



HOW TO INCLUDE AN INDIGENOUS WORKERS POSITION ON LOCAL EXECUTIVES

- A GUIDE



PRODUCED BY THE
INDIGENOUS
COMMITTEE
CUPEBC

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We would like to acknowledge that British Columbia is located on the homelands of 203 distinct Indigenous nations and cultures. Over 30 different languages and close to 60 unique dialects are spoken in the province. We also recognize the contributions that Métis, Inuit, and other Indigenous people have made in shaping and strengthening this province.



For settlers, the recognition of the contributions of Indigenous people must also be clearly and overtly connected to our collective commitment to make truth and reconciliation real in our communities, and to bring justice to Indigenous people in Canada.



INDIGENOUS WORKERS REPRESENTATIVE

At the 2021 CUPE BC Convention, delegates adopted a resolution to encourage locals to add an Indigenous workers' representative to their executive. This resolution was introduced and adopted because it recognized the importance of representation of Indigenous members on their executive boards. The addition of an Indigenous workers' representative is one way to ensure that Indigenous members are reflected in decision-making spaces.

This guide outlines the process and steps to consider as you move forward with this position. It is important to note that creating this position is just one step down a path of reconciliation. To support your work, the end of this guide includes a glossary of terms and additional resources.

THE THREE PEOPLE IN THIS CANOE
REPRESENTING THE THREE INDIGENOUS
GROUPS ON TURTLE ISLAND, WORKING
TOGETHER IN SOLIDARITY.



ACKNOWLEDGE AND OBSERVE

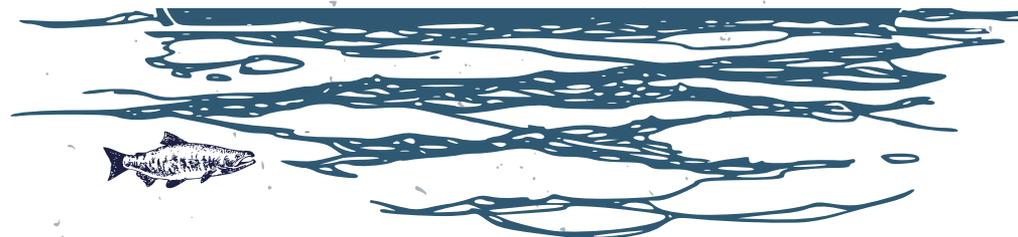
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Does your local executive understand the ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous people and the importance of reconciliation?
- Think about your current local executive, policies, and processes. Is it a space that is welcoming and accommodating for Indigenous members?
- Are Indigenous members actively participating in the union currently?
- What additional steps do you need to take to educate yourselves and your membership?

Cultural safety is essential to ensure that all members can participate in meetings. While the concept of cultural safety is still evolving, a culturally safe environment for Indigenous members can broadly be described as:

- one that is based on respectful engagement
- one that is socially, emotionally, and spiritually safe and supportive
- one that is free from racism and discrimination
- one that recognizes and strives to address the power imbalances and white supremacy inherent in colonial systems.

The concept of cultural safety asks: how safe did a person feel, in terms of being respected and assisted in having their cultural location, values, and preferences taken into account?



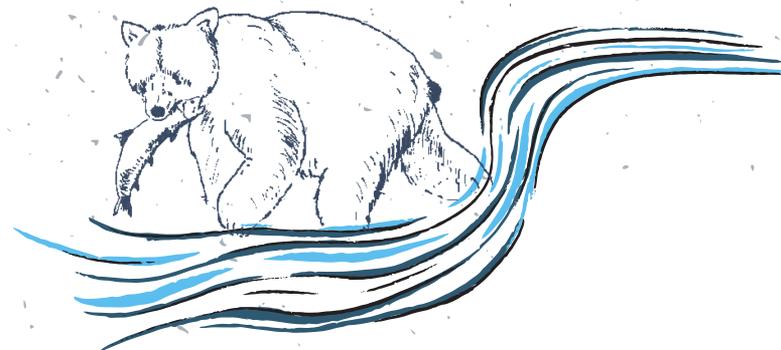
ACKNOWLEDGE AND OBSERVE

Cultural humility by non-Indigenous allies is a key component of a culturally safe space. The authors of *Creating a Culture for Change* explain this concept well:

“cultural humility is a process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another’s experience.”

It is important to be realistic when assessing where the local is at. We can only move forward together if we are starting from the same place of learning.

