

Building Trust, Becoming Allies

Practical ways for USW local unions to engage with Indigenous members and Indigenous communities



Introduction

Reconciliation will take work. The USW and our local unions will have to put time and effort into doing research, learning, reaching out and maintaining the relationship.

All of us want to “walk the talk” as we work to make reconciliation a reality. We don’t want to miss opportunities to engage Indigenous members as activists and leaders in our union and to be a better neighbour to Indigenous nations and communities. And we need to be prepared for the hard work that good relationships require.

This guide draws on the experience of USW local unions with successful histories of engaging with Indigenous members and with neighbouring Indigenous nations and communities. More than 40 USW local union presidents, executive members, members and staff were interviewed to create the guide. We thank them for sharing their advice and challenges.

The interviews were conducted by USW Indigenous Engagement Co-ordinators Julia McKay from District 3 and Josh George from District 6. (Their biographies are on page 3.)

This guide is a project of the USW National Indigenous Committee, with the support of the USW Family and Community Education Fund (FCEF). The committee wishes all the best to those who use this guide in their efforts to promote reconciliation, engage more effectively with Indigenous workers in their membership and build good relationships with their Indigenous neighbours.

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“The biggest thing I could say about making relationships ... is: It's not a matter of one size fits all, right? But there's certain principles when you go in to make a relationship, Steelworkers to a First Nations. You do it respectfully. You do it based on their cultural home turf because all cultures are different. You've really got to do your homework and your research. And then you have to be consistent. Don't go months without communicating or showing up to a ceremony or bringing some sandwiches down to an event they're doing.”

– Cody Alexander, USW 9548

We know that there are many more USW local unions with stories and experiences to share. We look forward to hearing from these locals and creating a second edition of this guide. And we acknowledge the diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and the diversity of practices and protocols. Not all the advice in this guide will be suited for every Indigenous group and we hope that future editions of this guide will reflect even more of that diversity.

Indigenous Engagement Co-ordinator biographies

Julia McKay is a coal miner and an activist with USW 9346 residing in southeastern B.C. Her father comes from the Tsimshian Peoples on the West Coast, but she grew up in Ktunaxa territory in southeastern B.C. Generational trauma separated her father from his family and culture, which in turn separated Julia and her sister from their culture. When she took on the position of Indigenous Engagement Co-ordinator, she also started her journey of discovery to learn about her heritage and history and more about who she is. She looks forward to continuing that journey and supporting her Indigenous siblings in any way she can.

Josh George identifies as First Nations and is a registered member of the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. His home community is along the shores of Lake Huron in southern Ontario. Growing up, he lived along the St. Clair River, near the southern tip of Lake Huron in the Aamjiwnaang (pronounced am-JIN-nun) First Nation community. Formally known as Chippewas of Sarnia, Aamjiwnaang means “at the spawning stream.” Josh’s local, USW 9597, represents airport screeners and security guards. First, he became an on-site Steward, then an Inside Guard, and is currently the local’s Second Vice-President. He also sits on the District 6 Human Rights Committee and the Southwest Area Council.

Engaging Indigenous Steelworkers in local union life

Many USW local unions are reaching out to Indigenous members and involving them in the life of our union. Many other locals want to try and do so, but say that they are hindered by not knowing who the Indigenous members are and how to engage with them. Some acknowledge that racism in the community or in their working environment discourages Indigenous members from self-identifying and stepping up.

One of the local unions that's had good success with member engagement is USW 9548 at Tenaris in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Past president Cody Alexander believes that the key is building trust with Indigenous members by showing respect, consistency and commitment.

Here are some things local unions are doing to build trust:

- Be compassionate and aware of historical trauma and how it affects Indigenous people today
- Provide education for local union officers
 - Take the Unionism on Turtle Island course, which helps open eyes and encourages a deeper understanding of Indigenous history (For more details, see the section of this guide called Unionism on Turtle Island)
 - Know whose territory you live and work on and, therefore, who your members likely could be
- Create an Indigenous Committee, Circle or Council in the local union (For more details, see the section of this guide called Indigenous Committees, Circles and Councils in Local Unions and Beyond)
 - Share minutes of Indigenous committee meetings with all Indigenous members
- Recruit, mentor, train and support more Indigenous members who show interest in union involvement to become local union officers or other roles
 - Make sure they aren't being tokenized or overwhelmed. Get their consent before publicly sharing their Indigenous identity
- Recruit and support Indigenous members as stewards, local union officers and committee members (which gives other Indigenous members avenues to reach out to the local union for help with grievances, information, etc.)

"If you have an Indigenous member and they had certain issues that were reflective of harm that person has felt in their life, those things should be taken into consideration when you're dealing with discipline. And management needs to understand that."

– Brian Butler, USW 1-1937

- Ensure that Indigenous members and units get access to opportunities for education and representation
- Demonstrate success in winning key demands from the employer that address Indigenous issues
 - Ensure the employer correctly applies tax rules for Indigenous members if the work site is on Indigenous land (See the resource sheet in this guide called Tax Forms for Indigenous Steelworkers)
- Fight for access by Indigenous members to culturally appropriate treatment centres when they need and want these services
- Bargain the involvement of Elders in grievance meetings
- Work with a trusted third party from the Indigenous community who can build bridges between the local union and its Indigenous members
- Negotiate new member orientations and work mentoring for new Indigenous members by Indigenous members
- Local union leaders demonstrate vocal support of Indigenous issues
- Involve Indigenous members when writing to governments or other agencies about issues that affect these members, their families and communities
- Sponsor cultural activities for the membership, such as beading or access to hunting sites
- Invite an Elder to speak at a membership meeting (See the resource sheet later in this guide called How to Offer Tobacco and Make a Request of an Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper, Chief or other Indigenous Person)
- Attend and volunteer for events within the Indigenous community

“How do we better service our Indigenous members and build that better rapport so that they feel comfortable coming forward and participating with the union? Because their voice is what’s important. Having someone on the executive or on one of our committees would be a world of difference.”

– Jill Hewgill, USW 8748

“So that when Indigenous people come to the work site from the local area, it’s their cousin that comes and says, ‘Hey, welcome to the team! I’m going to be your mentor for the next two months, and you’re going to be under my wing.’”

– Kyle Wolff, USW 7619

- Circulate information to all members about events in the Indigenous community, because otherwise, the average member may not know what they can attend
- Raise money for activities in the Indigenous community
- Close the local union office on September 30 (National Orange Shirt Day, also known as National Day for Truth and Reconciliation)
- Emphasize the shared values between unions and Indigenous peoples

“I noticed something interesting, what I call the convergence of values. First Nations’ values and union values come together. Solidarity and mutual aid are the basis; equality, environmental protection – we can work together on that. Then if we get together, everyone knows that unity is strength.”

