



Guidance for Requesting Cultural Teachings

Keweenaw Bay Indian Community Natural Resources Department

Importance of Indigenous Knowledge

The Keweenaw Bay Indian Community Natural Resources Department (KBIC-NRD) aims for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in our natural resources management activities and stewardship programs, including events hosted by our department that promote education and outreach in our community. Indigenous knowledge in our community includes Ojibwa cultural knowledge, and traditional and contemporary skills and practices that come from experiences and relationships we have with our community and family members, and the land, water, and many more-than-human beings who also call this region their home. It is important that we recognize the importance of our cultural teachers and elders in Ojibwa communities, and invite them to share their knowledge and skills at our department workshops and events when possible.

Who is a teacher?

When preparing for an event, and in the case that the program would be strengthened by cultural teachings, you may inquire and obtain references about individuals who have specific content knowledge, teaching skills, and a willingness to share with others from the KBIC Cultural Committee or the Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO). A teacher may include an individual of tribal descent, tribal membership, or a KBIC employee or partner with whom we have a working and trusting relationship. Honorarium arrangements are different for tribal or non-tribal teachers. KBIC-NRD staff do not receive honorariums from NRD events.

How to ask appropriately

To ensure that teaching and learning is done in a good way, first, *Asemaa* (tobacco) is offered to a potential teacher or an elder when seeking their knowledge or advice. Prior to making your request, always speak your good thoughts and intentions to *asemaa* before it is offered. *Asemaa* can be offered to another as loose *asemaa*, in a pouch, or wrapped in a piece of cloth. When offering *asemaa*, place it in front of the Teacher or Elder and kindly state your request. When you ask someone to share their knowledge, it is very important to be specific in your request. The Teacher or Elder indicates acceptance of your request by picking up the *asemaa*. (If you hand it directly to the person, you do not give him/her the opportunity to accept or pass on your request – it takes away their choice.) If the Teacher or Elder accepts the *asemaa*, s/he is accepting the request and will do her/his best to help you. If they cannot do what you are asking, they will say so, and they will not accept *asemaa*. According to cultural teachings, the exchange of *asemaa* represents reciprocity; it is similar to a contract between two parties where the Teacher or Elder is agreeing to do what is asked and the one offering *asemaa* is obligated to respect the Teachings and the Teacher.