

GUIDELINES FOR GOOD POWWOW ETIQUETTE

April 2022

NORTH  DAKOTA
NATIVE
TOURISM
ALLIANCE

Representing the five tribes of North Dakota. Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, Spirit Lake Nation, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa

GUIDELINES FOR GOOD POWWOW ETIQUETTE

1. GUIDELINE 1: RESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR

1.1 Personal interactions

Powwow participants spend years honing their talents and powwows take months to organize. Attendees show their respect by adhering to mutually understood protocol.

- 1.1.1 Be attentive to the Master of Ceremonies: listen to his advice on when it is appropriate to stand, to join in, and when photography is restricted.
- 1.1.2 Ask people around you to explain things you don't understand and feel free to ask the powwow staff/volunteers if you have any questions.
- 1.1.3 Do not engage in excessive public displays of affection as this may be considered impolite behaviors.

1.2 Photography, recording, filming and sketching

Regulations around reproductions may be in place to avoid cultural and commercial exploitation of tribal members and their traditions.

- 1.2.1 Ask before taking a photo of anyone.
- 1.2.2 Heed the Master of Ceremonies on when videos or photographs are not allowed. Avoid photography during veterans songs, flag songs or prayers.
- 1.2.3 Do not assume that if a dancer has given you permission to take a photo that you can use this in a publication. You must have the expressed approval of that person for commercial usage.

1.3 Gifts and Donations

Native American cultures tend to be incredibly generous; status is often displayed through gift giving. There are appropriate ways for powwow visitors to take part in this charitable tradition.

- 1.3.1 Consider donating money towards the powwow if the opportunity arises, such as during the Blanket Dance. Most powwows are non-profit events and these events help raise funds to cover powwow costs.
- 1.3.2 Take the time to visit the local vendors and artisans to support the local economy.

1.4 Participation and Joining in

All are welcome at public powwows, however there are times when attendees should not join the dancers, and stay out of the arena.

- 1.4.1 Join dancers in the arena during open/social dances; intertribal some will call for anyone to join, some other dances are considered sacred and should be observed only. Always move in a clockwise direction when in the arena.
- 1.4.2 Wait for the Head Man, Head Woman Dancers and Head Staff to start dancing during an open/social dance before you begin.
- 1.4.3 Follow the protocol demonstrated by the community members in attendance as to whether it is appropriate for children to enter the arena.

1.5 Respect for Elders

Most tribes have social protocols when elders are present given their highly respected status.

- 1.5.1 Show elders respect by not talking while they are speaking on the address system.
- 1.5.2 Give up your seat to an elder if you are able.

1.6 Inappropriate Gestures

Some tribes have particular etiquette about eye contact, gestures, and personal space that defines respectful interactions.

- 1.6.1 Refrain from using your finger to point; many nations consider this gesture to be impolite.
- 1.6.2 Avoid direct eye contact as a social norm, particularly with elders.

1.7 Garbage

Native Americans consider the land sacred. Measures should be taken to protect the natural environment where the powwow is taking place.

- 1.7.1 Help keep the landscapes clean and do not litter.

2 GUIDELINE 2: SAFETY

2.1 Prohibited items

Respecting tribal sovereignty includes following local laws while on tribal lands.

- 2.1.1 Do not bring alcohol, drugs or weapons to the event area, they are strictly prohibited at powwows.

2.2 Valuables

Like any major event, it is important to be conscious of your belongings at powwows.

- 2.2.1 Remain aware of your valuables at all times as unattended bags may be removed.

3 GUIDELINE 3: APPROPRIATE DRESS

3.1 Appropriate Dress:

Appropriate attire ensures visitors are respectful to the traditional aspect of powwow.

- 3.1.1 Do not wear short shorts or skirts, or other revealing clothing as this could be considered offensive.
- 3.1.2 Dress comfortably and casually unless advised otherwise.

4 GUIDELINE 4: POWWOW PROTOCOLS

4.1 Grand Entry

Grand Entry begins the powwow: all dance contestants enter the arena, led by the veterans, and an opening prayer is read.

- 4.1.1 Remain standing and remove hats during the grand entry.

4.2 Regalia

Traditional dress is referred to as regalia and most often worn during ceremonies and celebrations. Regalia is often handmade and passed down as family heirlooms.

- 4.2.1 Do not touch regalia without asking permission as some regalia have deeply sacred or personal meaning or may be fragile.
- 4.2.2 Know that some regalia has religious significance and should be worn only by those qualified to do so.

4.3 Dance arena

The dance arena/circle, often located within an arbor, is respected by powwow attendees.

- 4.3.1 Do not cross or enter the dance arena after it has been blessed, except during open/social dances.
- 4.3.2 Do not run or allow play within the arena.

4.4 Dropped feather

Eagle feathers are considered sacred to most Native Americans. When an eagle feather is dropped, veteran dancers must perform a special ceremony before the powwow continues.

- 4.4.1 Do not pick up a dropped/fallen feather; leave it where it is and notify the nearest pow wow staff member.

4.5 Seating

It is common for powwows to not have enough bleacher seating for everyone, social norms have evolved to ensure most attendees can be comfortably accommodated.

- 4.5.1 Take a lawn chair to the powwow if you have the means to do so.
- 4.5.2 Reserve a bleacher seat by placing a blanket over your spot. Do not take more space than you need.

4.5.3 Do not reserve front seats; they are reserved for dancers, singers, and their families.

The basic sample also included all powwows hosted by the five federally recognized tribes of North Dakota, and the nine federally recognized tribes of South Dakota. These powwows were a mix of contest and traditional powwows, no powwow etiquette was found for the traditional powwows.