



Government  
of Canada

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# Aboriginal Awareness Week



A Guide for the  
Public Service of Canada

Canada



## Introduction

This guide provides information on how to organize activities to mark Aboriginal Awareness Week. Organizers are encouraged to broaden their contacts and to make use of the experience of those who have successfully organized similar events.

Aboriginal Awareness Week, first introduced in 1992, is held on the four days that follow the Victoria Day long weekend. It was designed to increase awareness of Aboriginal peoples among federal public service employees.

Aboriginal  
Awareness

## Who should organize Aboriginal Awareness Week?

Setting up an event for Aboriginal Awareness Week requires a voluntary commitment on the part of a federal public service employee or a group of federal employees and/or department. Indeed, given the spirit and intent of Aboriginal Awareness Week, it is not necessary that the primary organizer(s) be Aboriginal.



It is important that an individual, group or department that wishes to organize an event or a series of events, meets the basic requirements of volunteerism, namely interest in participating in the event. With commitment assured, and support from this guide and other sources, the basic elements for a successful Aboriginal Awareness Week should be firmly in place.

## Who should participate in Aboriginal Awareness Week?


The short answer to this question is: all federal public service employees.



## How should a department recognize Aboriginal Awareness Week?

There is no set or approved formula, procedure, or activity for recognizing Aboriginal Awareness Week. The most important element is the commitment to create awareness on topics related to Aboriginal peoples.

Drawing on past Aboriginal Awareness Week experience and the organization of similar events, the following suggestions may be helpful. A review of past events held by different organizations include a large variety of activities:



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## Single event

- ▶ Aboriginal Awareness Week organizers may wish to focus on a single event. This may be accomplished by having an advertised presentation by a well-known Aboriginal person or by an articulate spokesperson from a significant organization, for example, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations or the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples. Other examples of cultural activities are exhibitions of Aboriginal art, performances by Métis dancers, demonstrations by Inuit drummers, and throat singers.

## Multiple events

- ▶ Aboriginal Awareness Week organizers may wish to undertake a full range of activities throughout the week. Examples include a different dance group performing each day at the noon lunch break; a series of presentations on Aboriginal topics; a prominent display of Aboriginal art, artifacts and cultural symbols; a daily series of ceremonies by First Nation, Inuit, and Métis elders; display tables staffed by Aboriginal artisans; an ongoing video exhibition focusing either on works produced by Aboriginal peoples and/or works about Aboriginal peoples and their issues.

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## Getting started

### Topics

There are a wide range of interesting and relevant topics about Aboriginal peoples that command both a high level of attention and concern. It is important to take the time to select a topic that is contemporary and has the potential to attract the broadest level of interest among the target audience and, at the same time, advance participants' knowledge. Among the most popular topics are the following:

- ▶ Aboriginal rights
- ▶ treaty and land claims – general (First Nations, Inuit, Métis)
- ▶ treaty and land claims – specific (British Columbia, Ontario etc.)
- ▶ residential school resolution
- ▶ access to resources
- ▶ self-government
- ▶ the *Indian Act* – past and present
- ▶ artifact registration
- ▶ spirituality
- ▶ the role of elders – traditional and contemporary
- ▶ linguistic and cultural groupings
- ▶ Who can be considered an Aboriginal person?
- ▶ economic development – rural, northern, and urban

## Speakers

It is imperative to ensure that guest speakers are experienced, knowledgeable individuals who have acknowledged expertise in a specific subject area. Organizers should first decide on a specific topic and then identify a speaker who has that particular expertise. For example, if the chosen topic is about the Métis, a possible speaker on this issue could be a representative from the Métis National Council. Or, as another example, if the topic is about “Aboriginal Peoples in Federal Politics,” suitable speakers could include past and present Aboriginal Members of Parliament and Senators.

Speakers with particular expertise can be identified by national, regional, or local political and cultural organizations, as well as by federal and provincial government departments with units involved in specific issues. A list of helpful Web sites is included on the last page of this guide.

## Activities

There are numerous activities that have potential to give depth and meaning to Aboriginal Awareness Week, including:

- ▶ elders available for individual consultations
- ▶ spiritual ceremonies conducted by elders
- ▶ the presence of Aboriginal artists and artisans with samples of their work





- ▶ an outdoor (or indoor) sale of traditional Aboriginal foods, or arts and crafts
- ▶ a display of Aboriginal art theme-based or general
- ▶ youth groups demonstrating such activities as dance, music, song, drums, etc.

