



## *UP Skills for Work* Facilitator Guide: Non-Indigenous facilitators supporting Indigenous Peoples

*UP Skills for Work* is a program that helps build skills for learning, work, and life.

This guide supports facilitators who aren't themselves **Indigenous** to use *UP Skills for Work* resources with Indigenous Peoples. "Indigenous" is an umbrella term used to refer collectively to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. This guide can be used in addition to the free [online training](#) available for *UP Skills for Work* facilitators.

As a facilitator, it's important to understand the perspectives and experiences adult learners bring to the learning environment. When you take the time to listen to and get to know learners, you gain a deeper understanding of what they want and need to succeed.

Non-Indigenous facilitators need to be sensitive to the intergenerational trauma of discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the legacy of residential schools. Parts of this resource mention some of these realities, but it's important to commit to continual learning about the harm caused by colonial systems. See "Suggestions for continued learning" at the end of this document for more information.

In this guide, you'll find information about:

- creating an inclusive learning environment
- common barriers Indigenous people encounter in the workplace
- what to do if you make a mistake as a facilitator
- resources that can help learners overcome barriers

## Creating an inclusive learning environment

Many learners face geographic, social, health, and other barriers that influence their ability to access workplace skills training. As a result, it's important to prioritize efforts to create an inclusive and flexible learning environment.

Here are some things to consider when using *UP Skills for Work* resources.

### Use trauma-informed instructional practices

A trauma-informed approach acknowledges that learners may have diverse and often complex experiences of trauma. It emphasizes the importance of creating a safer, non-judgmental, and empowering learning environment that acknowledges the potential impact of trauma on an individual's ability to engage in the learning process.

Everybody's lived experience is different and each learner is an individual with their own strengths and challenges. It's harmful to presume knowledge of an individual learner's lived experience, but you can assume that trauma is in the room. Your priority as a facilitator is to ensure the safety of learners.

Here are some practices to keep in mind as you establish a safer space for learning.

- **Promote a collaborative learning environment.** If visiting an Indigenous community, it's important to acknowledge that you're a visitor in the community. Start each workshop with a land acknowledgement. Emphasize that as a visitor, you've come to collaborate with learners and that your role is not to act as a subject matter expert. It takes time to build trust with learners. As you work with learners, continue to emphasize your role as a collaborator.

If you're comfortable doing so, share a bit about yourself and your relationship to the land. Here's an example.

*My family is originally from Poland. When my grandparents came to Canada, they settled and started farming in Manitoba. I grew up on Treaty 1 territory. I'm grateful to be visiting you here on Treaty 7 territory and I'm eager to learn more from you.*

- **Take time to develop trust.** The discussion-based framework in the *UP Skills for Work* workbooks uses open-ended questions that allow learners to guide the discussions. There are plenty of opportunities for active participation, but learners shouldn't be forced to participate or share. The questions are not meant to have one correct answer. This is important to emphasize. Some learners may struggle with confidence and taking away the pressure of having to get an answer correct will support learner participation.

If visiting an Indigenous community, provide opportunities for learners and community leaders to incorporate culturally relevant activities into workshop sessions. Prioritizing the cultural identity of learners supports their motivation and trust.

- **Support learners' autonomy.** Provide opportunities for learners to identify their learning goals. Use the information at the beginning of each *UP Skills for Work* workbook to prompt learners to think about their personal learning goals for the session. Provide examples of specific and achievable goals.
- **Be an active listener.** When you are an active listener, you respect other people's boundaries and preferences. Each learner has unique lived experience. There is great value in bearing witness and sitting in discomfort without trying to fix or find excuses. If learners feel comfortable sharing, it's important to take the time to listen respectfully and not offer opinions or judgement about their experiences. Make sure to thank learners if they choose to share.

- **Use a strength-based approach to learning.** This approach recognizes and encourages the skills, talents, and positive attributes that learners already possess. Use this approach to enhance learner confidence, motivation, and overall well-being by emphasizing what learners do well rather than focusing on addressing challenges.

Be aware that this approach can take time and some learners may need additional support in recognizing their own strengths. You can help by repeating back the strengths and achievements you learn about or observe. For many learners, talking about the courage it takes to show up at a workshop in the first place is a good start.

