

What is TK?

“Traditional Knowledge” (TK) is used in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). It is knowledge that is an integral, inseparable feature of Indigenous societies. It is important to define what you and your community mean by TK. Terminology evolves over time. First Nations across the province define TK in many different ways. Many

First Nations have their own concepts of TK that do not necessarily conform to academic, legislative or policy definitions. Some communities have indicated that community or ancestral knowledge is also TK. Other communities choose to define TK more narrowly. Some communities may choose to use different TK terminology altogether. For example, the Mohawks of Akwesasne use the term “Naturalized Knowledge System” to emphasize that

knowledge systems of Indigenous people are not homogeneous. Other First Nation communities may be comfortable with the term “Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge” (ATK), as referred to in the *Species At Risk Act* (SARA 2002) legislation. In 2006, the Chiefs of Ontario used the term “Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge,” and in later years used “Traditional Knowledge.” For many years, the term “Traditional Ecological Knowledge” (TEK) was used.

The Akwé: Kon Voluntary Guidelines for the Conduct of Cultural, Environmental and Social Impact Assessments define TK as follows:

Traditional knowledge – refers to the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

Source: Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2004. <https://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/akwe-brochure-en.pdf>

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples refers to TK in Article 31:

- 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.**
 - 2. In conjunction with indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights.**
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“Indigenous Knowledge” (IK) has gained general acceptance; it is defined as “the Indigenous knowledge of the Indigenous peoples of Canada” in the *Impact Assessment Act* (sec 2, 2019). Governments, proponents and other non-Indigenous agencies use the term “Indigenous Knowledge” but they are generally referring to a much more limited concept.

It is not appropriate to impose a definition of TK on First Nation communities. It is reasonable to expect proponents, governments and others involved in an EA process to respect the decision and preferences of a given community.

It is very important for each First Nation community to develop your own view/concept of what Indigenous or traditional knowledge means in your community. Your definition helps set the limits of what you are willing to share externally and what knowledge remains in the community. In recent years, some First Nations have decided to use their own ancestral language in expressing their knowledge.

There are many descriptions of TK based on international agreements, scholars, scientists, governments, agencies and Indigenous organizations. In this document, we will use the term TK, while recognizing it is by no means a perfect term, nor accept-

In a project with the Chiefs of Ontario related to water, Elders involved in the project were asked to describe “traditional knowledge.” The following is their brief description:

Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge includes the rules and guidelines passed down through generations that guide us in our behavior in relation to the land, to the animals and to each other (p. 14).

Source: Lavalley, Giselle. 2006. *Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge and Source Water Protection: First Nations’ Views on Taking Care of Water*. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

able to all First Nations (as noted above). First Nations should decide which term and definitions they are comfortable using.

Importance of Language

First Nations continue to emphasize the importance of language in generating, innovating and sharing TK. The Arctic Council Permanent Participants for

Use in the Arctic developed the *Ottawa Traditional Knowledge Principles*. These principles emphasize the relationships between TK and languages, and defines TK as follows:

Traditional Knowledge is a systematic way of thinking and knowing that is elaborated and applied to phenomena across biological, physical, cultural and linguistic systems. Traditional Knowledge is owned by the holders of that knowledge, often collectively, and is *uniquely expressed and transmitted through indigenous languages*. It is a body of knowledge generated through cultural practices, lived experiences including extensive and multigenerational observations, lessons and skills. It has been developed and verified over millennia and is still developing in a living process, including knowledge acquired today and in the future, and it is passed on from generation to generation. (Arctic Council, undated; https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58b6de9e414fb54d6c50134e/t/5dd4097576d4226b2a894337/1574177142813/Ottawa_TK_Principles.pdf).

Support for language revitalization and retention is thus critical for the maintenance and sharing of TK.

It is also important to consider ways in which TK will be shared in your community. The Chiefs of Ontario prepared a TK primer and has offered the following ideas for your consideration.

Ways of Sharing and Protecting TK Outside the Community

It is important to determine what you mean by “community” and to be aware that “First Nation” often means “beyond the reserve” boundary in terms of lands/

The Canadian Encyclopedia defines Indigenous territory as “Indigenous territory – also referred to as traditional territory – describes the ancestral and contemporary connections of [Indigenous peoples](#) to a geographical area. Territories may be defined by kinship ties, occupation, seasonal travel routes, trade networks, management of resources, and cultural and linguistic connections to place.”

Source: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indigenous-territory>.

Ways of Sharing and Protecting TK in the Community

The development and implementation of protocols to share and protect TK within First Nation communities is a priority. We are aware of the historical impact of colonization and our communities need to be pro-active by reconnecting and taking up our responsibility to adapt to the changes and move forward in protecting our future. TK promotes balance and harmony; this harmony includes integrating TK and practices of western society. What our ancestors have passed down to this generation will still work today, and in the future.

The following are examples of sharing and protecting TK in the community:

- Education on the role of TK in the community.
- Community programs that promote TK sharing and protection, [e.g.,] TK apprenticeship programs, language programs.
- Leadership to listen to the Elders.
- Sharing stories and knowledge with each other in the community, [e.g.,] Elders, Band Council, community members, health staff.
- Understand the role of TK in protecting the land for future generations.
- Children need to receive teachings, [e.g.,] school visits.
- Community promotion of ceremonies, [e.g.,] fasts, etc.
- Younger generations must learn their inherent rights and treaty rights.
- Incorporate TK in the community decision-making process and governance.
- Communities must work together to protect their TK.

Source: Chiefs of Ontario. 2010. *Traditional Knowledge Primer*. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.

territories and resources. First Nations are specific legal entities defined and governed by the *Indian Act* (1876). Jurisdiction is determined by the *Constitution Act* (1982). Often the term “community” is used synonymously with First Nation (or bands or reserves).

The *Indian Act* does not govern all First Nations; some have opted for various other negotiated agreements, such as self-government agreements. Some First Nations have also maintained their traditional governments over time, and continue to assert authority and jurisdiction through these governments. It is important to consider who or what the decision-making authority will be for your EA and TK study.

Protection of Indigenous/Traditional Knowledge

Although treaties outline the relationships between communities (nations) and Canada (nation), further rights to protect TK are required to limit First Nations’ cultural erosion and economic exploitation. First Nation communities also require the opportunity to proactively respond: this includes working in collaboration with governments on a nation-to-nation basis. Developing TK processes that include intellectual property rights is one step toward ensuring TK sustainability.

In addition, the Chiefs of Ontario suggested other ways to share and protect TK outside the community:

- **First Nations TK holders’ inclusion in external decision-making processes;**
- **Equal recognition of TK to western science;**
- **Positive working relationships with non-Aboriginal people;**
- **Education to encourage non-Aboriginal people to see and work with the natural world from a TK perspective;**
- **First Nation consultation on issues affecting their communities;**
- **First Nations resources for accessing lawyers, engineers, scientists to assist them in full participation;**
- **First Nations approval on decisions that impact their communities;**
- **TK must be consistent in decision making;**
- **External decisions need to consider the long-term impacts and survival of the people;**
- **TK [is] not for sale;**
- **Much TK has been forgotten, so it must be protected;**
- **TK sharing of what is relevant, not ‘everything’; and**
- **TK must be shared directly, not someone else conveying it on behalf of the community.**

Source: Chiefs of Ontario. 2010. *Traditional Knowledge Primer*. Toronto: Chiefs of Ontario.
