



How to be in right relationship with Sinixt: Settler Fragility, Allyship, and Working with Indigenous Peoples

Prepared by Lori Barkley¹, staff anthropologist with Autonomous Sinixt, for the West Kootenay Ecosociety, 2021

Everyone is an ally until they realize they will have to feel uncomfortable or get challenged or feel angry. It's not going to feel "right" to you to dismantle a thing that was invisible to you before. You are going to feel it's not fair. That's part of the work. ~ Tanya Tagaq

¹ Disclaimer: this is a resource intended for settlers. It is not a replacement for learning from Indigenous Peoples, nor your own education. I cannot know the background of all people reading this; for some it may be review, for others new information. It is an introduction to some of the issues that settlers and settler organizations need to consider when entering into relationship with Autonomous Sinixt. For teachings about Sinixt protocols, always consult with Autonomous Sinixt matriarchs. There are also many resources written by Indigenous Peoples about allyship. This document is intended as a step before that level of engagement to help identify some key issues. It is informed by my decades of living as a settler in Sinixt təmx^wúla?x^w learning, making mistakes, working with and within settler organizations, and seeking to do better.

I got it wrong: time to listen!

Inevitably mistakes are made. People are ignorant of Indigenous protocols by design. The first step is to never make anything about you! The worst thing you can do is to act defensively and immediately start to argue. It really isn't about you; your personal safety is rarely, if ever, under attack. Even in the face of anger, your most important response is to listen carefully to what is being said—again, without diverting your attention to how you will defend yourself, but rather to stay in that place and accept that anger as the frustration of generations of Indigenous Peoples having to explain themselves to settlers who rarely truly listened. Stay in that space and just listen and learn. Hold the space.

In fact, it is most often prudent to listen, to consider, and to go away and contemplate what was said to you. To respond immediately is to demonstrate that you haven't actually been listening carefully and thinking deeply about what is being said. What too often happens is that settlers will seek to explain themselves and their actions in the heat of the moment, often by interrupting. Now is not the time; you are reacting, not considering. The best time to continue the conversation is to come back to it later. Again, it is not about you, it is about listening and truly hearing. Once you have done so, you have demonstrated respect for the teaching you have been given (as uncomfortable as you may be, it is a teaching so remember that). You are being given an opportunity to do better and your actions will demonstrate whether you are up for the challenge or not.

True reconciliation can neither be comfortable nor convenient. ~ Christi Belcourt

How do I respond to anger?

Settlers often turn off their ears in the face of anger. Policing Indigenous People's emotions and judging them for being "too emotional", "too angry", etc. is another form of settler privilege. It is a privilege to be in the position to judge how oppressed minorities respond to injustice. Anger is about love. People tend to get most angry about those things that they love. So rather than hearing anger, think about it as an expression of love that often has no outlet. After all, consider what it is like to love something deeply and then repeatedly have to watch that thing be destroyed or disrespected (like your unceded $t\acute{a}m\acute{x}w\acute{u}l\acute{a}?\acute{x}w$). Imagine doing that for generations.

Do not try to police the emotions of oppressed people—that is not your role or your job. I have often heard, "well, X is just so angry, it turns people off", "if they could just be nicer, they would have a lot more allies", etc. Don't do this! It is one of the most insidious forms of privilege. All too often settlers decide how and with what emotions Indigenous Peoples can "show up". Don't be one of them!

"Good Indians" and Bad Indians"

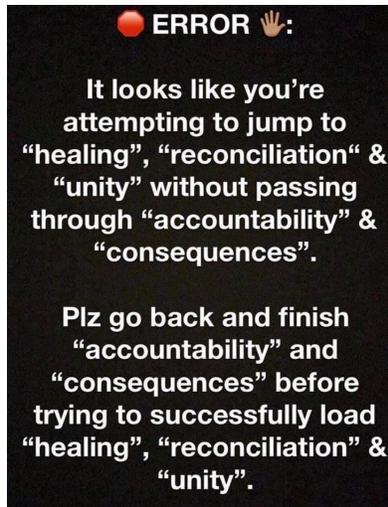
Funny how everybody likes the "Indian" that talks about the trees, the water, harmony, feathers, etc., etc. But nobody likes the "Indian" that talks about the invasion, terrorism, murder, theft, rapes by the White Man. (meme)

Many Indigenous Peoples, particularly land defenders, talk about this a lot (e.g., Pam Palmater in her *Warrior Life* podcasts). The “good Indians” are those that follow the rules, show up to events in regalia, ask little-to-nothing of settlers and thus make settlers feel “comfortable”. This is performative and does not lead to substantive change. Often, as settlers, one feels good in these situations. Consider that this comfort comes from leaving colonialism and theft of Indigenous lands and children out of the situation. All too often this is seen as reconciliation. It’s not.