[1] Moser, S., & Dilling, L. (Eds.). (2007). *Creating a Climate for Change: Communicating Climate Change and Facilitating Social Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



EDUCATE

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Do the local executive and members understand both the history and the ongoing impacts of colonization in Canada?
- Do the local executive and members understand why equity issues and reconciliation are priorities of the union?
- Do members and the local executive understand why this position is important, and why it cannot be part of a broader diversity seat?

Ensure that general membership have had an opportunity to understand the function of the position and why it is necessary. It's ok to make mistakes, take time to learn together and prioritize opportunities for further education.

Education cannot only be done by Indigenous members – you may want to bring in allies or Indigenous facilitators to learn. Education is an ongoing process. There are resources in this guide that can help. CUPE's Union Education Department is also available to provide some training opportunities for members.

The inclusion of this position is largely to bring a different lens to all the work of the union – work including finances, education, policies. It's important to shift from the perspective of “how can an Indigenous representative teach the executive/members” to a more inclusive perspective of “how can an Indigenous workers' representative bring a different lens to decision-making and liaise with and promote the participation of other Indigenous members.” Making this shift could help frame discussions about the position itself. These positions should not be tokenized. Indigenous people are not all the same.

Importantly, an Indigenous workers' representative position is not intended simply to function as an “Indigenous voice.” The position must also have equal voting rights and say on all work of the local.



PLAN

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What process do you need to follow to add this position?
- If you need to change your bylaws, does notice of motion need to be served? Are you working toward a specific timeline?
- Do you have draft language to work from?

Before talking to Indigenous members and the broader membership, the local should plan out the work they need to do, in order to implement this position. Understand the processes and procedures of the locals. Do your own research, with the support of your National Representative, to think about what the position could look like for your local, as each local has a different structure. There are several ways to add an Indigenous workers' representative to your executive board. Some locals may choose to shift the focus of an existing position, while others may add a new position.

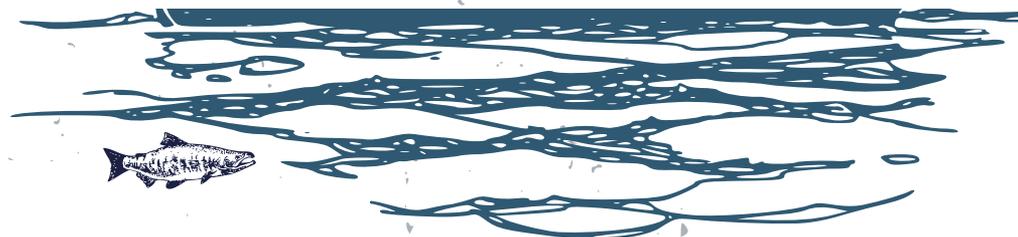
Think creatively about the context of your local specifically.

For most locals, the composition of your executive board is outlined in the local's bylaws. Therefore, changes to the structure of your executive board would be made through a resolution at your membership meeting to amend the bylaws. Bylaw changes need a 2/3 majority to pass and typically need notice of motion in advance of the meeting.

Think about your timelines. There should be sufficient time to move through all the steps in this guide, and education could create a lengthier process. Consider not only bringing in the new position, but what other training and tools will help them be successful; for example, planning for a parliamentary procedure workshop for the new executive.

Are there other planning steps that could be useful?

Some locals may want to do a survey to better understand the demographics of their membership, for example.



CONNECT

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Do you have a way to connect with Indigenous members of your local?
- Have you considered about how the executive is going to talk about this position and have a united voice about its importance?
- Will you connect through a special meeting? Area meetings? A general membership meeting?

It is key that local executive members consult with Indigenous members throughout the process of adding this position. There is a phrase, nothing about us without us, that encapsulates this process. Conversations about representation for Indigenous members should centre Indigenous members' voices. In conversations with Indigenous members, take time to listen to their ideas about the position, duties it should include, the election process, and other thoughts about the union that might arise. If you do not currently have a way to connect with Indigenous members, consider ideas to begin outreach and explain why this is something the local is considering.

Also connect with membership at-large to talk to them about their concerns and explain why this is a priority of the local. Are there things you can be doing now that bring in and support Indigenous members who are currently not actively participating in the union?