Each *UP Skills for Work* workbook includes opportunities for learners to reflect on and discuss their experiences and consider their next steps for learning.

- **Skip, adapt, or extend activities and discussions as needed.** Use the *UP Skills for Work* resources in ways that work best for the learners. Some of the scenarios presented in *UP Skills for Work* materials may not be relevant for all learners, particularly those living in remote or rural settings.

If you're visiting a remote or rural community, try to find out as much about the community you're serving as you can. Understanding the services that are available to learners will help you develop a clearer understanding of how to make the resources relevant.

See the *UP Skills for Work* [online training](#) or [contact a program coordinator](#) for more information about adapting materials.

## Acknowledge and respect diverse Indigenous cultures and traditions

The word “Indigenous” refers to many different groups of people. Many Indigenous people prefer to be referred to by the specific Nation they belong to.

If visiting an Indigenous community, look to community leaders and learners for support in integrating Indigenous knowledge specific to the learners where possible. Connecting with Elders and other members of the community allows learners to make connections between the skills and knowledge gained through cultural practices, events, and activities and the workplace skills addressed in *UP Skills for Work*.

## Be flexible

The *UP Skills for Work* program has a variety of instructional and learning materials to support learners’ development of life and workplace skills. There are options for facilitating learning online or in-person to help address learners’ competing life priorities. Building relationships with learners takes time, but it’s a key part of understanding what they need to succeed.

Many people in Indigenous communities experience poverty. Keep in mind that some learners may benefit from access to snacks at the beginning of a workshop.

## Be mindful of language

The discussion-based framework in the *UP Skills for Work* resources provides starting points for meaningful discussion about skills development. When facilitating discussions with learners, be mindful of using respectful and inclusive language. For example, you may hear learners refer to themselves or others as “Indians.” This does not make the term any less offensive coming from other groups and you should still avoid using it.

## Emphasize relational learning

The discussion-based framework in *UP Skills for Work* resources supports a balanced relationship between facilitator and learner. There are opportunities for the facilitator and learners to set learning goals together and to learn from each other. Remember that one of the key priorities of the workshop is to build relationships. Not all learning may seem relevant to the workshop topic, but it is still valuable.

Learners need to feel safe and respected to meet their learning goals. Keep in mind that negative prior experiences and intergenerational trauma related to education can impact a learner's willingness or ability to participate and engage in learning environments. If a workshop feels too much like a school environment, some learners may disengage entirely. If visiting an Indigenous community, consider inviting an Elder to start the workshop by doing a prayer or smudging.

## Commit to continuous learning

All non-Indigenous Canadians need to understand the truth of Canada's colonial history and its current relationship with Indigenous Peoples. Non-Indigenous Canadians should seek opportunities to learn, listen, and reflect on the realities of Canada's history and the residential school system and how the institutions in place today continue to keep Indigenous Peoples disenfranchised, displaced, and disconnected. As a facilitator, understanding how this legacy and present-day reality impact Indigenous people in multiple aspects of their lives, including educational settings, is key.

## Get to know your learners

Every learner is a unique individual and has a preferred learning style. If a learner seems hesitant to participate, it could be for any number of reasons. Some learners may also have a different communication style than you. For example, some forms of non-verbal communication are not universal, and some learners may not be comfortable making eye contact. This doesn't necessarily mean the learner is not interested or engaged.

Invest time in developing relationships with learners to build trust and understand their unique learning strengths and challenges. Failing to consider the needs and interests of learners can discourage them from actively participating. Learners need to feel recognized and included. As is the case in any learning environment, learners will likely have a wide range of literacy levels. If learners feel like they can't keep up, they may shut down. Take the time to understand learners as individuals and what they need to succeed.

One aspect of getting to know your learners when facilitating workplace skills training is learning about their lived experience in the workplace. Developing an understanding of the realities many Indigenous people face in the workplace can help you better understand learners' perspectives during discussions.

## Common barriers in the workplace

Here are a few examples of common barriers Indigenous people encounter in the workplace, though not all examples may be relevant to all learners. Keep in mind that barriers in the workplace can be due to multiple factors, including the colonial systems in which workplaces exist.