The “bad Indians” are those that can make settlers feel uncomfortable. They talk about land rights and land back, sovereignty, blockades, Indigenous rights, and racism in its various forms (structural, institutional/organizational, personal), and more. “Good Indians” are rewarded by settler society. “Bad Indians” are not. They are targeted and surveilled by police; settlers may accuse them of “ruining my life” or “making me late for work”, or “destroying my livelihood”. Well, take a seat behind those that have been experiencing this for over a century and work on building some empathy now that you are experiencing it.

Minor settler inconveniences are in no way comparable to what Indigenous Peoples have experienced. So just stop that kind of talk and think about what it is like to truly experience those things. It is settler ignorance that allows for those kinds of attitudes to persist. No settler came with land and natural resources, those are all stolen from Indigenous Peoples. Always remember that, particularly in environmental work. Indigenous Peoples were stewards of this land for thousands of years, settlers are newcomers lacking traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).

There can be no reconciliation without first decolonizing. If you are truly decolonizing its uncomfortable as hell. Too bad! Settler comfort is the foundation of this country. If there is no decolonization there is no space for Indigenization or reconciliation. Colonialism is taking up all of the space and there is no room left. Realistically we are a long way from decolonization. Your organization should have decolonization at the forefront of everything they do. This is no easy task as colonization is ongoing, so that means that the work of decolonization is also ongoing. We are continually running a race that keeps on getting longer. We are a very long way from the goal of Indigenization or reconciliation. Focus on running the marathon of decolonization; expect to get muddy.



Inviting Indigenous Peoples: entering into relationship

Indigenous Peoples are not circus bears and should not be treated as such! I can't tell you how many times settlers will ask if an elder could "dress up in their traditional clothes". This needs to stop! Not all Indigenous peoples have regalia. Not all Indigenous Peoples have the resources or privilege of having these items that settlers think is necessary to portray their Indigeneity.

For Autonomous Sinixt, there isn't money for regalia and costumes, but that does not make them any less Sinixt. The work of Autonomous Sinixt is focused on community and following the rules of whuplak'n and smum iem. It is not what you wear, but what you do that matters most. According to the laws of smum iem, everything belongs to the women, including hunger, sickness, etc. So, the Autonomous Sinixt matriarchs put money back into their community; it is their responsibility to care for their community, which also includes settlers. Rather than their own regalia, money goes to feed hungry people in the community, contribute to healing, etc.

If you invite a Sinixt person, or any other Indigenous person, to an event, don't tell them what to wear, or express disappointment about how they are dressed. It is not the wardrobe that matters, but rather the knowledge that they carry. I often joke that leather, beads and feathers are like the Pied Pipers of settlers. If someone shows up with these items, and speaks a few words most won't understand, many settlers will follow them anywhere. Pay attention to more than the accoutrements of culture. Just because someone fits the settler stereotype of what Indigenous Peoples are "supposed to look like", doesn't mean that they have more knowledge of their culture, or are a "better" or "good Indian".

The same goes for singing, drumming, story-telling, etc. Not all Indigenous Peoples have the same resources and skills. Some are skilled story-tellers, some aren't. Some have songs, some don't. You get the idea. Again, Indigenous Peoples are not your

circus bear! Sadly, I have seen all of these things and more. “Does the elder drum or sing? It would be great if they could do that!” “Could they give a speech in their language?” Sadly, colonialism cut Indigenous Peoples off from their culture, language, land, etc. You may be adding further harm by asking someone to do something that they are not capable of. It can further harm someone to make them feel lesser than Indigenous because they cannot perform in the ways you expect. You may be asking for something that has been persecuted in the past and brings up painful memories and experiences. Also, do not ask Indigenous Peoples to perform for your event, only to be dismissed once their performance is over.

Similarly, do not have someone else who isn't from the territory do a welcome to the territory and “perform” in expected ways rather than the People's whose traditional territory you are on. This seems to happen most often when someone is looking for a drummer. The organization then has that person do the welcome to the territory as well. (See section on the differences between a land acknowledgement and a welcome to the territory) Rather, enter into a discussion about the goals of what you are doing and what would be appropriate. It is good for you to have a clear idea of what you are asking for, but be ready to change your vision. Consult, listen, ask, don't tell.

It is very important also to note that when you make an “ask” of Sinixt you are entering into relationship. If Sinixt accept, you are now in a relationship that you must maintain. Do not take up the time of an elder to then decide that you would rather work with someone else. This is not a respectful relationship. Just because someone seems “easier to work with”, doesn't justify cutting off communication. Easy does not mean better, either. This requires a conversation, just as with any other respectful relationship.

