



First Light Volunteer Guide

(as of March 2026)

Volunteer Guide



Read this document in full before completing your volunteer registration.

WELCOME

First Light is a community organization rooted in Indigenous cultural revitalization and celebration, serving both urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in St. John's. Our events and programs are built around culture, healing, language, and connection.

When community members walk through our doors, they are coming to a space that **belongs to them**, where they can be themselves without having to explain, perform, or educate anyone.

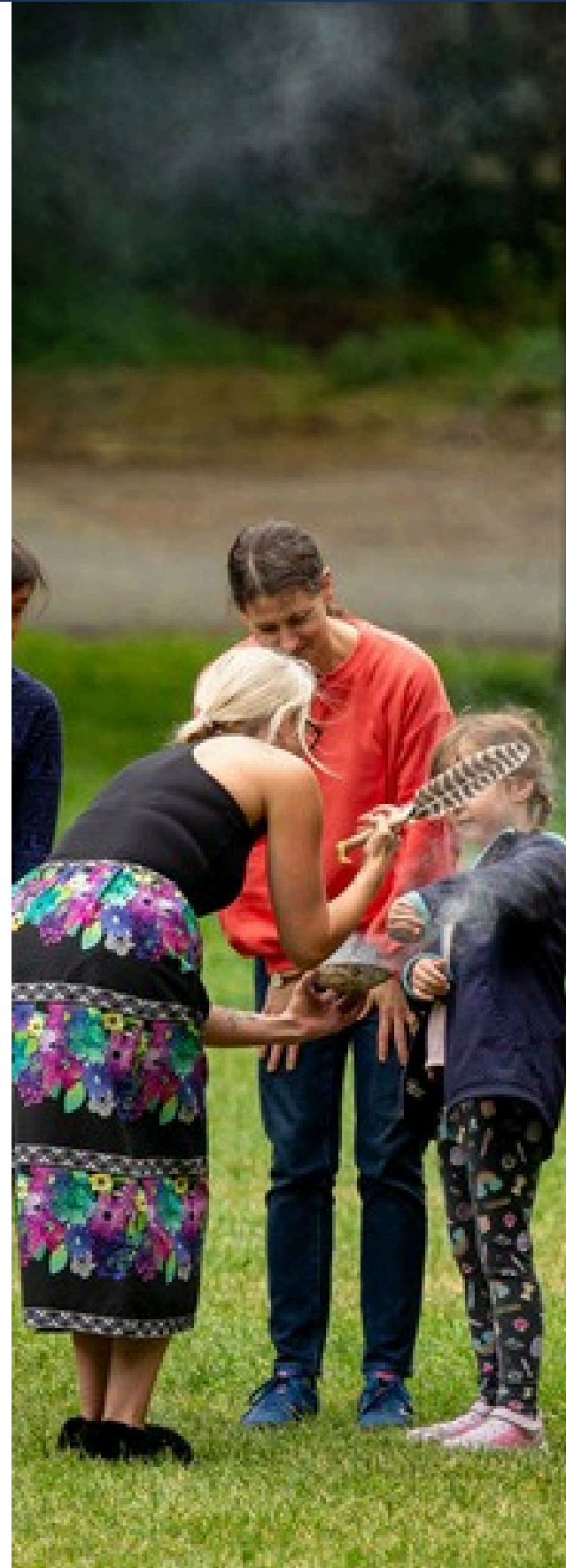
Volunteers are a valued part of making our work possible. Choosing to give your time here is meaningful, and we want to set you up to show up well. That starts with understanding the kind of organization First Light is, the spaces you may be entering, and what respectful presence looks like in each of them.

OUR COMMUNITY

First Light serves Indigenous people from many Nations. This includes Innu, Inuit and Mi'kmaw. We also serve Indigenous people who now call St. John's home and may have moved here from different parts of North America.

Many of the people who come to First Light have experienced trauma, displacement, or harm at the hands of institutions, systems, and well-meaning strangers.

