure, access to education, underperforming health and social services, as well as disproportionately higher rates of incarceration in Canada's criminal justice system. Further, the ongoing epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls reflects systematic mishandling of Indigenous cases by both the police and justice systems.

Racism and discrimination continue to affect Indigenous people in various aspects of life, including in the workplace.

It is important to recognize that nobody is defined solely by one identity. Everyone has many identities that impact who they are: race, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, and economic background are just some examples. These identities intersect with each other and combine to give each of us different perspectives on the world. Allyship also requires us to be aware of our own identities and the privileges we have as non-Indigenous people. This doesn't mean dwelling on feelings of guilt, but rather reflecting on past actions and

beliefs and challenging ourselves to do better.

## **ALLYSHIP IN ACTION**

Being an ally in the workplace means challenging discrimination, stereotypes, and other examples of oppression when you encounter them. As an ally, you are taking on this work to help reduce the burden on your Indigenous colleagues; or any other marginalized group for that matter. Remember, being an ally does not stop when a marginalized person leaves the room. What people say behind closed doors says a lot about the culture of your workplace—and being an ally means changing that culture.

Here are some examples when an ally might need to step up:

1. When someone makes a joke using a racial stereotype or an offensive term about Indigenous culture.
2. When a colleague makes assumptions about how an Indigenous person will behave, based on generalizations about their culture.
3. When a manager or supervisor shows preference or favouritism based on race, either overtly or in the way they assign work or form teams.
4. When co-workers exclude an Indigenous colleague from meetings, a lunch table, or after-work activities.
5. When someone wears a logo or slogan that mocks Indigenous people or culture.

When you witness something like this happening, it can be difficult to speak up, and not all situations can be dealt with in the same way. Sometimes, you can directly address the problem and other times it might be best to take it up with a supervisor. In most scenarios, speaking to them one-on-one is the best approach and pointing out that a joke isn't funny or asking a colleague to explain the reasoning behind their stereotype are small, meaningful steps you can take as an ally. Challenging racism and oppression in your workplace can be difficult, and by taking a stand, you are not only making your work environment better and safer for your Indigenous colleagues, but you are also setting a positive example for your non-Indigenous colleagues to follow.

## **WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS**

Employers in Canada have an obligation to take steps to eliminate discrimination or negative treatment (of employees or clients) based on any of the grounds listed in the Canadian Human Rights Act or the comparable Provincial Human Rights Act. These grounds include:

- Race
- National or ethnic origin
- Colour
- Religion
- Age
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Marital status
- Family status
- Genetic characteristics
- Disability
- A conviction for which a pardon has been granted or a record suspended

This law means that sometimes it is necessary to treat people differently to be fair. However, it is better to prevent barriers in the first place than to remove them after the fact.

### **These are just some examples of barriers that you can proactively remove in your workplace:**

1. Create employee dress codes that are inclusive of Indigenous cultural clothing and traditions – while recognizing that safety on jobsites is a priority.
2. For the health and well-being of Indigenous employees, design policies so that employees can attend spiritual gatherings, ceremonies, or events which may not coincide with existing schedules or time off. These events are incredibly important for personal and cultural growth and can contribute to a sense of identity.
3. Be aware of cultural differences and don't expect everyone to behave according to your standards. For example, some Indigenous people may prefer not to hold sustained eye contact or give a firm handshake. This is a mark of respect and not evasion.
4. Consider providing opportunities for Indigenous champions on jobsites (over and above shop stewards and owner-appointed liaison representatives). These champions could organize cultural events, coordinate mentorship, or provide forums or educational workshops.

5. Host events that recognize Indigenous employees and their achievements, creating a sense of community, understanding, and support. This also could be used as an opportunity to promote cultural awareness.

When making accommodations or attempting to remove barriers, it is always best to listen to the people who are being impacted. When trying to remove barriers for Indigenous people in your workplace, ask Indigenous employees what their specific needs are – but don't assume that every Indigenous person will have the same needs.

## **ACKNOWLEDGING TERRITORY**

A simple way that your workplace can demonstrate its commitment to Indigenous allyship is by acknowledging the traditional land on which you operate. Many Indigenous people feel a strong connection between the land and their identity and culture. This connection has been disrupted by centuries of displacement. Acknowledging the people who have lived on and cared for the land for many thousands of years shows you are aware of historical injustices and dedicated to reconciliation. A verbal land acknowledgement might take place at the beginning of a meeting, conference, retreat, grand opening, or any other special event. It can also be displayed permanently on a sign or plaque inside or outside your building. Acknowledging traditional territory shouldn't be treated as merely symbolic or as something you "have to do" - it should reflect serious consideration on your part, and a conscious effort to work towards reconciliation. Land acknowledgments should take place regardless of whether there are Indigenous people present at an event or in your workplace.