If you are establishing or in relationship with Autonomous Sinixt, you also have responsibility to Autonomous Sinixt. All too often settler organizations enter into relationship, take up scarce, time and resources and then decide they are then going to work with someone else. Decide who you want to enter into relationship with and why before you reach out. Then once you do, you need to nurture and honour that relationship. Do not interview Indigenous Peoples to see who you like best either!

Gifts and tokens of appreciation

We are often asked what kinds of gifts to show appreciation. Like many heads of state, this often takes the form of material objects: stuff. Gifts are symbolic of relationships; it is the relationship that you are honouring not the object. Keep in mind that people only have so much room for stuff, so don't be disappointed if that material token of your relationship with Sinixt and appreciation is not occupying a privileged space in a Sinixt home. It may be. It may also be gifted to other land defenders for a silent auction, for example. This does not mean that Sinixt do not value the relationship that has been established, but rather your gift helps Sinixt to fulfill their responsibilities in taking care of community.

You don't need to spend a lot of money on something. Gifts of home-grown foods, canning, etc. are appreciated. Again, these may be further distributed to those in need in the community. In all cases, your gifts are important as they help Sinixt matriarchs in fulfilling their responsibilities under Smum iem.

Speaking of money—it is always appreciated! As Sinixt are “extinct for purposes of the *Indian Act*” they receive no government funding like Band Councils do. This also further disadvantages them in applying for funding, which may require Band Council support. Again, this money is not hoarded. It goes to support projects, it goes to community events, community members in need, etc. For example, I was at an event with Marilyn James where 50/50 tickets were sold. She bought several and instructed me that if she won, the money was to go to the family for which the money was being raised. The needs of community most often determine where resources go. This is in keeping with Sinixt traditional protocols grounded in responsibility.

Offering Tobacco

This protocol is for Autonomous Sinixt. If you are not working with Sinixt, then you need to verify the protocol for the Peoples on whose territory you are making the offering—which would be the same people you have entered into relationship with. Tobacco is most appropriate when asking for a blessing or entering into relationship. The offer of tobacco is to the Autonomous Sinixt representative, who takes that offering on behalf of the ancestors (which is why tobacco is most suited if you are doing something on the land or water, as their permission is also required. The person to whom you are offering is a conduit to the ancestors.)

If a Sinixt person is coming to open an event, to offer a welcome to the təmx^wúla?x^w, to answer a request, or to participate in a project, the protocol is to offer tobacco to the ancestors and ask for some kind of blessing. This can be as simple as asking for a blessing on a particular event or for some learning that is hoped for, a specific or something else entirely.

The tobacco should come wrapped in red cloth if possible. It can be a whole pouch (organic preferred but not necessary) or if can be part of pouch. In a pinch, you could even empty out a few cigarettes into some cloth or paper. This tobacco is then used in the future for prayers and offerings. It is possible to offer other plant material instead, such as Rocky Mountain Juniper, but tobacco is traditional.

When ready, you invite the Sinixt representative to stand with you. The person offering stands in front of them, holding the tobacco pouch out in front and says: "We offer the ancestors this tobacco and ask that (e.g.) they bless this exhibit/event/project and that it might help people learn more about the Sinixt and that we come into right relationship with the people of this land." They will then take the tobacco and hold it over their head and say some prayers which will include honouring the directions.

If people witnessing are sitting, they should be encouraged to stand up and turn, as they do, to face each of the directions with their palms facing forward at their sides. The offeror can stay standing next to the Sinixt representative for this part. They will finish this with saying "lim limpt" four times (please join in!) and then spreading a small amount of tobacco (which they have ready from their own stash) on the floor, ground or a designated spot. If they have more to say after the actual blessing, the offeror can step away or go sit down.

In terms of the offering for an on-line gathering, you can do the speaking part on line, then either set aside the offering and have it delivered to the representative OR take it outside right away and lay it down (meaning sprinkle some of the tobacco on the ground).

Remember that tobacco offered should be respected. If you need to move it, take it to the water, or place it at the base of a tree. If it is indoors, do not vacuum up the tobacco. It now holds prayers so needs to be respected as such; return it to the earth in a respectful way.

Ceremonies in Sinixt tæmx^wúla?x^w

Only Sinixt should be performing ceremonies in Sinixt tæmx^wúla?x^w. If you or your organization are bringing some form of ceremony here that is not grounded in Sinixt culture and performed by Sinixt, permission must be granted. This includes the use of hallucinogens, sweats, etc. If you are attending such an event, you should ask if permission from the matriarchs was granted. If not, you should not participate, and identify that permission needs to be granted prior to holding ceremony.