– Tshakapesh Jérôme, USW National Indigenous Committee

And here are some new ideas that we could try to do within local unions, districts, and nationally:

- Use talking circles and talking stones in grievance, termination and other meetings
- Give regular updates on USW implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action and on our support of work to address the problem of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Gender-Diverse Persons
- Set up mentoring programs for Indigenous new hires
- Put articles in local union newsletters about Indigenous rights and bargaining
- Ensure Indigenous faces and stories are represented in all USW publications and social media
- Make majority-Indigenous units into stand-alone local unions
- Educate about and promote the use of trauma-informed processes inside our union and in employer-funded services to members
- Encourage and welcome Indigenous members to wear traditional dress at union events and to rallies/demonstrations

“I’m always in grievance meetings. You sit on one end of the table, the company at the other end and you start arguing back and forth, and by the end, you’re almost fighting, right? So maybe the [talking] stone could help break that down a little bit better, and say, ‘OK, whoever has the stone talks, everybody else listens.’ I think that’s the important part of when we try to resolve grievances – that people listen. But when you argue, you’re not listening.”

– Hans de Feyter, USW 9548

- Allow for space to smudge and practice other traditional ceremonies at local and other union events
- Be open to and encourage more collaboration with the employer on Indigenous issues
- Provide local unions with recommendations of Indigenous organizations to donate to
- Lobby school boards to offer more education on Indigenous issues and Indigenous languages
- Lobby to create a labour-First Nations forum
- Support free, prior and informed consent with regard to development on Indigenous lands (See the resource sheet in this guide called What is UNDRIP and What Does It Mean for USW and Local Unions?)
- Hold National Gatherings for Indigenous Steelworkers in areas with high concentrations of Indigenous population

“We’ve suggested – and hopefully the government takes it up at some point – to create a body that represents labour and First Nations so they can meet and discuss what we can do for each other.”

– Brian Butler, USW 1-1937

“I’m looking forward to seeing how we can establish a broader conversation, ... where there’s actually an Indigenous council meeting on a regular basis to talk about what’s happening in local areas, and how we as a district – or even a national or even an international – recognize things from different local areas, and to build that capacity of language and bargaining rights and put in pressure on companies to say, ‘Hey, it’s not good enough to put a quote in the front of your [collective bargaining agreements], you actually need to establish a proportional conversation that actually happens within the workplace.’”

– Kyle Wolff, USW 7619

Bargaining Indigenous rights

Bargaining good language on Indigenous rights into USW collective agreements is one way to show members and Indigenous communities that we value them and take their issues seriously.

USW local unions have been successful in bargaining a range of good collective-agreement language, including:

- Grievance procedures that are trauma-based
- Having Elders present at grievance and other meetings
- Leave for traditional practices, including hunting and gathering
- Leave to vote in elections in Indigenous communities on the same basis as leave to vote in provincial or federal elections
- Leave to run for Indigenous office
- A committee or circle for Indigenous members
- Increased timelines in the grievance procedure to give the local union more time to learn what may be the reasons behind an incident
- September 30, National Orange Shirt Day or National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, as a paid statutory holiday or a floating statutory holiday which can be used for September 30 (See the resource sheet in this guide called Why Do We Mark September 30?)
- June 21, National Indigenous Day, as a paid holiday
- Clarification of the use of Indigenous sub-contractors working on their home territory
- Preferential hiring of Indigenous workers
- Implementation of Impact Benefit Agreements
- Land acknowledgements in the preamble of collective agreements (For a more detailed discussion about land acknowledgements, see the section of this guide called Land or Territorial Acknowledgements.)

“The language we've negotiated ... for Indigenous leaves and those kinds of things, we intend to add into our major forest industry agreements because there's a lot of language we need to address if we're going to be true partners in reconciliation. ... It doesn't just mean adding a Truth and Reconciliation Day stat. or something like that. We need to modify our language.”

– Brian Butler, USW 1-1937

Other local unions are trying to bargain:

- Paid leave for traditional practices and cultural matters

- Leave to run for and hold Indigenous office
- September 30 as a paid day off
- Bereavement leave for a broader definition of family members
- Leave for hunting, fishing, and harvesting
- Leave to help search for missing family or community members
- Tax exemptions for Indigenous members working on their First Nation land
- Indigenous wellness spending account

“Bargaining tactic: Don’t refer to September 30 as a vacation or holiday. Call it a day of education.”

– John Tartt, USW 4120

If you are interested in seeing any of the language mentioned in this section, please contact your district’s Indigenous Engagement Co-ordinator or consult the USW Bargaining Guide for Advancing Indigenous Rights. The most recent edition can be found at usw.ca/equity-for-indigenous-people.

Several of the local union leaders interviewed shared some tips that have helped them before and during bargaining:

- Reading the USW Bargaining Guide for Advancing Indigenous Rights to see language from other locals
 - From the guide: Choose priority language for the next round of bargaining
- Having solid support from the local union executive for new proposals on Indigenous rights
- Having support in the membership as a result of the local providing them with information and education about the proposals and about our history as a country
- Having an Elder smudge the union’s negotiating committee before each round of bargaining
- Reading a land acknowledgement at the start of each round of bargaining
- Having the negotiating committee read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report and recommendations

“How do you build capacity within the membership to make it a meaningful and important demand? ... By educating them ahead of time.”

– Georgi Bates, USW 2009

The local union leaders interviewed for this guide say they would also benefit from some additional supports:

- Having a live discussion forum where negotiating committee members can talk, get advice and share experiences while in bargaining
- Where Indigenous members rely on the employer for communications, figuring out how to counter-balance the employer's information and role

"I've attempted to reach out [about] certain things during bargaining. I did get some resistance to it because remote communities very heavily rely on my company for communication. They were very hesitant to be advocates around some things."

– Brian Miller, USW 1944

We encourage you to download a copy of the USW Bargaining Guide for Advancing Indigenous Rights, which can be found at usw.ca/equity-for-indigenous-people. In particular, we draw your attention to language related to apprenticeships and other hiring and training programs for Indigenous workers.

Engaging with Indigenous Nations, Communities and Neighbours

Many local unions have successful histories of engaging with their Indigenous neighbours. (See the section in the guide called USW Success Stories.) Good community engagement enriches member engagement, and vice versa.

USW local unions have engaged with Indigenous nations, communities and neighbours by:

- Co-managing an industry with an Indigenous nation
- Co-organizing events with the Indigenous community, such as celebrations for September 30, trail cleanups and documenting Elders' stories
- Volunteering with Indigenous organizations
- Connecting Indigenous people to job openings with the employer
- Attending community events to mark September 30, October 4 or other days to remember Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Gender-Diverse Persons, or other occasions such as official openings of community facilities
- Responding to requests for donations or reaching out to ask if donations are needed
- Inviting Indigenous speakers to union events

"I'm trying to be a big part of the healing centres, because there's a big drug addiction in our area for opioids and methamphetamines."

– Shane Bonin, USW 9548

"The local has a Trades Training Co-ordinator and the job is just that: to seek out where we can get to the high schools and meet some of these kids. And being as close as we are to the Six Nations of the Grand River, we spoke to them and encouraged some of them to come here to work."

– Randy Graham, USW 8782

How do we do that?