## **LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT EXAMPLE**

"We recognize that our operations in the greater Ottawa area take place on unceded Anishinaabe Algonquin territory. The Algonquin people have never relinquished, sold, traded, or transferred ownership of their land to European settler colonies. The peoples of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation have lived on this territory for millennia. Their culture and presence have nurtured and continue to nurture this land. We recognize the historical claim of these original inhabitants and are committed to working in solidarity with Indigenous people toward a goal of reconciliation and decolonization."

## **KEY ELEMENTS OF A LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

- The land acknowledgement takes place at the beginning of your event, before any other business

- Do your research. Check with local communities or Native Friendship Centres to ensure you are acknowledging the correct nations or peoples, using the correct pronunciation and spelling. If you are not sure where to start, this site might help you identify whose territory you are on: [native-land.ca/](http://native-land.ca/)
- Acknowledge the traditional caretakers of the land you occupy, as well as the current or more recent Indigenous people who have lived there
- Acknowledge your commitment to working to improve relationships with Indigenous people. This is not a chance to brag, but a reminder of the work still to be done
- If you have invited guests or Elders from an Indigenous community to your event, you can ask them to welcome the crowd to their territory. A non-Indigenous person can acknowledge territory, but only a member of the Indigenous community can welcome others to their land



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY TRAINING PROGRAMS

- Consider community partnerships for training with a community advisory panel to guide the project. Community training reduces transportation costs and will enable more frequent connections between the program and the community
- Have buses available for local transportation during the training program
- Consider a later start time
- Allow for transition time. There are many barriers Indigenous people face
- including community pressures
- Host community celebrations i.e. Family Day
- Host workshops in partnership with Indigenous communities to prepare and educate employers
- Host employer meet-and-greets for the community. Have employers sit in on training classes
- Ensure that there are follow-up supports after training programs have wrapped up. Conduct regular check-ins with the Employer and Apprentices
- Provide mentorship training for your mentors. The CBTU mentorship alliance can help with this!





## **LEXICON**

### **INDIGENOUS**

A collective term for the original people of Canada and their descendants. It includes Métis, Inuit, and First Nations people, and shouldn't be used when only one of those groups is meant.

### **ABORIGINAL**

An older term which has been mostly replaced by "Indigenous", although it is still used in legal settings because it is used in the Constitution Act, 1982.

### **NATIVE**

Also an older term which has mostly been replaced by "Indigenous", although it is still used by some Indigenous people who identify with the term.

### **INDIAN**

An outdated term which should be avoided – it has been replaced by "First Nations", although it is still used in some legal settings.

### **FIRST NATIONS**

Refers to Indigenous people who are not Inuit or Metis, and should not be used when either of those groups are also referenced.

### **INUIT**

An Indigenous people living primarily in Inuit Nunangat, which includes Nunavut and parts

of Quebec, Labrador, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories.

### **METIS**

A distinct Indigenous nation whose ancestry includes European and Indigenous people. This should only refer to those who self-identify as Métis.

### **ELDER**

Someone recognized by their community as a keeper of traditional knowledge and cultural practices. Elders are highly respected and often take on the role of passing knowledge down to younger generations.

### **PRIVILEGE**

Rights, advantages, or access that are granted to some people over others because of a characteristic such as gender or race.

## RESOURCES

### ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

Assembly of First Nations is a national advocacy organization representing First Nations people and communities in Canada. [afn.ca/](http://afn.ca/)

### INUIT TAPIRIT KANATAMI

Inuit Tapirit Kanatami is a national organization representing the interests of Inuit in Canada. [itk.ca](http://itk.ca)

### MÉTIS NATION COUNCIL

Métis National Council represents the interests of the Métis Nation. [metisnation.ca](http://metisnation.ca)

### GROUNDWORK FOR CHANGE

Groundwork for Change is a website providing information to help non-Indigenous people grow relationships with Indigenous people that are rooted in solidarity and justice.

### DRAGONFLY CANADA

Dragonfly Canada provides training and resources that build understanding and awareness of Indigenous histories, perspectives, and experiences. [dragonfly.dk/dragonfly-canada](http://dragonfly.dk/dragonfly-canada)

### INDIGENOUS WORKS

Indigenous Works is a non-profit national organization with a mandate to improve the inclusion and engagement of Indigenous people in the Canadian economy. [iworks.org/](http://iworks.org/)

## ABORIGINAL CONSTRUCTION CAREERS

Aboriginal Construction Careers has created a toolkit for employers looking to recruit Indigenous workers in the construction industry. [caf-fca.org](http://caf-fca.org)