In the context of Sinixt "extinction", there have been many, many examples of people bringing in ceremonies from other places. A common practice is Medicine Wheels, which have a specific context on the prairies, grounded in their traditions. Medicine Wheels are not part of the traditions birthed in Sinixt tæmx^wúla?x^w. While Autonomous Sinixt are not necessarily against this, and some organizations use this in their teachings after consultation with Sinixt matriarchs, consider if it is more appropriate to do something from this land, on this land. One thing to consider is that this takes space away from Sinixt culture and protocols and instead introduces ceremony from another culture and place in Sinixt tæmx^wúla?x^w. If someone from another culture brings ceremony here, they are not conducting it in their own territory and need to ask permission. This is a significant problem in Sinixt tæmx^wúla?x^w.

As an example, a local organization asked about using Medicine Wheel teachings as part of a larger event. They were in discussion with Autonomous Sinixt who suggested the Sinixt ceremony of "taking it to the water". A teaching was given to several people who now have permission to use the ceremony in their work. They offered tobacco prior to the teaching (see "offering tobacco"), were given the teaching, and then permission was granted for them to use it in their work. They also found the teaching was helpful

not only to them, but also for their work. Rather than using the Medicine Wheel teaching, they were using a Sinixt teaching that also helped them. By asking and be willing to learn, they were honoured with a teaching on the land.

How does a territorial acknowledgement differ from a welcome to the territory?

This is a big one, no one but Sinixt can welcome people to Sinixt t̄əmx̄w̄úlaʔx̄w̄. It is completely inappropriate to have someone from another nation welcome people to Sinixt t̄əmx̄w̄úlaʔx̄w̄, unless they are doing so with the permission of Sinixt matriarchs. While there are many Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations doing so, this doesn't make it right. This is distinct from a territorial acknowledgement, which is acknowledging whose territory you, your event, or, where your organization is located. Just as it would be inappropriate for a guest in your home to welcome other guests into your home, the same holds true for Indigenous Peoples. Ditto for someone who is Indigenous living here, but who is not Sinixt. As non-Sinixt, you can acknowledge territory, but you do not have the authority to welcome people to it. Regardless of whose territory, this is an important sign of respect and demonstrates right relationship.

Reconciliation will never succeed so long as one side sees it as a question of rights, and the other side sees it as an act of benevolence. ~ Murray Sinclair

Common settler excuses in land acknowledgments and how to respond

You need to be able to explain your territorial acknowledgement. If you can't, you need to do this work. I have seen many organizations copy another organization assuming they must have done their research. Don't assume this. Here are some common responses I hear when talking to people about land acknowledgements and some examples of how I respond.

- "We want to be respectful of all Indigenous Peoples"

Response: "if you are neutral in the face of injustice you are on the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." (Desmond Tutu). Within the context of the land claims process in BC, your acknowledgement is a profoundly political statement that is used to support land claims. By acknowledging Nations who are claiming Sinixt t̄əmx̄w̄úlaʔx̄w̄ as equal to Sinixt, injustice is perpetuated, harming the most oppressed. It perpetuates Sinixt extinction and supports the land claim to Sinixt t̄əmx̄w̄úlaʔx̄w̄ by other Nations. Your neutrality is supporting the elephants, not the mouse. This is not respectful of Sinixt, who's traditional t̄əmx̄w̄úlaʔx̄w̄ this is. Quote Desmond Tutu again.

- "I don't know enough to have a say"

Response: then get educated. This is literally the least you can do is to know whose land you are benefitting from every single day. To not know is an expression of settler colonial privilege.

- "Settlers shouldn't be involved"

Response: Too late; you are already "involved" just being in Sinixt t̄mx̄w̄úlaʔx̄w̄. You are part of the ongoing processes by which Sinixt are being repeatedly disposed of their t̄mx̄w̄úlaʔx̄w̄. Canada is a settler colonial state, and as a settler, living in unceded Sinixt t̄mx̄w̄úlaʔx̄w̄ you are already "involved" in usurping Sinixt land rights. The Sinixt were rendered extinct in our name, by our settler colonial government. We are all in this mess together. If you think you aren't already "involved", think more deeply about the ways in which you are, as there are a multitude of them. The only way out of this mess is for settlers to be actively informed and involved. An "extinct" people cannot take this all on by themselves. Land defenders in other nations also work with settlers. Lend your privilege and support to actively support land rights and autonomy of Indigenous Peoples. It is always important to work under the guidance of Sinixt elders, however. You are not a maverick; you are a supporter.