## Events

Regarding a major event or series of activities, the decision to act on will depend on the audience and the objective to be attained. The objective of a major event is to allow participants to share in a meaningful educational experience or to advance their knowledge about Aboriginal issues.

### *Examples:*

- ▶ the presence of a major Aboriginal personality who has national recognition such as an artist, a hockey player, a politician, a musician, a comedian, or an author
- ▶ the physical presence of a display (accompanied by oral and/or written explanations) that represents some aspect of the traditional Aboriginal way of life such as a tipi, a Red River cart, an assortment of baskets, gaming and play toys, an inuksuk, or an encampment

- ▶ a display of evidence (military medals, short biographies of Aboriginal veterans, photos and published texts about a decorated Aboriginal veteran) related to Aboriginal involvement in Canadian military commitments (World War I & II, Korea, peacekeeping)
- ▶ an archival display on the Residential School experience
- ▶ a mini pow wow; or
- ▶ a treaty-signing re-enactment.



## How to organize Aboriginal Awareness Week

While there is no prescription or step-by-step procedure for organizing Aboriginal Awareness Week, below are some practical steps:

- ▶ Form a committee from those who have expressed interest – select a chairperson, delegate tasks, and assign responsibilities. Begin planning as early as possible.

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The concept of an elder has tremendous significance for Aboriginal peoples.

- ▶ Seek to engage others who may be interested – by personal invitation or by in-house advertising. Encourage the participation of those individuals with event organization experience, or those who have already organized Aboriginal Awareness Week events.
  - ▶ Identify sources and amount of financial support. Negotiate facility needs, especially space requirements.
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- ▶ Investigate the possibility of inviting an elder to assist in the planning process. This initiative may involve a little homework but the results will add measurably to your success and give immediate credibility to your efforts. The concept of an elder has tremendous significance for Aboriginal peoples.
  - ▶ Identify a Champion from senior management and invite that person to join the committee and to help promote the Week within the organization.



- ▶ Discuss the possibility of inviting people outside your organization to your committee, for example, representatives from Aboriginal organizations, from other departments, from the private sector, from volunteer organizations, or individuals from the Aboriginal community.
- ▶ Investigate partnering with other departments or agencies, and give special attention to cementing those partnerships, especially when a number of departments are housed within the same building complexes.
- ▶ You may wish to document your event with photographs of activities, speakers and participants for future reference or for purposes of publicity, either paper-based, online or both. Also, you may want to obtain the permission of all individuals photographed, letting them know what you intend to do with their photograph.
- ▶ Hold a debriefing meeting of the committee at the end of the process and leave a “paper trail” of the process for the benefit of those who will follow, for example, do a post-event review.



## Conclusion

To ensure the successful planning of an event or series of activities for Aboriginal Awareness Week, organizers should take into account three essential considerations:

- a) level of support within the organization
- b) interest and commitment level of participants
- c) the specific event and/or activities

Celebrating Aboriginal Awareness Week within your organization will assist in creating a welcoming workplace for Aboriginal peoples, contributing towards a truly representative and inclusive federal public service.

celebrating

## Helpful web sites

Please note: Some of the following links point to Web sites of organizations not subject to the *Official Languages Act* and, as such, information contained therein is available in the language in which it was written.

Aboriginal Awareness Week  
[www.aaw-ssca.gc.ca](http://www.aaw-ssca.gc.ca)

Aboriginal Canada Portal  
[www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca](http://www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca)

Assembly of First Nations  
(613) 241-6789  
[www.afn.ca](http://www.afn.ca)

Congress of Aboriginal Peoples  
(613) 747-6022  
[www.abo-peoples.org](http://www.abo-peoples.org)

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami  
(613) 238-8181  
[www.itk.ca](http://www.itk.ca)

Métis National Council  
(613) 232-3216  
[www.metisnation.ca](http://www.metisnation.ca)

National Association of  
Friendship Centres  
(613) 563-4844  
[www.nafc-aboriginal.com](http://www.nafc-aboriginal.com)

Native Women's Association  
of Canada  
(613) 722-3033  
[www.nwac-hq.org](http://www.nwac-hq.org)

Pauktuutit - Inuit Women's  
Association  
(613) 238-3977  
[www.pauktuutit.ca](http://www.pauktuutit.ca)

Tungasuvvingat Inuit  
(613) 563-3546  
[www.ontarioinuit.ca](http://www.ontarioinuit.ca)