Many other local unions want to engage but don't know how to approach Indigenous communities properly, without giving offence.

Building a relationship with an Indigenous nation or community is like building any type of friendship. It can be awkward at first. Then the more you engage and the more you talk, the more comfortable it becomes.

It's also different, because First Nations and other Indigenous communities are sovereign nations. Their leaders carry heavy workloads, dealing with major issues like community services, education, infrastructure, and relations with provincial and federal governments. So local unions have to figure out how to support Indigenous members and their Indigenous neighbours while also staying out of their internal political matters (such as elections for Chief and Council) and their nation-to-nation relationship with the Canadian government (unless asked for specific support as an ally).

USW local unions with track records of successful engagement with their Indigenous neighbours say that these are some of the behaviours and principles that have helped them:

- Engage with respect
- Do your research so you know something about the people and their way of life, and follow their traditional protocols (See the resource sheet in the guide called How to Offer Tobacco and Make a Request of an Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper, Chief or other Indigenous Person.)
 - Understand the central role of Elders
- Be consistent and patient
- Be committed. You must be in this for the long term
- Draw on the ideas of Indigenous members
- Ask to be introduced to the Indigenous community by someone that the community already trusts
- Understand that USW's work is happening at a time when Indigenous communities are rebuilding from residential schools and other harsh historical experiences
- When you are invited by the community or by a leader to attend an event, go!
 - Bring food, a gift or whatever is appropriate to the event (which could include giving firewood or loaning equipment such as a teepee)

"Once you develop a relationship, you have to maintain it. And you know everybody is so darn busy with what's going on in life. You still got to take the time. Do what you can to make sure you participate in powwows and things like that."

– Joe Krmpotich, USW 2251

"We want a naturally occurring relationship that's built on trust and it's built on time in and consistency and respect ... The weather's better now and there's going to be more community stuff going on. I'm going to watch for sacred fires and just go up there, bring some [food]. I think that's how it's going to happen."

– Cody Alexander, District 6 staff rep

- Attend events that are open to all. Introduce yourself to others; make friends; don't be pushy
- Don't ask for anything in return
- Have an open door (or an open phone). When the community asks for your time or assistance, listen and respond
- Don't assume that every Indigenous person has a connection to an Elder or Chief or their community. Respectful communication and questions are key
- When asked "What have the Steelworkers done for Indigenous people?", be able to answer. Know what the USW has already done on Indigenous issues in the local union, district and nationally (See the resource sheet in this guide called A Short History of USW Work on Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation)
 - This can include having an Indigenous member on the local union executive
- Listen and ask questions from the heart
- Offer community leaders a platform to speak, such as at union meetings or public events sponsored by the local union
- Don't start by asking to meet the Chief, but when you do get a chance to meet them, bring a delegation from the local union

"Now that we've got local band members on the committee, they can honestly say back to their Chief and Council, 'No, we're actually doing some good stuff. And they're actually on our side here. We're actually part of the executive. We're actually having discussions about what that looks like and any issues that we're having on site.'"

– Kyle Wolff, USW 7619

"Engaging with the communities that surround us is so important. And if USW is proactive and trying to see things from an Indigenous lens in addition to the predominant colonial lens, that may lead to more successful partnerships in the future."

– Jonathan Karmazniuk, USW 2009

Indigenous Committees, Circles and Councils in local unions and beyond

USW local unions are starting to create structures for Indigenous members. These committees, circles or councils have a range of structures, depending on what makes the most sense for the local or locals involved: joint (employer and union representatives), local only, or area-wide. There is also a USW National Indigenous Committee which has been in existence since 2014.

See the stories on the next few pages for more details about three Indigenous committees in our union.

What's the purpose of a committee?

There are a number of good reasons why a local union decides to create an Indigenous committee, including:

- To create a bridge between Indigenous members and the local union
- To improve relations and overcome cultural differences within the local union
- To help build better relations with the Indigenous community outside the workplace by showing the local's commitment to Indigenous issues and Indigenous people
 - And Indigenous members can help the local union connect to their communities
- To create a safe space for Indigenous members to talk about their work lives, needs and hopes
- To contribute to reconciliation
- (See the section of this guide called Engaging with Indigenous Nations, Communities and Neighbours for specific ideas of activities committees can take on.)

"It's a little bit easier for them to talk to members from the circle than it might be, to like general grievance guys ... So they [the circle] can form a bridge for us, for certain things that we do."

– Hans de Feyter, USW 9548

"I was really, really happy to hear that we were finally getting a committee, that all of the Indigenous members on site can look at the minutes and have people come up with ideas and have discussions about that. Because ... some people just can't understand what a lot of us have had to go through with intergenerational trauma and all this stuff. So it's nice to have a group that everybody can relate to."

– Michaela Palacios, USW 7619

"Make a space where people do feel safe in self-identifying because it could be a situation where it's easier to self identify to a small committee."

– Brett Bird, USW 2009

How do we start one?

Prepare a solid rationale for creating a committee. Do some research to figure out approximately how many Indigenous members are in your local union. Ask as many of these members as you can if they'd appreciate having an Indigenous committee, what they'd like to see it do and whether they'd take part. Use that feedback in your rationale.

Indigenous committees, circles or councils can be created by:

- A decision of the local executive or of the general membership, in keeping with the local's bylaws
- A request from Indigenous members to the local executive or to a membership meeting, following local bylaws
- Bargaining language into the collective agreement, including related to payment of lost wages to attend meetings
- A decision by a number of local unions in a community or area to create a body across a larger geographic area

What makes a good committee?

From the experience of locals with existing committees, here are some of the things that have helped:

- Add language about the committee to the local union's bylaws and create terms of reference for the committee
 - Consider including in the terms of reference that the committee will not engage in political campaigns or issues inside an Indigenous community
- Have a flexible committee size to take into account members' available time
- Be open to Indigenous and non-Indigenous members (but ensure the leadership is by Indigenous members), because we don't know who non-Indigenous members may be married to or have in their extended families
- Whether the committee has a formal chair or not, make sure someone is responsible for keeping the ball rolling, sending out emails, etc.
- Among the things the committee does, include:
 - Coming up with ideas for projects, such as membership education and events that include members' families

"I didn't want to have a council or committee that created segregation. I know it's pretty hard to actually look at it in that scope because it's an Indigenous committee."

– Chay Nali, USW 7619

- Identifying community events to attend
- Sending out regular communications to members
- Have a good communication link between the committee and the local union executive. That could include having the committee chair or a committee representative sit on the local union executive
- Make sure committee members understand how to get approval for activities and expenditures

Things that have hindered the smooth operation of a committee:

- If it's a joint committee and the employer refuses to participate
- If Indigenous members don't have a lot of time to devote to committee work
 - Possible solution: Bargain with the employer for full or partial coverage of committee meetings on work time
- If committee members don't know how the local union works and need time to learn
- If too much time passes between meetings, each subsequent meeting spends a lot of time reviewing and catching up

A joint union-employer Indigenous Council – USW 7619 at Highland Valley Copper near Kamloops, B.C., has shown strong leadership and a commitment to their Indigenous membership and Indigenous communities with the creation of an Indigenous Council, which has been added into their collective agreement in 2021.