- "It's about culture, don't make it all political"

Response: as an anthropologist I really have fun with this one. Politics is part of culture, not the other way around. Culture is all-encompassing, it includes all social processes, including political ones. If you are celebrating one culture and promoting that culture then you are being political. If you acknowledge territory, you are being political. If you don't acknowledge territory, you are also being political. If you have books from other nations on display but none from Sinixt, you are being political. And so on, and so on.

It is very much your responsibility to educate yourself about Indigenous politics, lateral violence, and how you or your organization is making a political statement—whether that is your intention or not. Who you invite to share culture also makes a political statement. If you include or exclude Sinixt in their t̄mx̄w̄úlaʔx̄w̄ you are making a deeply profound political statement. I sometimes also talk about how settlers have a long history of consuming Indigenous culture, without taking on the political struggles that enabled that culture to survive. You can't "celebrate culture" without politics; culture is political!

- "You are being divisive, I don't subscribe to divisive politics"

Response: this is most often heard from those with power being called out. The response here is very similar to the response to "We want to be respectful of all Indigenous Peoples". Ironically, I hear this most often from those working exclusively with the Colville Confederated Tribes, who assert that one person alone speaks for all Sinixt, and exclude Autonomous Sinixt entirely. It also comes from those working with Syilx who deny Sinixt a distinct identity and instead refer to Sinixt təmχwúlaʔxw as Syilx "eastern territory".

Standing up to Band Councils is not divisive, it is often based in following directions of elders, ancestors and traditional protocols, rather than colonial systems imposed on Indigenous Peoples. It is only by disregarding the many layers of lateral colonial violence perpetrated by those powerful groups, that the most marginalized standing up for their rights are deemed "divisive". This is often deeply embedded in the "good Indians" and "bad Indians" trope.

Overarching this is settler colonialism, which pits Indigenous Peoples against each other in the fight for scarce resources. Colonialism is an ongoing process and thus an ongoing problem for all Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island. This is an important context to keep in mind—these are the consequences of terrible government policies imposed on Indigenous Peoples and the structural roots of lateral violence. The ongoing work of colonialism is best served by keeping Indigenous Peoples fighting amongst themselves rather than against the governments that divide them.

I'm an Ally!

You don't call yourself an ally. If you do the work, you may one day be recognized by Autonomous Sinixt as an ally. It is not your place to decide if you are an ally. It takes years of showing up, doing the hard work, and taking responsibility to follow Sinixt protocols to even be considered for such an honour. You can call yourself a supporter of Autonomous Sinixt.

If you are serious about being an ally, Dr. Lynn Gehl, who talks a lot about Reconciliation, has written an Ally Bill of Responsibilities.² This provides concrete actions to take if you want to act in allyship with Indigenous Peoples. I have made comments after her statements as to how that relates to Autonomous Sinixt specifically. And if you stick around and keep doing the hard work, one day you might even be an accomplice.

² http://www.lynngehl.com/uploads/5/0/0/4/5004954/ally_bill_of_responsibilities_poster.pdf

Responsible Allies:

1. *Do not act out of guilt, but rather out of a genuine interest in challenging the larger oppressive power structures;*

Comment: if you come from a place of guilt, then the focus is on yourself, not on oppression of Indigenous Peoples. Move past the guilt--which doesn't help anyone and can be a further drain of resources--to action and challenging colonial power structures.

2. *Understand that they are secondary to the Indigenous people that they are working with and that they seek to serve. They and their needs must take a back seat;*

Comment: this means, for example, that your deadlines are not those of the Peoples with whom you work. You need to allow the time and space for consultation. For Autonomous Sinixt, that may mean consulting with the ancestors, which may also take time. Short response times also contributes to the feeling that Indigenous consultation was an after-thought, rather than being respectful of Sinixt protocols and planning with Sinixt perspectives in mind from the outset. This also means not telling Sinixt matriarchs what they can and cannot talk about. You and your organization should be the ones to serve, not the other way around.

3. *Are fully grounded in their own ancestral history and culture. Effective allies must sit in this knowledge with confidence and pride; otherwise the "wannabe syndrome" could merely undermine the Indigenous people's efforts;*

Comment: being an ally is to respect Sinixt culture, not to appropriate it. Cultural appropriation is not a sign of respect, but further exercising settler privilege. Know who you are, rather than trying to be someone else. Using the Sinixt dialect when you can, is a sign of respect. Saying lim limpt (thank-you), way' (pronounced whi, for hello and good-bye), calling things and places their original names are signs of respect.

Appropriating Indigenous culture is hurtful because you are taking on the fragments of a culture for which the original culture-bearers have been persecuted, cultural items stolen, destroyed, disrespected, etc. Those practices are still ongoing. Respect culture and Sinixt protocols, don't appropriate it. And always remember "culture is not a costume".

