

TOOL 1

Applying principles of good engagement

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are a number of key principles of good engagement that companies should seek to apply when engaging with Indigenous Peoples. This tool provides practical instructions on how operational staff can put these principles into practice.

Practical steps for engaging with Indigenous Peoples

To ensure good practice engagement with indigenous communities, companies must understand and respect local etiquette for engagement. Company staff should consider the following when engaging with Indigenous Peoples residing in the area in which they operate.

STEP 1

Listen to indigenous communities

An attitude of respectful listening and willingness to learn from Indigenous Peoples goes a long way to building confidence between the different parties. It also demonstrates a genuine commitment to working with indigenous communities as partners, rather than as beneficiaries. Company staff should ensure they are open to listening to indigenous communities. This may involve:

- being willing to take extra time in meetings, listening to stories and having informal discussions and interactions outside of official meetings
- Listening respectfully to all concerns instead of giving quick – and what may be perceived as patronizing – answers, as these concerns may be real issues to the indigenous community
- extensive talking around an issue in order to gauge the right moment before getting to the point of business
- refraining from going straight to business talk without following cultural protocols and “affirming the relationship”.

STEP 2

Allow adequate time for discussions

Companies are often under time constraints to achieve objectives according to project milestones. However, indigenous groups will need time to consider the consequences of project propositions, particularly if they have not previously had any experience of mining developments. When engaging with indigenous communities, companies should:

- notify indigenous communities about potential company time constraints, but try not to rush any process with them as this could be counterproductive
- negotiate an agreement with community representatives regarding key dates and deadlines, to avoid an open-ended process, but recognizing the need for some flexibility to be built into the engagement process
- remember that respect and mutual understanding develop over time, and are unlikely to emerge from discussions that are solely focused on issues of interest to the company.
- remember that many Indigenous Peoples view time as cyclical, in contrast to the Western view of time as progressing in a linear way without stopping (ie past-present-future).³⁷

³⁷ Viewing time in a cyclical manner means that the same events can happen over and over again, and so time is not a force that passes by inexorably. These differing perspectives of time need to be recognized and accommodated in companies' engagement with local communities.