### Lack of representation

More role models of Indigenous people working in different industries are needed to inspire and educate other Indigenous people about the opportunities that exist. When Indigenous people don't see other Indigenous people in the workplace, especially in leadership roles, it can lead to a feeling of isolation. They may feel like the workplace has limited opportunities for professional growth for employees who are Indigenous. Being perceived as different from others can make it feel unsafe to speak up or make a mistake.

### Unfair expectations

Organizations that have reconciliation or diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies often rely on Indigenous employees to educate their staff. While it's positive that Indigenous people are recognized for their insights, this reliance can become burdensome. They may find themselves shouldering the responsibility of training and educating other staff.



## Discrimination

Indigenous people may encounter discrimination in many aspects of their lives, including the workplace. Discrimination against Indigenous women in the workplace is especially common.

Anti-Indigenous racism is often expressed in the workplace through stereotyping and stigmatization. As a result, Indigenous people may feel like they need to work harder than non-Indigenous employees to prove their value.

Indigenous people often experience **microaggressions** from co-workers and leadership. A microaggression is an everyday behaviour or remark that implies negative associations or insults towards an individual or group. Examples of microaggressions include using harmful terminology, condescension, and inappropriate jokes.

A co-worker or supervisor may say or do something casually, with no real intent to inflict harm. But the remarks or actions can have long-lasting effects. Those impacted by microaggressions can feel unwelcome and emotionally exhausted. Many workplaces have policies in place to prevent and address bullying, but microaggressions might not obviously break any official rules. This makes addressing microaggressions in the workplace difficult.

## Job opportunities and hiring practices

There are often limited job opportunities in rural or remote Indigenous communities, which forces people to leave their home community to seek employment. Opportunities for remote work can be limited by the high cost and unreliable nature of internet and cellular service in remote and rural areas.

Standardized hiring practices can exclude Indigenous people. For example, the traditional job interview process doesn't always allow for alternative communication styles. It can also perpetuate bias in terms of how a person is expected to present themselves in an interview.

## Access to skills training

Learners in remote or rural communities don't have the same access to digital skills training or other types of training as learners in larger urban centres.

## What to do if you make a mistake

As a facilitator, you'll likely make mistakes from time to time. For example, you may perpetuate a harmful stereotype in casual conversation by being careless with your choice of words. Think about your mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow.

Decide if you should address the mistake in front of the group or in private on a case-by-case basis. If the mistake occurs in front of the group, you may wish to openly acknowledge the error and take responsibility in front of the group. In some situations, it may be better to acknowledge your mistake and apologize privately and directly to the person involved to avoid embarrassing them.

Here are some more suggestions for what to do if you make a mistake.

- **Take responsibility.** An important first step when you make a mistake is to acknowledge it. Don't be defensive. Explain that you understand why what you did or said is a problem. Avoid making excuses for why you made the mistake.
- **Apologize.** Be sincere and specific about what you did wrong, but don't over-apologize. Respectfully correct yourself.
- **Learn from the mistake.** Every mistake is an opportunity to learn. Take time to reflect on the mistake you've made and what caused it. This will help you avoid making the same mistake in the future.

## Other resources

When you take the time to understand your learners and their unique needs and experiences, you have a better understanding of how to support their growth by choosing relevant instructional approaches and resources. Visit [upskillsforwork.ca](https://upskillsforwork.ca) for more information about resources in the *UP Skills for Work* program that you can use with your learners to support the development of key workplace and life skills.

## Extension activities

*UP Skills for Work* offers a series of activities that expand on content in the core workbooks. Examples of activity topics that may be relevant to your learners include setting boundaries, taking up space, and managing emotions when someone says no. Visit [upskillsforwork.ca](https://upskillsforwork.ca) to download activities.

## Suggestions for continued learning

If you want to learn more about trauma-informed practices, the [Crisis and Trauma Resource Institute website](#) offers courses, workshops, and other resources.

Consider reading the following national inquiries and reports:

- [The Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#)
- [Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#)
- [National Indigenous Economic Strategy](#)

## Glossary of terms

### **Indigenous**

A term used to refer to collectively to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples

### **Intergenerational trauma**

When the impacts of trauma are passed down by a trauma survivor to subsequent generations

### **Microaggressions**

Everyday remarks or actions that imply negative associations and insults towards an individual or group, suggesting that they are less than or a problem that needs to be fixed. Microaggressions may be subtle or overt, and intentional or not

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