The language of Article 19.17 reads: “The Parties agree to establish an Indigenous Committee that will meet at minimum on a quarterly basis. The Committee will establish a Term of Reference and forward non-binding recommendations to be reviewed by the Union President and the General Manager. The Committee, which will be made up of Indigenous individuals, will have three (3) employees from the Union and three (3) from the Company.”

The council is fully funded by the company. During the first few meetings, they have focused on setting out terms of reference and goals for the group. They have set their sights high! Some of the areas they are looking at are:

“Because of having the Indigenous Council, Indigenous members of USW 7619 now feel comfortable to say to the local president, ‘Hey, I’ve got an idea.’ ... This is what we want to do. Those ideas are starting to flow in now, and you start to see engagement in different committees. We start to see more Indigenous women joining the Women of Steel Committee. We’re starting to see more people take on shop steward roles. We’re starting to see more people take on contracting out issues. There’s more safety reps standing up.”

– Kyle Wolff, USW 7619

- Improving Indigenous employee recruitment and experience
- Delivering a new-hire mentorship program
- Supporting an Indigenous cultural awareness training program
- Campaigning and fundraising in support of Indigenous-led initiatives

A regional or area Indigenous committee – Another consideration for increasing engagement representation is adding an Indigenous committee to your area or regional council. In northern Saskatchewan, the nine local unions created such a committee in 2019. The committee chair is an elected position, with elections taking place every two years at the council’s annual general meeting (AGM).

Unionism on Turtle Island

One of the best ways to learn how to build trust and respectful relationships is to take our union’s course Unionism on Turtle Island.

It’s a course designed for non-Indigenous Steelworkers (but open to all members, regardless of ancestry). Over five days, participants will:

- Learn more about their Indigenous neighbours, their cultures and beliefs from a local Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper or other helper
- Learn more about our union’s history acting in solidarity with Indigenous struggles
- Gain a clear overview of key events in Canadian history
- Identify ways that local unions can support Indigenous members, whether by representing them in grievances or collective bargaining or by supporting their communities’ struggles for a better life
- Name practical steps to take at work and at home to be good allies with Indigenous Peoples and to practise reconciliation
- Feel comfortable asking questions without judgment or embarrassment
- Appreciate similarities between Indigenous and union activism

To request a course for your local, area or region, contact your District Education Coordinator or Indigenous Engagement Co-ordinator for more information. (They can also explain what arrangements your local union, area or region is expected to make for the course and how it can use the course as a stepping stone to relationship building.)

Steelworkers who've taken the Unionism on Turtle Island course say:

- “Within six months of taking that course, we managed to get the Indigenous Circle recognized in the CBA [collective bargaining agreement].” – Cody Alexander, USW 9548
- “The course has started me on a journey that I wouldn’t ever have thought I would need to travel. This is just a start. We are all agents of change.” – USW District 6 course participant
- “Taking that course ahead of time, before we even went in bargaining, would have helped them understand, culturally.” – Alecia McLeod, USW 7913
- “I would really like to see that all the presidents get that training because I think that's important to understand ... what you can do for your workforce to make things better, right? You might better understand certain reactions if you understand everything behind it.” – Hans de Feyter, USW 9548
- “I think more of our leadership needs to know [the history] and understand it. How can we stand up for them when we don't know the issues and we don't know the culture?” – Pat McGregor, USW 1-423
- “I’m a big supporter of it. I think that it's way overdue. I wish I wasn't still talking about it.” – Darrin Kruger, District 3 staff representative
- “Taking the Turtle Island training was eye-opening. Being an Indigenous person with lived experience it was very insightful ... This training has made me feel more empowered and inspired to continue moving forward and hopefully, one day, break that intergenerational trauma with my children and grandchildren, because we are all valuable people.” – Victor Iron, USW 7689

Land or territorial acknowledgements

Many USW local unions, staff and elected leaders now give a land or territorial acknowledgement at the start of speeches, meetings or other events.

Other Steelworkers include land acknowledgements in their e-mail signatures, bargain them into the preamble of collective agreements and use them to start negotiation sessions with employers.

Why give an acknowledgement?

It names the Indigenous Peoples on whose land you live and work, so it is a way of showing respect. It can also be a sign that non-Indigenous people want to establish a new relationship with Indigenous Peoples, different from the colonial past with its history of land theft, cultural repression and residential schools. Most practically, it reminds you where you are.

How to give an acknowledgement?

Some people say, “Do it right or don’t do it at all.” While a land acknowledgement doesn’t have to be lengthy, preparing a respectful one requires time and thought. Here are some steps to follow:

1. Do some research to find out whose territory you’re on. Talk to Indigenous members, visit your community’s Indigenous Friendship Centre or visit the website native-land.ca.
 - Note: A province-wide or national local union will write a very different acknowledgement than a local based in one community.
2. Local union officers and activists should discuss:
 - a) Why are we doing this acknowledgement?
 - b) How does this acknowledgement relate to the work we are doing?
 - c) What are the impacts of colonialism in this territory?
 - d) What is our relationship to this territory? How did we come to be here?
 - e) What do we plan to do to work for reconciliation, in addition to giving this acknowledgement?
3. Once you have written a first draft, ask Indigenous members, the local’s Indigenous Committee or Circle (if one exists), your staff representative and people in the Indigenous community to review it. Amend your draft based on their advice.
4. Keep adding to it or changing it over time, as events happen and as your local union builds stronger relationships with Indigenous members and communities.

5. Remember: It's up to non-Indigenous people to research, write and give land acknowledgements. Don't ask the Indigenous members of your local union to do this work – they already know who they are.

Examples of land acknowledgements used in our union:

USW 2009 (IATSE 891), District 3

As Parties to the Collective Agreement, we are committed to reconciliation and justice for Indigenous Peoples. We acknowledge that the headquarters and where we gather is on the unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations.

We recognize and deeply appreciate their historic connection to this place. We also recognize the contributions of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) and other Indigenous Peoples have made, both in shaping and strengthening this community in particular, our province and our country as a whole.

As settlers, this recognition of the contributions and historic importance of Indigenous people must also be clearly and overtly connected to our collective commitment to make the promise and the challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities.

This acknowledgement serves as a reminder to our difficult history. We pledge to conduct ourselves respectfully in all ways on this territory.

USW 9548 (Tenaris), District 6

We will begin this general membership meeting of Local 9548 by acknowledging that we are meeting on Indigenous land, here on Turtle Island, that has been inhabited by Indigenous Peoples from the beginning. We are grateful for the opportunity to meet here, and we thank all generations of First Nations people who have taken care of this land – for thousands of years. We thank the Elders, both past and present. We acknowledge that we are on land under the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850 and that this is the lands of the Anishinaabeg. We recognize and deeply appreciate their historic connection to this place. We also recognize the contributions of the Métis. We make this acknowledgement to show our continuing commitment to make the promise and the challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities and to do our part to bring justice for many murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls across our country while continuing to support and advance Indigenous issues nationwide. Miigwetch.