4. *Are aware of their privileges and openly discuss them. This action will also serve to challenge larger oppressive power structures;*

Comment: but do not make everything about you! I find that openly discussing my settler privilege is most often relevant when talking with other settlers to help them become aware of their own privileges. Where it may also be appropriate is when you have made a mistake and realize how your settler privilege contributed to that mistake. Own it, demonstrate that you understand and will work to correct it (put the action into reconcile-action!)

5. *Reflect on and embrace their ignorance of the group's oppression and always hold this ignorance in the forefront of their minds. Otherwise, a lack of awareness of their ignorance could merely perpetuate the Indigenous people's oppression;*

Comment: again, do not make everything about you. These reflections may not be shared verbally, but they do need to inform your actions. Reflecting on settler privilege is like peeling an onion, there are many, many layers to peel away. Peeling the onion is your work to do, not that of Indigenous Peoples. Like peeling an onion, sometimes it makes you cry! Settlers are ignorant of Indigenous issues by design.

6. *Are aware of and understand the larger oppressive power structures that serve to hold certain groups and people down. One way to do this is to draw parallels through critically reflecting on their own experiences with oppressive power structures. Reflecting on their subjectivity in this way, they ensure critical thought or what others call objectivity. In taking this approach, these parallels will serve to ensure that non-Indigenous allies are not perpetuating the oppression;*

Comment: this is often referred to in settler society as being reflexive: thinking critically about your own position in relation to others. How do my many subject positions shape my perspective, how others see me, and how much space I take up? What kinds of unearned privileges do I bring with me? What assumptions am I bringing with me? Etc. If you are a settler, even one living in poverty, you have unearned privileges. You do not need to feel guilty (see point 1), but you do need to be aware and conscious of how you can take up less space with your privilege, and/or use your privilege to create space for others. For example, if you are at an event or meeting and notice that Autonomous Sinixt representatives are trying to speak, yet no one calls on them, use your privilege to make space for them (e.g., put your hand up & when you get called on and cede your space of privilege to Autonomous Sinixt).

In addition, consider a time when you may have been oppressed, if even briefly. Part of settler privilege, especially of white, heteronormative, cisgender folk is that privilege is everywhere. If you have ever been denied access to space, for example, reflect on how that feels. Then consider what it would be like to live with that oppression on multiple levels, every day. Privilege can also be about what you don't experience, like not being followed in a store, or not fearing for your life when you see police, or knowing that you can walk into pretty much any space and be accepted, etc.

7. *Constantly listen and reflect through the medium of subjectivity and critical thought versus merely their subjectivity. This will serve to ensure that they avoid the trap that they or their personal friends know what is best. This act will also serve to avoid the trap of naively following a leader or for that matter a group of leaders;*

Comment: see comments on points 4-6

8. *Strive to remain critical thinkers and seek out the knowledge and wisdom of the critical thinkers in the group. Allies cannot assume that all people are critical thinkers and have a good understanding of the larger power structures of oppression;*

Comment: this is the "any Indigenous person will do" trap. You still need to be a critical thinker about which Indigenous Peoples you work with and support. Just because someone is "easy" to work with, doesn't mean that they are the best person to work with. The same goes for allies; again, you are only an ally if the people you work with call you one. It takes a long time to earn that position and it must be actively maintained. Some people who call themselves allies aren't (usually they aren't).

9. *Ensure that a community consensus, or understanding, has been established in terms of their role as allies. Otherwise, the efforts of the people will be undermined due to a lack of consultation and agreement;*

Comment: this means constantly checking in to ensure that you are acting according to the wishes of Autonomous Sinixt. Just because you had support in one context doesn't mean you no longer need to consult or you have authority on Sinixt matters. There are so many things going on with Autonomous Sinixt that you have no idea about. Also, just because someone was in right relationship in the past, doesn't mean they still are. Check in with Autonomous Sinixt about people or organizations they have

designated as being in right relationship. Remember, people can make mistakes and work to get back into right relationship as well.

10. *Ensure that the needs of the most oppressed—women, children, elderly, young teenage girls and boys, and the disabled—are served in the effort or movement that they are supporting. Otherwise, they may be engaging in a process that is inadequate and thus merely serving to fortify the larger power structures of oppression. Alternatively, their good intentions may not serve those who need the effort most. Rather, they may be making the oppression worse;*

Comment: intersectionality is important! If an organization has harmed Autonomous Sinixt, your role as an “ally” is to not belittle the harm or explain it away. The powerful are well-served in Canadian society, so think critically about how the least powerful are being served by your organization or group. Is your organization or event accessible and welcoming to all? How is the space organized? If there are limited seats at the table, or opportunities to speak, think critically about who is at the table and who is being heard and who is being excluded. If some demographics are missing, think critically about why, and ask the people who are missing how you can better facilitate their participation (e.g., is everyone equally familiar with Robert’s Rules of Order?). Under the laws of smum iem, Autonomous Sinixt must act responsibly towards the most oppressed. This may not be the same for Band Councils, or Tribal Business Councils (i.e., the CCT) who have different priorities and goals and may more closely follow settler political rules of engagement.