ORGANIZE

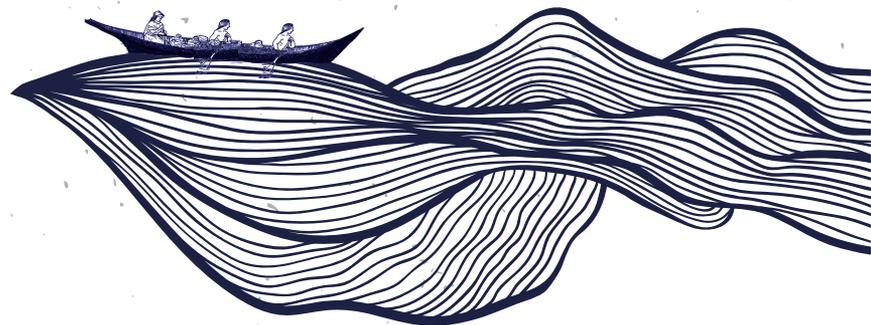
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Have you taken steps to consider questions or pushback you may receive and how the local will respond?
- Are allies comfortable taking the lead in conversations about representation for Indigenous members? If not, what will help them feel more confident in stepping up?
- Are there other members, not on the executive, who can support these conversations with other members?

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ON-GOING WORK

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

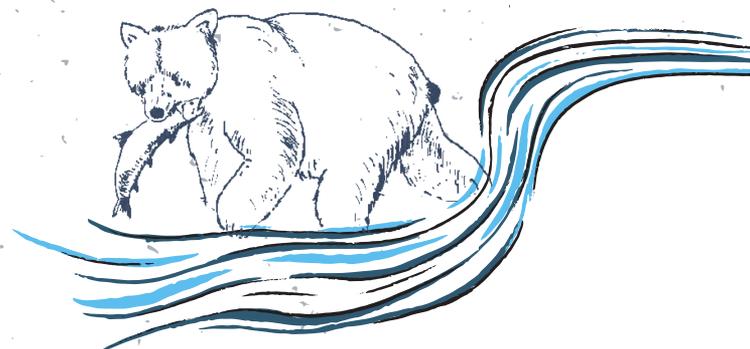
- What is the process to receive feedback from Indigenous members about the work of the union?
- Is reconciliation a topic on the agenda of membership meetings?
- Can reconciliation be incorporated into committee work?
- Are there relationships that can be built within the community to further reconciliation? For example, with other unions, with Friendship Centres, or with other allies?
- Does the local have a plan about how to move forward? Have you addressed the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action?
- How can reconciliation work be moved forward in the bargaining context?

Once you have successfully added the new position to your executive, consider what ongoing education and resources are needed to engage and support Indigenous members. This process is not just about checking a box, it is one step on the ongoing path of reconciliation. Support Indigenous members and allies to continue work toward reconciliation. Think about how to bring a different lens to the work of the union.

Avoid tokenizing equity positions. Tokenizing can look like only asking for input when issues related to the group they represent arise.

An Indigenous workers' representative can have suggestions around reconciliation, but they should be equally valued for their input on other parts of the union, including finances.

Tokenizing could also look like having the expectation that an Indigenous workers' representative will do land acknowledgements or are only there to serve as a teacher for others.



SAMPLE LANGUAGE

Language for bylaw changes should be developed in consultation with Indigenous members and should take into account the local-specific issues and needs. Below is an example of language that you may want to use as a starting point when developing language that works for your local.

The Indigenous Workers' Representative shall:

- Be an Indigenous member, identifying as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit.
- Be a full voting member of the Executive Board.
- Act as a liaison between the Executive Board and Indigenous members.
- Utilize an intersectional decision-making lens in all areas of union leadership.
- Bring forward recommendations to the Executive about how to address reconciliation and support Indigenous members.

This is a starting point, but each local will need to consider their own structure. If other positions have duties outlined in their bylaws, it makes sense to outline some duties for this position. If they do not, it might make sense to only reference the position itself to remain consistent.

Your staff representative, along with support from CUPE Human Rights Department, may be able to share ideas to strengthen proposed wording.



GLOSSARY

Ally: Someone who aligns with and supports a cause with another individual or group of people, usually not someone from the group being supported.

Colonization: The process of assuming another peoples' territory and applying one's own systems of law, government, and religion.

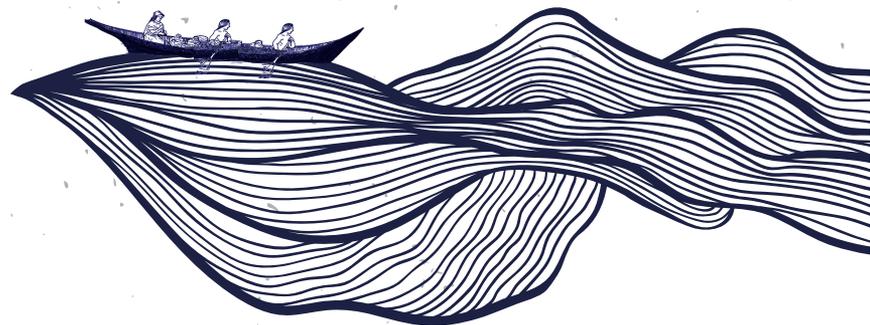
Cultural humility: Understanding and recognizing your own cultural biases, respecting other cultures, and realizing that you cannot know everything about other cultures. This can look like putting yourself in the position of a learner, listening rather than speaking.