Challenges local unions face ... and some new ideas

Besides all the good work being done in USW local unions, there are also some challenges. The challenge most frequently mentioned is: How to create safe spaces for Indigenous members to get involved in the local union? We addressed that in the first section of this guide called Engaging Indigenous Steelworkers in Local Union Life.

Here are the other challenges some local unions are facing and their ideas for solutions at the local, district and national level:

Challenge: How to get members to self-identify?

New ideas:

- A survey for members to self-identify by ancestry (and other categories), whether across the whole union or just in those local unions who want more information about their membership
- Put on orientation sessions for Indigenous new hires
- Highlight the presence of Indigenous members in USW by using USW publications and social media to share news about the USW National Indigenous Committee, upcoming events and local union work on Indigenous issues.

"I just think there's got to be a better way for us to capture the identity of our membership."

– Cindy Lee, District 3 staff

Challenge: How to successfully bargain for Indigenous rights in our Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs)?

New ideas:

- Develop a way for negotiating committees to talk with one another in real time
- Provide negotiating committee members with bargaining training and support that focuses on USW's Bargaining Guide for Advancing Indigenous Rights
 - Include how to bargain trauma-informed processes
- Educate members before bargaining on why Indigenous issues are important and why to support them

Challenge: How can local unions get more staff support and other resources?

Local union leaders are very busy and may not have the time or knowledge to build relationships with Indigenous neighbours and engage with their membership

New ideas:

- Link local unions who are doing this work across areas, districts and nationally

- The USW Family and Community Education Fund is a great support for contributing local unions. Several have applied for funding to put on projects related to engaging Indigenous members and working with their Indigenous neighbours. Visit the website at www.usw.ca/fcef. Email the Fund co-ordinator at fcef@usw.ca.

Challenge: How to deal with employers who have no interest in working on Indigenous issues or who aren't yet fully educated about Indigenous issues?

New ideas:

- Bargain language on inclusive hiring practices
- Bargain language that covers apprenticeships and contractors
- Invite the employer to send a manager or two to take the Unionism on Turtle Island course
- Ask the employer to sponsor diversity training at the worksite

“There used to be a lot of Indigenous lead hands. And then we had this one idiot supervisor that pretty much came and cleaned them up and replaced them ... We've got reports of Indigenous workers from the band that applied [for jobs] and didn't even get a phone call back.”

– Pat McGregor, USW 1-423

Challenge: How to approach some Indigenous people who don't understand unions or have negative views of unions?

New ideas:

- When you meet with Indigenous members or Indigenous community leaders, share copies of articles about what the USW has done on Indigenous issues. (For example, make copies of the resource sheets in this guide called A Short History of USW Work on Indigenous Issues and Reconciliation and Indigenous Rights Resolutions from the 2023 USW National Policy Conference)
- During orientations for new hires, talk about how the local union is taking action on Indigenous issues
- Use USW publications and social media platforms outlets to share information about Indigenous issues and USW actions

USW success stories

We learn from the successes that other USW local unions have. Here are some short case studies from a range of union activities where Steelworkers have built respectful relationships with their Indigenous neighbours and members.

Success story #1: USW 1-1937 and the Huu-ay-aht First Nation on the west coast of Vancouver Island

Brian Butler and USW 1-1937 represent a diverse membership engrained in forestry and mining in B.C. Over the years, Brian has worked to cultivate a meaningful relationship with the Huu-ay-aht First Nation that has benefited both the First Nation and USW members. This relationship took Brian's personal time and commitment to nurture, but there was a realization that the needs and issues of the Huu-ay-aht often paralleled those of our union.

Brian was introduced to the elected Chief of the Huu-ay-aht, Robert Dennis, several years ago. The Chief was focused on a long-term plan to keep his people in their community and bring people back who had migrated elsewhere. This meant creating good jobs and offering affordable housing. The union and the Huu-ay-aht worked together to produce a Memorandum of Understanding in 2021 and successfully lobbied the government to award the Huu-ay-aht access to undercut timber volumes which potentially could have been awarded to outside, non-union contractors. This keeps jobs close and allows the Huu-ay-aht Peoples and USW members to stay in their communities. It has also afforded the First Nation the ability to offer more enhanced training for future generations.

Brian makes sure he attends events and gatherings when he is invited. He listens to concerns and ideas, and works with members of the Huu-ay-aht on those concerns as well as lobbying the provincial government side-by-side on common issues. The sacred principles of the Huu-ay-aht were front and centre and will guide the ongoing work of USW 1-1937 with the Huu-ay-aht and other First Nations.

Success story #2: USW 6500 strike preparation keeps Sudbury Indigenous community informed

During their 2021 strike, USW 6500 realized that picket lines could impact the daily routines of Sagamok Anishnawbek First Nation, one of the Indigenous communities in the Sudbury area.

Members of USW 6500 went to speak with members of the First Nation to let them know what the strike was about and what could possibly happen on the road running past the mine site. Steelworkers said they would create a special lane for the Sagamok

band members to use so they would be able to get in and out of their community and continue with their everyday routines.

The local union also let the First Nation members they had spoken to know who to contact should anyone have questions or concerns.

Dan Bertrand, one of USW 6500's Chief Stewards, said those Sagamok community members really "appreciated the fact that we went out to speak with them on what was happening or could potentially happen."

"We had a positive interaction and there were no issues. So I think this is a good news story, and we continue to value the members of the First Nations community."

Success story #3: USW 7619 makes major changes at Highland Valley Copper, Kamloops

Kyle Wolff came back from attending USW's 2017 National Gathering of Indigenous Steelworkers in Edmonton on a mission! After hearing stories and learning from Indigenous members and guests, he recognized that his local, USW 7619, needed to do more work to support and represent their Indigenous membership.

When they headed into bargaining in 2021, Kyle took the USW Bargaining Guide for Advancing Indigenous Rights to show local First Nations members. He asked what they would like to see added to the CBA. Taking those suggestions, the union committee was able to bargain an Indigenous Council paid for by the company, leave to vote for Chief and Council, more diverse hiring practices and language around Indigenous contractors on site.

Kyle is also a staunch advocate of holistic-based treatment for those who seek help for addictions and mental health issues. He hopes to bargain in more supportive language for the Indigenous members at Highland Valley Copper to have access to traditional treatment methods.

Success story #4: USW 9548 builds strong ties in Sault Ste Marie:

For the first-ever National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30, 2021, USW 9548 and Batchewana First Nation hosted an event on Whitefish Island for reflection and healing. Throughout the day, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people were brought together and took part in traditional ceremonies and teachings, and other fun activities.

After the successful event, Indigenous leaders shared with USW leaders that, when it comes to hosting events of great significance to the Indigenous community, such as events marking National Orange Shirt Day, it's best to let the Indigenous community take the lead and have USW follow their lead, help and attend. This was important advice, because trade unionists are organizers and leaders – but sometimes we need to listen and follow.