11. *Understand and reflect on the prevalence and dynamics of lateral oppression and horizontal violence on and within oppressed groups and components of the group, such as women, and seek to ensure that their actions do not encourage it;*

Comment: This is tricky in practice. This is when non-violent communication skills, or bystander training can be helpful. Autonomous Sinixt are subject to much lateral oppression and horizontal violence. For one, they are “extinct for purposes of the *Indian Act*”. Federal, provincial, and municipal governments who ignore Sinixt and do not consult with them on important matters in their territory is a form of oppression. Other Nations excluding Sinixt, denying their distinctiveness, calling Sinixt territory their “eastern” or “western territory” is lateral oppression and horizontal violence, for example. Consider how you are your organization may be contributing to or destabilizing oppression.

Settler organizations hiring all non-Sinixt peoples to consult on projects in Sinixt təmx^wúlaʔx^w is also a form of oppression, as is misidentifying Sinixt artifacts as belonging to other nations, and so on and on and on. Recently

Touchstones Museum, The Capitol Theater, and the Revelstoke Museum put on an event stating that Shelly Boyd and the Chairman of the Colville Confederated Tribes are the only people authorized to speak about Sinixt issues in Canada. This is lateral violence, perpetuated by powerful settler organizations. It is not the role of settler organizations to profess who speaks for Sinixt. Touchstones' response was to deny and deflect, which is not being an ally, but rather avoiding taking responsibility for their actions.

Do not contribute to lateral violence or divisive politics perpetuated by anyone, settler or Indigenous. Deciding which Sinixt organization (i.e., the Colville Confederated Tribes, or Autonomous Sinixt) you want to work with, and who best fits with the values of your organization, is not oppression. Just as in settler society and environmental organizations, there are many to choose from. Choosing to work with one and not another is not oppression, but rather making an informed decision as to who you want to work with. For example, this is akin to deciding whether I want to work with Yellowstone to Yukon, West Kootenay Eco-society, Wildsight, etc. who are all working for environmental justice, but which organization do I want to enter into relationship with? Which organization's values, goals, and actions do I support?

12. Ensure that they are supporting a leader's, group of leaders', or a movement's efforts that serve the needs of the people. For example, do the community people find this leader's efforts useful, interesting, engaging, and thus empowering? If not, allies should consider whether the efforts are moving in a questionable or possibly an inadequate direction, or worse yet that their efforts are being manipulated and thus undermined, possibly for economic and political reasons;

Comment: having the greatest number of people show up doesn't mean that the leader is doing "good work". Land defenders are most often the minority in their nations. Many Indigenous peoples are just trying to survive and don't, or can't, engage in bigger struggles. In the context of Autonomous Sinixt, it is the very powerful and well-funded Indigenous organizations that can be the greatest source of problems. Again, it is important to think about what are the objectives of different groups. Just as there are many organizations in broader society, so too in Indigenous communities. Some may be pro-capitalist and pro-development. So also consider which Indigenous organizations fit best with your goals.

As an environmental organization, you may be working with a minority in comparison to the Band Council system and their associated industries, like logging and mining. Just as there are deep divisions within settler society, so too Indigenous societies. Don't expect there to be consensus,

one leader accepted by all, etc. Which specific community are you going to work with?

Also, it is very important to keep in mind that Band Councils only have authority over reserves, not the nation's unceded lands. Again, traditional leaders may be oppressed within their nations as well. If your project is on a reserve, then it would make sense to consult with the Band Council. If it is not on reserve, then you should be consulting with traditional governance systems (e.g., hereditary chiefs). Just as you would not consult the City of Nelson on a project in the Slocan valley, do not take direction from Band Councils that are not the original Peoples of this t̄m̄x̄w̄ú̄l̄ā?̄x̄w̄.

13. *Understand that sometimes allies are merely manipulatively chosen to further a leader's agenda versus the Indigenous Nations', communities', or organizations' concerns, and when this situation occurs act accordingly;*

Comment: Indigenous political leaders can also be Machiavellian. Do your homework and figure out who you are working with and know why.