Cultural safety: Cultural safety includes respectful engagement, and recognizes and addresses power imbalances stemming from the history of colonization. It seeks to eliminate structural racism and discrimination.

Cultural sensitivity: The knowledge, awareness, and acceptance of other cultures and cultural identities.

Decolonization: For individuals of settler identity (non-Indigenous people), decolonization involves breaking down the barriers that exist for indigenous people in our current structures, including power dynamics. It includes breaking down the falsity that Western thought and Western ways of being are superior, and instead valuing Indigenous knowledge and approaches. Decolonization also means changing prejudices about Indigenous peoples, and learning about their own identities in relationship to the land on which they live.

Diversity: Diversity describes the presence of diverse social groups within any collection of people, for example, race, class, Indigenous identity, gender identity and expression, ability, and sexuality. Diversity efforts are often focused on representation – i.e., who is present at the table.



GLOSSARY

Equity: Equity is about social justice for historically oppressed groups. Unlike equality, equity is not about treating everyone the same. Equitable outcomes and processes require recognizing and addressing power imbalances that lead to social advantage and disadvantage, and often require differential treatment and resource distribution.

Inclusion: Inclusion describes practice and effort to ensure that historically oppressed groups are not only present in spaces but that individuals belonging to these groups are welcomed, belong, and have equal voice. Inclusion efforts focus on whose voices are heard at the table and who has positions of power.

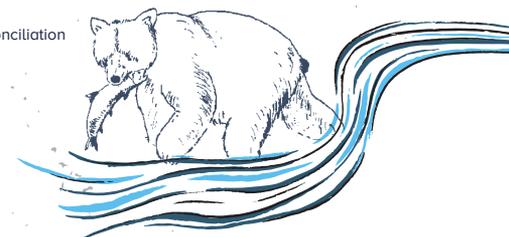
Indigenous: In Canada, Indigenous people include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. They are the first people of the land that is now called Canada, with their own distinct culture, governing structures, and languages.

Reconciliation: Reconciliation includes understanding the history of Canada's treatment of Indigenous people, acknowledging the harm that has been done to Indigenous people, atonement, and action to change behaviour. This is often coupled with the truth element of truth and reconciliation, as reconciliation relies upon a common understanding and acceptance of the truth of the past. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission says that "reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country."^[1]

Settler colonialism: Settler colonialism is a distinct type of colonialism that functions through the replacement of Indigenous populations with an invasive settler society that, over time, develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty.^[2] Settler colonialism persists in the ongoing elimination of Indigenous populations and control over their lands.

Tokenism: Making efforts that are only symbolic, and don't give or share power. It's often about looking like you're doing something for appearances, rather than working to change culture.

^[2] Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 6
^[3] Veracini, L. The Settler Colonial Present. 2015



FURTHER EDUCATION

23 Tips on What Not to Say or Do

www.ictinc.ca/23-tips-on-what-not-to-say-or-do

BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres

bcaafc.com/

CUPE National Walking the Talk Guide

<https://cupe.ca/walking-talk-practical-guide-reconciliation-cupe-locals>

CUPE National Truth and Reconciliation Bargaining Guide

<https://cupe.ca/cupe-launches-truth-and-reconciliation-bargaining-guide>

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act (adopted in BC)

www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/indigenous-people/new-relationship/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples

FirstVoices Language Tools:

firstvoices.com/

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Report and Calls to Action

nctr.ca/records/reports/#trc-reports

Native Land Indigenous territorial, treaty, and language map

native-land.ca/

Reconciliation through Indigenous Education Course (free)

pdce.educ.ubc.ca/reconciliation/

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples

University of Alberta Indigenous Canada Course (free)

ualberta.ca/admissions-programs/online-courses/indigenous-canada

#Next150 Challenge

<https://next150.indianhorse.ca/>





Namwayut

Namwayut is a word in Kwak'waka, the language of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples from northern Vancouver Island, smaller surrounding islands, and adjacent mainland BC in Canada, meaning "we are all one". As represented in the images below, we are all paddling forward together in solidarity as a union family.





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