Former USW 9548 president Cody Alexander shared his story of when he and another member were invited to a sweat lodge at the home of a former Chief of the Batchewana First Nation.

Cody shared that he had been asked by an Indigenous member if he could help arrange a Sweat Lodge. Cody approached the Chief of Batchewana and asked for his help.

“The part that really impacted me was he didn't set one up, he invited us into his home to have one with him,” Cody said. “That was the part we didn't expect. We thought he would be the catalyst to help direct us to an Elder that would get us a lodge and different things because there's different people in the community, but the really special part was he said, ‘No, come to my home where my children and my grandchildren live.’ We met with them and we had a huge feast with them.”

Success story #5: USW 480: Lobbying and educating the community in Trail

USW 480 and its president, Chris Walker, recognize the importance of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and what it means to Indigenous people. In late 2022, Chris participated in efforts to lobby the British Columbia provincial government to adopt this day as a paid statutory holiday for all workers in B.C., not just those covered by federal labour law. And the USW locals and Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) members who took this on were successful!!

Chris also recognized that more needed to be done in his area to recognize this day and educate his members and community on the history and struggles of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. On September 30, 2022, several members of USW 480 travelled to a nearby town and participated in events hosted by the Métis Society. After that, Chris pressed his town council and his employer to do more. USW 480 worked with the town of Trail and Teck to create an educational event for their community on September 30, including sharing some resources from USW's Unionism on Turtle Island course with the town library. USW 480 hopes to continue doing this every year.

Success story #6: USW 1-423 educates employers on Indigenous issues

Pat McGregor, President of local 1-423, has a high Indigenous membership at one of the sites he represents in the Okanogan Valley in B.C. The employer has repeatedly demonstrated a lack of respect and knowledge when it comes to the needs of the members.

Pat and one of the local members decided to reach out to two local Indigenous educators and ask them to come to their site and talk to the company and workers. They hoped this would help offer the company a deeper understanding of the Indigenous workers and foster a healthier work environment. We are lucky to have leaders like Pat who think outside of the box when it comes to their membership!

Success story #7: National Committee takes some big steps toward reconciliation

USW's National Indigenous Committee has initiated a number of important projects to advance Indigenous rights. For full details, see the resource sheet in this guide called A Short History of USW Work on Indigenous Issues and Reconciliation.

Success story #8: Taking the first steps in relationship building

USW 9597 represents airport screeners and security guards in parts of Ontario. It held the Unionism on Turtle Island course in July 2023. Since taking the course, the local has started their journey on building a relationship with Caldwell First Nation. So far, the local has made donations to the Indigenous community and has helped some families by providing backpacks filled with school supplies.

Caldwell has invited some of the local executive members to attend ceremonies that are being held with their community.

Resource Sheet #1: Tax forms for Indigenous Steelworkers

The link below will take you to Canada Revenue Agency website. There you will see TD1-IN Determination of Exemption of an Indian's Employment Income. It comes in two different PDF formats: the first one is a printable form and the second is a fillable/savable form. Select the one that is best for you. (You may have to download or update Adobe Reader.)

www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/forms/td1-in.html

Resource Sheet #2: What is UNDRIP and what does it mean for USW and local unions?

UNDRIP is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. UNDRIP was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007 and by Canada's Parliament in 2018.

The declaration establishes minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous Peoples of the world. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, adopting and implementing it is crucial for really achieving reconciliation.

UNDRIP addresses topics like education, language, citizenship and self-government. It emphasizes the harm done to Indigenous Peoples when their lands and resources are taken from them and recognizes the valuable contribution that traditional practices and knowledge can make to sustainable, equitable economic development. Central to this is the right of Indigenous Peoples to use, develop and control their lands and resources, and the obligation of governments and corporations to properly obtain the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples before proceeding with development, mining, water use or other activities that affect Indigenous territories and resources.

What role does our union have under UNDRIP?

Indigenous Nations are sovereign nations with a direct relationship with the Crown. Our union is not a party to UNDRIP or to other laws and treaties affecting Indigenous Peoples and nations. But the USW has endorsed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, and we have an important role to play as an ally. This includes:

- Continuing to build respectful, meaningful relationships with the Indigenous communities on whose lands our members live and work and where we hope to organize new groups of Indigenous workers
- Developing the skills and knowledge to consult with Indigenous communities with regard to economic development suggestions or opportunities

- Following and supporting the decisions taken by Indigenous communities, including those related to the implementation of Impact Benefit Agreements
- Pressuring governments and employers to ensure that economic development is preceded by the free, informed consent of the Indigenous Peoples and communities whose lands and resources are to be affected. If your employer and/or government isn't consulting, your local union can build a relationship with the affected Indigenous community and work together to push for better consultation
- Pressuring governments and employers to ensure that economic development enhances rather than harms Indigenous culture and economic practices and the safety of Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse persons

Resource sheet #3: Why do we mark September 30?

Between the late 1800s and 1996, more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children attended Indian residential schools as a policy of the federal government. Separated from families and communities, they were forbidden from speaking their language or practising their cultures. Many were poorly nourished and experienced physical and sexual abuse. Orange Shirt Day (also known as National Day for Truth and Reconciliation) commemorates this legacy.

The Orange Shirt Day movement was started by Phyllis Webstad, a member of the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation and former residential school student, to honour survivors and intergenerational survivors, and to remember those children who never made it home.

At the age of six, Phyllis was taken from her home to attend a residential school. Her grandmother gave her a shiny new orange shirt to wear. But it, and all of her clothes, were taken away, never to be seen again.

Orange Shirt Day is an opportunity for all of us to engage with the legacies of the residential school system and to work for reconciliation.

(Source: irshdc.ubc.ca/orange-shirt-day/about-orange-shirt-day)

Resource sheet #4: How to offer tobacco and make a request of an Elder, Traditional Knowledge Keeper, Chief, or other Indigenous person

Offering tobacco is an act of respect and a traditional way by which many Indigenous people make requests. Please note that Inuit Elders and Knowledge Keepers do not accept tobacco offerings because they do not use it ceremonially. It is still a kind gesture to offer a small gift, though, such as tea.

There are many ways of presenting tobacco, but it is most commonly given as a tobacco tie (see photo). Here's how to make a tobacco tie in order to ask a Chief, Traditional Knowledge Keeper, Elder or other Indigenous person for their help or knowledge:

"Elders are not hired. They're not there to come and play drums for you or to come do a dance for you. These are sacred things to them that they do. To have an Elder come talk [or do an opening and closing], they do it because it matters to them. And you've given them tobacco."

– Cody Alexander, District 6 staff rep

1. **Get some tobacco:** It's best to use traditional tobacco (not for commercial smoking use), organic tobacco or pipe tobacco (e.g., Drum). In a pinch, you can use commercial loose tobacco (but this is discouraged as it's laced with chemicals).

2. **Get some cloth:** From any fabric store, buy a length of broadcloth (ideally 100% cotton) in a solid colour such as red, yellow, white, green, purple or blue.