14. *Do not take up the space and resources, physical and financial, of the oppressed group;*

Comment: again, don't make it about you! Offer compensation to Autonomous Sinixt representatives who welcome people to the territory or attend your events. Offer gas money, a meal, think about what it takes for an oppressed people to keep showing up. Ensure that they feel welcomed and are attended to and provided with adequate space and resources (a comfortable place to sit, water to drink, etc.). When you come to a Sinixt event, it may also be appropriate to bring an offering.

Time is also a resource. It is astounding how many "asks" Autonomous Sinixt receive. It is even more amazing how many of those requests they are able to fulfill. It is disheartening to see how often this is taken for granted. It also means being very clear about what you are asking before you make the request. This can include people with the very good intentions to "help". Taking up hours of an elder's time to figure out how you can help is disrespectful. Pay attention, look at where help is needed and then offer to help fill that need with what you can do. If you say you are going to do something; do it! Hours are spent with people who don't follow through, and nothing comes back to Autonomous Sinixt.

Before you ask to be involved, show up to events, pay attention and learn. It is your work to figure out what you can offer, not the work of Sinixt.

Spend time learning about the issues, and listening. This is the best way to figure out how you can act in solidarity.

15. Do not take up time at community meetings and community events. This is not their place. They must listen more than speak. Allies cannot perceive all the larger oppressive power structures as clearly as members of the oppressed group can;

Comment: often there is limited time for participation. I have many times seen settlers take up all of the available space in a room. Watch, listen, learn. At meetings in Sinixt təm x^wúla? x^w, Sinixt are most often in the minority. Use your privilege to ensure that they have space to be heard. (See also point 6 for a strategy to do this)

And finally,

16. Accept the responsibility of learning and reading more about their role as effective allies.

Comment: you must continually be learning. You never arrive at decolonization or allyship, you must continually renew your efforts.

But it's too hard!

You are right, it is hard! Of course, it is; you are battling against over a century of ongoing colonialism. According to the laws of smum iem, you have to take care of yourself first. If you don't do that, then you create more work for others. It is ok to take a break from the hard work and then come back to it refreshed. For me, if I am coming to the work with anger, hostility or other negative emotions, I need to take a break and come back to it with a more positive outlook. Also, consider this as another aspect of settler privilege. As a settler I can choose to disengage for a while. It is also a sign of respect to not bring your negative baggage (burden basket) to Sinixt solidarity work. They don't need any more settler crap to deal with.

*If allyship sounds uncomfortable and exhausting, that's because it is. Inequality must be corrected through active work, the discomfort is worth it. ~
Prestomanifsto0*

The danger of the workshop!

The greatest problem with workshops is that people think they are experts and done learning after an hour, or two, or a couple of days. This has the potential to create

instant “experts” who still have much to learn. A workshop is no replacement for the vast amount of knowledge one should have before entering into relationship with Sinixt. A workshop is a basic introduction to some issues. It can produce over-confidence. Never say to a Sinixt elder, “oh, I know that, I took a workshop on it”. What this does is disregard the centuries of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) they carry.

However, most people don’t have time for that extensive knowledge gathering when they are on a short contract. The point is not to profess to know everything. Listen, learn, integrate knowledge. Think of the workshop as helping you get to the starting line, but it won’t equip you to run the full race and win. That will take additional work.

I know, I worked with Band Councils in

We hear this a lot! Most often it is in the context of Ontario or the prairies. There are so many significant and profound differences between provinces that have treaties and BC with very few. Further, Sinixt have no Band Council in Canada, nor do they want one. So, your experiences working with Chiefs and Band Councils in other part of Canada, or even BC, is not the same as working with the Autonomous Sinixt who are operating under traditional laws and protocols and a matriarchy. These experiences may be relevant, but they are not the same as “knowing” about Sinixt ways. I can’t tell you how many times I have heard this phrase when being asked to explain about Sinixt. It is offensive and disregards Sinixt distinctiveness. It will stop relationship building in its tracks. If you hear yourself starting to say this phrase, you should stop and reconsider if this knowledge is truly appropriate or not. Most often it isn’t. Listen instead; you might learn something new.

Why do you keep calling me a settler; I don’t like it.

Canada is called a settler colonial state. This means that the land was colonized with the intent to “settle” it (i.e., to populate the land and use the resources). So, to acknowledge that you are a settler, even if you immigrated here and may also be an oppressed minority, is to recognize that you are a part of the ongoing colonialism that is usurping Indigenous sovereignty and land rights. This is not to deny the slavery and forced relocation of African-Canadians. There is much work out there on settler colonialism. For example, Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker’s *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada*, published by Fernwood, 2015.

If it doesn’t feel uncomfortable, it’s not real reconciliation. True reconciliation will only be found in the discomfort that comes with the exchange of land, wealth and power. ~ Pam Palmater