



Lake Winnipeg Production: Excellence in Community Engagement

WORKING IN
INDIGNEOUS
COMMUNITIES

So much of the making of the film was relationship building leading up to filming: communicating the intention of the story, describing the idea, getting feedback on how the community feels about that, and ensuring reciprocity by determining how the film can be of use to the community.

Keven Settee, Filmmaker, Lake Winnipeg Project

Director Kevin Settee's Lake Winnipeg Project, produced by the National Film Board (NFB)¹, is a community engagement project for a series of four short films (running 10-15 minutes each) and extensive social media engagement.² The Project explores the life and culture of the Anishinaabe, Cree and Métis communities that call *Kitchi Sakihikan* (Lake Winnipeg) home and their acts of resistance to change imposed from the outside. It aims to capture the spirit of pride in resistance inherent in the life and culture on *Kitchi Sakihikan*. The film's primary audiences are Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living on or around the lake, Indigenous people across Turtle Island who are facing similar externally imposed challenges to their ways of being, and those who relate to the cultural and political struggles of the people of the lake.

While director Kevin Settee, Anishinaabe/Cree community organizer, had deep family and community connections from all around the lake, he sought to build formal filmmaking experience. This part of the process included a week-long filmmaking/shooting masterclass, which resulted in a stand-alone short film. Filmmaking mentorship was built into the full production stage as well, with Kevin directing and shooting the fourth film entirely on his own. Five categories of engagement were conducted during the development phase, together building a holistic engagement approach.

¹ Key roles included Kevin Settee as Director, Alicia Smith as NFB Producer, David Christensen as NFB Executive Producer, and Scott Parker as Filmmaking Mentor / Consultant. Scott Parker was brought on to provide Kevin practical training and mentorship opportunities throughout the duration of the project.

² The project commenced in early 2018 and is slated to run through mid-2021: Development Phases 1 and 2 ran from April 2018 through June 2019 and the Production Phase ran from August 2019 to June 2021.

String of Trust

Every film is different, every community is different, different levels of trust, different avenues of trust (eg. maybe Chief and Council; maybe family). Understand that trust in the community is tied together in a string, where first trust is built with a community leader such as an Elder, who then introduces you to others such as other Knowledge Keepers. From there, community meetings, connections with schools, youth, become more comfortable with sharing their stories. Damaging one part of that string has a big effect on how others may or may not trust you. Keeping the string intact requires ongoing respect and involvement, including updates on where the project is at. Kevin Settee

Trust has to be maintained with everyone at every level all the way through the project. One mistrust has an effect on the whole string. There needs to be ongoing respect and involvement from beginning to end, including updates on where we are at in production. All these layers of trust that have to be built and then respected afterwards. This means phone calls, community screenings, and social media engagement. Explaining that you will show the film to the community first, before screening/distributing anywhere else, can be helpful in building trust with communities.



Engagement Tools & Best Practices

1. “Community Visits”

Over the period of a year, the team visited several Indigenous communities around the lake to informally introduce the team to the communities. Visits involved taking the time for ceremony, staying with a host family, walking around the community, going out on the land, and sharing food with the community. Visits included discussions about the project as a whole and reflections on what a meaningful relationship and reciprocity look like. They enabled the team to learn about the people, hear their

stories, share with the community who the team members are, and build trust, respect and understanding across groups. Kevin describes such sharing as the bare minimum when it comes to working with communities.

2. Formal Consultation Meetings³

The first film was made on Matheson Island. The team provided food and coffee/tea and screened a short film produced by the NFB, to enable community members to learn about the NFB, hear what the team had been hearing in other communities in the region, share their stories and ideas about their communities, and provide any other information they find important for development, production, screening and distribution. The team sought permission to make a film in the community and followed up asking specific people if they would participate in the process. They then fleshed out the plan for the films and relayed their thoughts to key leaders, stakeholders, and influencers in the community.

3. Production Preparation

About a month later, the team returned to embark on a five-day development shoot on Matheson Island. They brought on Jaydon Flett, a local woman with film/broadcast experience, as Production Assistant and Sound Recordist. The objective was to hire a local person to provide such assistance in other communities as well. The relationships developed by the team in the two earlier stages enabled them to capture the authenticity of people's stories, in their personal spaces, showing people things they might not otherwise see.

4. Community Workshop

During the development visit, Kevin and Scott gave a talk at the local school about their plans for the film and hosted a workshop for the kids. In preparation for the workshop the team worked with the Principal to ensure the kids did some writing – stories about their lives and interests on the island –which focused on the stages of STORY/SHOOT/EDIT/SHARE to help the kids understand the filmmaking process. The kids had an opportunity to shoot with mini zoom cameras. The workshop was a great way to give back to the community, build trust with the families, and inspire some of the kids to one day get into filmmaking themselves. Working with youth? Finding creative ways to engage the community, such as cultural activities, prizes for participation. Kevin recommends organizing the Youth Film Workshop ahead of time, providing incentives for registration, sending participants videos ahead of time to review, and preparing a good lunch for the participants, to achieve a higher level of interest in filming from youth.

5. Community Screenings

Community screenings and distribution are key elements in the community engagement part of the project. These screenings have built relationships, strengthened community networks, fostered discussion, increased a sense of agency, and provided tools for community members to advocate for their concerns. The team screened other films to generate interest in the community in the filmmaking process and build interest in the process and in making connections with the team afterward.

³ These formal consultation meetings were based on the model Scott Parker honed in *The Grasslands Project*, but tailored for the *Kitchi Sakihikan* geographical and cultural context.

Hearing about what the films mean to the community feeds into the distribution strategy. Consider hiring someone from the community to be part of the strategic planning for distribution or a marketing / outreach coordinator for a few days in order to involve the community in developing outreach. This can also assist in developing an archival strategy to enable community access to material after production and distribution of final cut.

5. Community Consent

Keven used a process of ongoing consent and respect, where community members were told they can back out or be edited out of the film (before the film has been released) if they do not like how they are being portrayed. This often meant signing release forms at the end of the process and being open to some participants not signing consent forms until the film is complete.

Use of Social Media as a Best Practice

Building on his existing extensive social media experience and presence, both through his personal profile on Facebook (FB) and Instagram (IG) accounts, Kevin has built, manages, and is creating content for the [Lake Winnipeg Project](#) FB page, and is planning to do the same as the process progresses further. The Project made use of three key functions of a FB page, which all support community engagement.

1. Sharing Existing Media Stories Relevant to the Project

The Lake Winnipeg Project FB page serves as a hub to connect the project to individuals, communities, and events in the region, through sharing stories in the media relating to Lake Winnipeg, the people of the region, and their culture.

2. Project Status & Promotion

The page is used to share:

- when and where the Project's trips to communities for consultations and filming are happening,
- creating and promoting community events and invites, for consultations and film screenings,
- allows people make comments and ask questions on FB, which enables the team to give update on where they are at.

3. Micro-Stories

The FB page also provides the opportunity to share action shots or pictures of people the team connected with, to thank people for their hospitality and make them feel like they are an important part of the Project. These micro stories complement the film(s); as there was not enough time to film everyone's stories, social media took some weight off the films in terms of representing community, life and culture on the lake. The social media stories help fill the gaps, where the films were not able to capture pieces of the stories from the lake. These kinds of posts also help increase the following of the page to help build up interest leading to the release of the films.