3. **Prepare the tobacco tie:** The person making the request should prepare the tobacco tie. As you do so, think about what you will request and have good, kind thoughts in your mind. Here are step-by-step instructions on how to assemble your tobacco tie:

- Cut a square of fabric (4 inches by 4 inches)
- Cut a thin strip of fabric (about ½ inch by 6 inches)
- Put a pinch of tobacco in the centre of the cloth square
- Gather the corners of the square together
- Wrap the strip of the fabric around the top of the gathered fabric and tie a knot. (You can also tie it up with a piece of yarn or twine.)

4. **Make your request:** Offer the tobacco tie when you first make your request. Approach the Elder, Chief, Traditional Knowledge Keeper or Indigenous guest with the

tie in your left* hand, held out in front of you. Respectfully (and specifically) ask what you would like them to do. If they accept and take the tobacco, they are agreeing to do what you have asked. If they aren't able to fulfill your request, they will say that they can't take the tobacco at this time. (*The left hand is closest to the heart, the residence of spirit.)



Here's an example of what to say when making your request and offering tobacco:

I am offering you this tobacco for ...

- ... *the opening and closing remarks at [name of event].*
- ... *smudging the meeting room and the participants.*
- ... *your guidance with _____.*

(We acknowledge drawing from the Ontario Federation of Labour's Aboriginal Circle and Aboriginal Person's Caucus's *Tobacco Offering Protocol* to make this resource sheet.)

Resource sheet #5: A short history of USW work on Indigenous issues and reconciliation

In addition to the good work being done by USW local unions and districts, much has been done at a national level, led by the USW National Indigenous Committee.

- Prior to 2013, the USW had a record of activity on issues affecting Indigenous Peoples and members, including presenting to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, supporting Idle No More and negotiating some groundbreaking agreements in work sites on Indigenous territory.
- 2013: the USW National Policy Conference passes a resolution inspired by Idle No More. It calls on the union to find out what Indigenous members want the union to do and is the catalyst for a dramatic increase in USW allyship and action.
- 2014: the USW creates a National Indigenous Working Group, made up of two Indigenous members from each of the three districts. Its mission is to organize a national consultation meeting with Indigenous Steelworkers and make a report to the four Canadian directors on next steps.
- June 2015: a two-day National Consultation Workshop for Indigenous Steelworkers is held in Winnipeg. More than 50 delegates attend. All discussions

take place in a talking circle or in small groups, with an Elder present at all times. When delegates are asked to name the most important topics for the Working Group to share with the union at its upcoming policy conference, they say: the truth about residential schools, the importance of preserving and expanding Indigenous languages and the story of organizing school-district workers on Norway House First Nation.

- April 2016: the National Indigenous Working Group receives a standing ovation from delegates to the USW National Policy Conference. Delegates also pass resolutions to make the Working Group into a permanent committee of the union; to hold another national gathering of Indigenous Steelworkers; to create a course for USW members, leaders and staff to raise awareness on Indigenous issues and our history; and to adopt a USW Statement of Principles on Indigenous Issues.
- June 2017: the federal government bends to pressure from families and launches a national inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The USW offers funding to Steelworkers of Indigenous ancestry who have suffered the loss of a family member and want to attend or give testimony at a hearing of the national inquiry.
- July 2017: the second National Gathering for Indigenous Steelworkers takes place in Edmonton. More than 60 delegates meet in a talking circle with an Elder and Helper present at all times. Among other things, the delegates urge the union to support MP Romeo Saganash's private-member's bill on the United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples; create a tip sheet for how local unions can better support Indigenous members; and discuss priorities for a USW course on Indigenous issues and history.
- November 2017: USW arranges for Paul Carl, an Indigenous member from Local 2010, to work with USW Education and Equality Department Leader Adriane Paavo to design a five-day course called Unionism on Turtle Island.
- June 2020: the first USW Bargaining Guide for Advancing Indigenous Rights is published, sharing our best examples of collective agreement language. The guide is updated in 2021.
- June 2021: launch of USW Indigenous Scholarships. Six scholarships of \$1,500 each are offered annually to Indigenous members or their dependants. The selection process gives priority to applicants who live in remote regions and will attend school far from home in unfamiliar locations.
- October 2018: the Unionism on Turtle Island course is piloted at the District 6 Fall School near Orillia, Ontario. Everyone at the school notices the aroma of sage and hears the participants' excitement at learning things they'd never been taught in school.

- October 2022, the third National Gathering for Indigenous Steelworkers takes place in Sault Ste Marie, Ontario. More than 100 delegates meet in a talking circle with an Elder present at all times and with a sacred fire burning around the clock. Chief Sayers of Batchewana First Nation and Chief Rickard of Garden River First Nation welcome the delegates. They learn about how ending poverty through a guaranteed livable basic income will help reduce violence against Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse persons. Representatives from local unions with large numbers of Indigenous members discuss how to effectively represent them. And delegates learn about the USW Indigenous Engagement Project.
- January 2023: the USW hires two Indigenous members to be the first Indigenous Engagement Co-ordinators. Josh George works in District 6 and Julia McKay works in District 3. Their role is to support local unions, staff and leaders in their districts as they work to bargain Indigenous rights, represent Indigenous members, and be good neighbours to the Indigenous nations and communities on whose land they live and work.
- March 2023: 13 Indigenous and one non-Indigenous Steelworkers are trained to be facilitators of the Unionism on Turtle Island course. Since the pilot in 2018, demand for the course is increasing.
- 2024: District 5 launches a French-language version of Unionism on Turtle Island, focusing on the history of Indigenous-settler relations in Québec.

Resource sheet #6: Taking action on gender-based violence and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women: What Steelworkers can do about temporary work camps and remote permanent work sites

As part of our commitment to be an ally with Indigenous Peoples, USW spoke with the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) to learn their views on how our union could help implement the recommendations of the national inquiry. NWAC asked USW to develop a position on “man camps” and to engage our members, staff and leaders in appropriate actions to increase the safety of Indigenous women and girls.

“Man camps” are temporary work camps housing mostly male employees working on the construction of resource development projects.

Camp life is characterized by long hours, high pay, social and geographic isolation and a hyper-masculinized work culture, where physical violence and misogyny are considered “normal.” Camp workers are mostly non-Indigenous young men who are far from their home communities, have no ties to the Indigenous communities near the work site and have no understanding of their cultures. This contributes to a “freedom

from accountability” among camp workers who go into nearby communities to “blow off steam.”

Several research projects have noted a correlation between the arrival of the camps and an increase in gender-based violence.¹ That violence can take the form of sexual assault, an increase in sexual harassment and workers propositioning women inside and outside the workplace and a sudden increase in the sex trade in affected communities.

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls found substantial evidence that temporary work camps are implicated in higher rates of violence against Indigenous women at the camps and in neighbouring communities.² It recommended that industry, government, service providers and other involved parties:

- Consider the safety and security of all Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual) people at all stages of a development. Ensure they benefit equally from development.
- Mitigate risks identified in those assessments prior to approving a project.
- Include provisions in Impact Benefit Agreements that ensure women and girls benefit equitably from a project.
- Recognize increased demands on social infrastructure including policing, social services and health services.

