



Guidelines for the Burning of Sacred Plants on VCC Campuses



Indigenous Education and
Community Engagement

Vancouver Community College is located on the traditional, unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples and acknowledges the x^wməθk^wəy əm (Musqueam), Skwx̣ wú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłẉ ətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations who have been stewards of this land from time immemorial.

Vancouver Community College (VCC) is actively working towards indigenizing its practices, and recognizes that Indigenous students, faculty, staff, and community engage in a variety of traditional ceremonies which may include the burning of sacred plants.

VCC recognizes that smudging, the burning of tobacco and other medicines (sage, sweetgrass, cedar, lavender) are a part of the Indigenous traditional way of life and are, therefore, permitted on campus in accordance with these guidelines and the principles and procedures set out in the VCC Smoke-Free Campus policy 221.

It is important to relay that practices such as smudging are always voluntary, and people are never forced or pressured to participate. It is completely acceptable for a person to indicate that they do not want to engage in the practice. That person may choose to refrain from participating, and either stay in the room or leave the room during the practice. Such practices will be done with respect for those who choose not to be involved, as well as those who choose to be involved.

These guidelines apply to all College community members, including but not limited to students, staff, volunteers, visitors, observers, contractors, and officials representing the College.

DEFINITIONS

Ceremony: A traditional ritual or practice that is recognized as integral to indigenous culture. This may include but is not limited to drumming, singing, dancing, praying, pipe ceremony, and/or the burning of sacred plants (known as medicines). The ceremonial use of sacred plants will generally take place as part of a planned event.

Smudging: Smudging is a traditional ceremony practiced by some, but not all, Indigenous peoples. It involves the burning of one or more sacred plants in a variety of contexts and purposes, such as to purify a space and/or to release negative thoughts, emotions, and energy.

Sacred Plants: Plants used in traditional indigenous ceremonies and smudging. These include but are not limited to cedar, sage, sweetgrass, lavender, and tobacco.

PROCEDURES

The purpose of these guidelines is to support an environment that is inclusive and welcoming while ensuring that the burning of sacred plants is conducted respectfully and safely.



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Individual Smudging

Smudging is used as a way to calm and balance a person or situation.

1. Spaces are available to Indigenous people wishing to Smudge and are exempt from any requirement to request an accommodation or to provide notice to the broader campus community.
2. Smudging can occur within the Gathering Spaces or affiliated offices without prior approval.
3. Outdoor smudging can be practiced anywhere on campus, as long as it takes place away from open windows, doors and building air intake units.

Classroom Engagement

Academic areas planning a traditional ceremony or smudging as part of engagement with Indigenous pedagogies in the classroom, and that will include the burning of sacred plants must observe to the following protocol.

4. At least 5 working days prior to the event, submit a Facilities Service Request (FSR) to the Facilities Department, copying the school Department Head, school Dean, Indigenous Education & Community Engagement (IECE) Dean or delegate, and Department of Safety, Security, Risk and Privacy.
5. The Facilities Department will evaluate the fire and ventilation systems in the requested space and will provide the approval on whether or not the ceremony may proceed in the requested location. If the requested location is not suitable due to fire, ventilation or other significant concerns, Facilities staff will work with event organizers to find suitable spaces.

Upon approval to proceed with a ceremony:

6. The appropriate Building Manager or delegate will advise Security of the date, time and location of the ceremony.
7. Faculty should inform participants of the intention to engage in this way of knowing.
8. At least 2 days prior to the event, post notices in nearby spaces (hallways, classrooms, offices), indicating the date, time, and location of the event, and that the burning of sacred plants will be taking place.
9. During the ceremony, keep doors closed until the aroma has dissipated.
10. The IECE Dean or delegate will be available to provide advice and guidance as needed regarding such ceremonies.



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Community Engagement / Planned Event

Events that are either arranged on behalf of the College or hosted on campus by an external group, and that will include as a traditional indigenous cultural ceremony, are considered a planned event, and must observe the following protocol.

11. The IECE Dean or delegate will be consulted during the planning stage of events where a traditional indigenous ceremony will be part of the event.
12. The appropriate Building Manager or delegate will advise Security of the date, time, and location of the ceremony.
13. Event notices will be posted in nearby spaces (hallways, classrooms, offices), indicating the date, time, and location of the event, and that the burning of sacred plants will be taking place.
14. The IECE Dean or delegate will be available to provide advice and guidance as needed regarding such ceremonies.

Fire Safety

15. Do not leave burning material unattended. Fully extinguish the burning plant material after the conclusion of the ceremony.
16. Event organizers must know the location of the nearest fire extinguisher, be aware of nearby combustible materials and keep embers in a heat proof container until cold to the touch before discarding.
17. When smudging outdoors, please observe fire safety practices around dry grass and forested areas, especially during times when the fire hazard level is elevated.

For more information about these guidelines, please email: indigenous@vcc.ca