



WORKING WITH
INDIGENOUS CAST &
CREW

Sensitizing Non-Indigenous Crew



Creators continue to stress the importance of sensitizing non-Indigenous crew members to appropriate behaviour/norms and any sensitivities around what is being filmed. Where issues with non-Indigenous crew are identified, they are generally around cultural biases and cultural competency. Related challenges with freelance crews included finding the right person for the job and difficulties working with particular crewmembers:

“There were a couple of unfortunate decisions with regard to finding the right person for the job. People present so well - it is really hard to know who they are until you are in the thick of it.

I felt supported by the producers in navigating my way through, but it was a lesson in letting people go earlier if you feel they are not right for the job.”

Production teams often have little knowledge of Indigenous history and protocol, the diversity of Indigenous story-telling forms, and process or methodology of Indigenous creation. As crew often work directly with the community, unexplored biases and assumptions often lead to negative impacts and consequences. If a production includes sensitive subject matter (which is often the case), or works with vulnerable people (again, prevalent in Indigenous communities), you cannot have crewmembers with unexamined racism.

Community members should not be given the role of sensitizing the crew. Crew sensitivity should be done prior to arriving in the community, by the production team. This kind of work can bring up difficult/sensitive issues, thus attempting it while in the community may risk damaging valuable relationships with community members. Where possible, sensitizing the crew should be done in the pre-production stage. It is also important to monitor the relationship between the crew and community. Everyone on production, from sound to editing, need to understand and know the people.

Approach to Training

While it is optimal to choose a crew on the basis of trust and cultural understanding; another solution is to create cultural competency training for crews, so they have greater understanding when working with an Indigenous filmmaker and/or in Indigenous communities. Cultural training and participation in ceremony has proven to build stronger relationships amongst and between non-Indigenous crew members as well. A multi-pronged approach to training would include the following elements:

- Prepare a package in advance (eg. Pathways & Protocols and/or nation specific protocols).
- Begin with a pre-emptive discussion, on day one, before production and prior to being on location. Contextualize important cultural and/or social issues that may arise (eg. for Métis this may be around identity, for Inuit this may be around country food and food security, for First Nations this may be around political issues).
- Provide cultural competency training when dealing with sensitive subject matters.
- Develop codes of conduct for culturally sensitive, traditional, or cultural expressions; and
- Be sensitive to (and build in appropriate supports for) the impact of difficult material based on individual’s experiences or intergenerational legacies.

I think it can be very hard for freelance crew coming into an Indigenous production. Some of them have a very regimented way of operating which doesn't always work inside an Indigenous production and it comes off as all-knowing behavior, when in fact, they're in the perfect place to exchange knowledge equally and expand.

Marie Clements, Director, The Road Forward

1. Begin with sensitizing the non-Indigenous decision makers and crew members.

Depending on the knowledge and experience of the crew, begin with basic training:

- a. Anti-racism training
- b. Anti-harassment training
- c. Education about Indigenous peoples in Canada
(see <https://www.ictinc.ca/>)

Organize workshops to help crews understand the cultural climate in the community wherein the filmmaking takes place and help the crew understand the diversity within Indigenous peoples). Stress the need for soft skills, such as being able to recognize the meaning of silence, particularly when crew is working directly with Indigenous actors or serving in some sort of mentorship capacity.

Everyone suggested the earlier this process begins, the better. Learning needs to begin early enough for people to hear, listen and understand the impact of what they are being taught before the other pressures of production take priority. You want them to be excited about what they are learning, and not in a situation where they are compelled to learn in a high-pressure and time sensitive environment.

2. Consider general Pathways and Protocols training for Producers and all crew members

Many producers distributed the On-Screen Protocols & Pathways to the entire production team and crew a few weeks ahead of time; some reviewed it with their producers as much as a year in advance. Some productions held protocols meetings or training sessions ahead of production; others suggested all crew member Read and Sign both the Protocols & Pathways document and a Code of Conduct. Documents such as this can serve as policy for productions.

3. Identify needs for Subject Specific Training

Again, while it is best practice to have a point person for training needs and follow up, there are numerous online resources that can serve an individual's education on any number of Indigenous specific issues. There are a plethora of online resources, ranging from nation specific or territorial protocols, treaty issues and maps, social, environmental and economic specific studies, or:

- d. Residential Schools and impacts

<https://education.afn.ca/afntoolkit/learning-module/residential-schools/>

https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_residential_school_system/

e. Resources for working with Elders

<https://www.ualberta.ca/provost/media-library/office-of-the-provost-and-vice-president/indigenous-files/elderprotocol.pdf>

<https://carleton.ca/indigenous/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines-for-Working-with-Indigenous-Elders.pdf> <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/first-nation-elder-protocol>

4. Establish Set Culture

Producers can play a key role in backing up and supporting Indigenous filmmakers in working through these issues with crew; creating, for example, a clearer chain of command to minimize the impact on Indigenous filmmakers always having to witness, respond to, and correct lack of cultural understanding on the part of crew.

- Encourage teams to be proactive in asking questions around what is appropriate (self-reflection).
- Provide on set cultural learning, cultural supports and knowledge.
- Demonstrate a willingness to work through issues that arise (demonstrating humility), and
- See our other protocol documents such as Respectful Conduct on Set and Creating Safe Spaces.

Ensure a producer / associate producer serves as a conduit or trouble-shooter, dealing with difficulties within the production team, and ensuring the filmmaker was being listened to and respected. Often the Indigenous director / creator has to address difficult issues that arise with other people on the team; whereas producers can often see what is going on, and should address these types of issues or grievances, allowing filmmakers to focus on directing and creating.