Given the industries our union organizes, USW is less likely than other unions to represent workers engaged in the construction of resource-development project sites. Once that construction is completed, the story is different. We do represent members working at a number of permanent remote sites, where long-term mining, smelting and other processing operations take place. Some of these sites operate on a “fly in, fly out” basis, but the workers have stable, ongoing employment and may also be deliberately hired from nearby Indigenous communities.

However, even permanent work sites can be prone to gender-based violence.³ Workers are far from home, family and other structures that usually guide their behaviour.

¹ “Indigenous Communities and Industrial Camps”, February 2017, Firelight Group with Lake Babine Nation and Nak’azdii Whut’en, https://firelight.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Firelight-work-camps-Feb-8-2017_FINAL.pdf.

² “Deeper Dive: Resource Extraction Projects and Violence against Indigenous Women”, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, June 2019, pages 584-94.

³ Moodie, Sue, Aja Mason, and Lois Moorcroft. May 2021. *Never Until Now: Indigenous and Racialized Women's Experiences Working in Yukon and Northern British Columbia Mine Camps*. Watson Lake, YT: Liard Aboriginal Women's Society. (PDF) <http://www.liardaboriginalwomen.ca/index.php/never-until-now-laws-mining-report/file> (Disponible en anglais seulement)

Employers may not provide safe, private hygiene and sleeping facilities and may not set and enforce codes of conduct that prevent sexual harassment and sexual violence. And sites may host contractors and other, more itinerant workers who do repairs and maintenance or expand facilities, who may engage in sexually predatory behaviour on- and off-site.

And the USW also represents workers in other industries who travel to work, far from home, in remote areas near Indigenous communities and/or work in mixed-gender crews in remote settings.

Some things that the USW can do to help end the violence associated with temporary work camps include:

- Inform leaders, staff representatives, organizers and members about the problems currently associated with temporary work camps and permanent work sites and ask for their cooperation in promoting safe and respectful behaviour by all workers. Information could be provided in the form of briefing notes, articles in union publications and content in relevant union courses
- When asked by government or industry for our views on resource-development projects, ask that projects be designed and developed with the safety of Indigenous women and girls and of female workers in mind. Refer to the national inquiry recommendations. Ask that Indigenous women from affected communities be involved in consultations and decision-making from the beginning
- Lobby governments to develop effective strategies to end gender-based violence and to increase funding for Indigenous-controlled social services and community infrastructure
- Insist that employers shoulder their responsibility to create safe and healthy workplaces
- Where workers are likely to purchase the services of sex-trade workers, encourage the view that “workers are workers”, deserving of fair pay, respect and a violence-free work environment, regardless of their occupation
- Continue to promote the union’s “Unionism on Turtle Island” and “Elevating Action” training

By being aware of and sensitive to the risks of increased violence against Indigenous women and girls, Steelworker staff, local union leaders and bargaining committees can take proactive steps to increase safety in the communities where we live and work.

Resource sheet #7: Other helpful USW resources

Check out the Indigenous rights section of the USW web page at usw.ca/equity-for-indigenous-people. Return periodically to see new content.

Resource sheet #8: Indigenous rights resolutions from the 2023 USW National Policy Conference

C13 INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION

WHEREAS diversity and representation are essential to ensuring equity and fairness within any organization; and

WHEREAS historical and systemic injustices continue to marginalize voices of equity deserving groups within our union; and

WHEREAS there are currently very few Indigenous Steelworkers on the staff of our union, at the district or national level; and

WHEREAS our union would greatly benefit from having the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous peoples and of all equity-seeking groups represented in our staff; and

WHEREAS embracing different perspectives and opinions can lead to better decision making and stronger unity within our great union.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Steelworkers continue to take action to establish programs to support and train equity deserving Indigenous members to reach all leadership and staff positions within the union. This will promote diversity and ensure that the composition of the union truly reflects the richness and variety of its members and help to counteract the ongoing effects of colonialism and systemic oppression of Indigenous members.

E7 LOBBYING FOR INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

WHEREAS our union has a proven track record of effective lobbying of federal, provincial, and territorial members of Parliament and of legislatures, and

WHEREAS our union has been a strong voice calling, first, for a national inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit Persons and, then, for implementation of the Calls for Justice, and

WHEREAS our union has long advocated for governments to adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), as part of our work of reconciliation,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the United Steelworkers:

- Carry out a lobbying campaign on Parliament Hill involving USW members to demand implementation of the Calls for Justice and the passage of NDP MP Leah Gazan's private member's bill on a framework for a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income;
- Carry out lobbying campaigns with provincial and territorial politicians to demand that they endorse UNDRIP and apply it to their laws;
- Ask and invite the CLC and provincial and territorial labour federations to take part in these campaigns.

E3 INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT CO-ORDINATOR PILOT PROJECT

WHEREAS the United Steelworkers has begun a pilot project in two of our three districts to help our union do an even better job representing Indigenous Steelworkers and working respectfully with Indigenous communities; and

WHEREAS we will learn a great deal from the ten-month project, but the work of reconciliation will take years.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the United Steelworkers support the work of the Indigenous Engagement Co-ordinators, learn from the pilot project, and make Indigenous Engagement an on-going feature of our union's work.

E8 NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

WHEREAS in 2021, September 30 was declared the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation; and

WHEREAS this day is not a statutory holiday in all jurisdictions.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the United Steelworkers:

- Lobby governments in all jurisdictions to make it a paid statutory holiday;
- Make it a priority to bargain September 30 as a statutory holiday in USW collective agreements;
- Encourage Steelworkers to attend reconciliation and cultural events in their communities;

E9 UNIONISM ON TURTLE ISLAND

WHEREAS our union created Unionism on Turtle Island, with the participation of Indigenous Steelworkers, to promote reconciliation and ensure we all know the truth of what happened on this land; and

WHEREAS this course has been attended by dozens of members since its launch in 2019, but our union would be stronger if many more attended.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the United Steelworkers:

- Support training of Indigenous member-facilitators so that we can offer Unionism on Turtle Island more often;
- Encourage local unions and area councils to request the course and send members to it.

H6 RACIAL JUSTICE

WHEREAS the struggle for racial justice escalated during the pandemic, because of George Floyd's murder, the deaths of Regis Korchinski-Pacquet and Joyce Echaquan, and conflicts affecting Wet'suwet'en, Six Nations of the Grand River and Sipekne'katic peoples; and

WHEREAS the re-discovery of the remains of thousands of Indigenous children at the sites of former residential "schools" further highlights the need for more racial justice; and

WHEREAS many Steelworkers who responded to the Canadian National Women's Committee's *2021 Survey Regarding the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Steelworkers* reported that these events caused some or significant impact on their mental health and on relations with family and friends.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the United Steelworkers expand and promote the anti-racism education of members and staff, and increase USW's outspokenness on racial justice issues.

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