That history does not disappear when someone walks into one of our events. Our responsibility is to make sure that when community shows up, **they feel safe, seen, and free to simply be**. Your responsibility as a volunteer is to support that, not interrupt it.





OUR EVENTS AND WHAT THEY CALL FOR

Not all First Light events are the same, and the expectations for volunteers differ depending on the space.

Read each category carefully.

LARGE-SCALE COMMUNITY CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

e.g. National Indigenous Peoples Day (NIPD), Spirit Song Festival

These are major celebrations that bring our community and the broader public together. They are joyful, high-energy events. Volunteers play an important role in logistics, hospitality, and accessibility. Cultural elements are woven throughout, and respectful conduct is essential. These events are a good starting point for newer volunteers.

LARGE-SCALE EVENTS WITH DEEP CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

e.g. Gathering of Voices, Orange Shirt Day (OSD), Language and Culture Camp

These events carry significant emotional and cultural weight. They are spaces of healing, learning, and intergenerational connection for our community. Volunteers at these events must have a proven track record of respectful engagement with First Light and our community. If you are new to First Light, we ask that you build that relationship first through general volunteer support and more celebratory events before being placed here.

SMALLER EVENTS WITH DEEP CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

e.g. Red Dress Day, Sisters in Spirit, 2SLGBTQQIA+ events

These are smaller in scale but carry profound meaning. They are acts of remembrance, solidarity, and grief. The community present at these events may be in a vulnerable place. Volunteers are expected to be present, quiet, and led entirely by staff. Placement at these events is reserved for volunteers who have demonstrated cultural awareness and community trust over time.



EXTERNAL EVENTS AND PRODUCTIONS

e.g. Centre for Performance and Creativity (cpac) events

When First Light supports external venues and productions, volunteers represent our organization in a public-facing capacity. The role here is about production support and guest experience. These events do not carry the same cultural elements as our internal programming, but professional and respectful conduct still applies. This is a great fit for volunteers with an interest in event production.

GENERAL VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

e.g. Admin support, event preparation, community initiatives

General support roles include things like preparing materials, setting up spaces, and supporting our staff with behind-the-scenes tasks. This is where most new volunteers will start, and it is genuinely valuable work. It is also an opportunity to get to know First Light, build relationships with our staff, and develop a sense of the organization before stepping into more culturally significant spaces.

A NOTE ON VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT

If this is your first time volunteering with First Light, we will start you with general support roles or large-scale celebrations where we can get to know you and ensure you feel comfortable in our spaces. Placement at deeper cultural events is something that develops over time, as trust is built. This is not a barrier. It is how we take care of our community, and of you.





HOW TO SHOW UP WITH RESPECT

The following expectations apply at every First Light event, regardless of your role or the type of event you are supporting.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND RECORDING

As a general rule, **photography at First Light events requires permission**. Our community members are not attending our events just to be photographed, and many people have personal, cultural, or safety reasons for not wanting their image taken or shared.

Please treat this with the same care you would want extended to yourself: **ask permission before you take someone's photo**. Volunteers are expected to stay present in the moment. Phone use should be limited to what is necessary for your role.

Do not Photograph

Ceremony of any kind: prayers, smudging, kullik (oil lamp) lighting, or sacred drumming during specific songs, when requested. *These are not performances and should not be photographed or recorded, unless under very specific circumstances.*

Community members eating, socializing, or going about their time at an event, without their explicit permission.

Photographs/Video MAY be appropriate

During a **designated performance**, such as a stage set, drum performance presented as entertainment, or a cultural showcase where photography has been indicated as welcome.

When a community member has clearly and enthusiastically consented, and you are confident that consent is **genuine** and not just politeness.

When in doubt, **do not take the photo**. No moment is worth making a community member feel uncomfortable or unsafe in a space that is meant to be theirs. Consent must be clear, ongoing, and freely given. If there is any uncertainty, do not proceed.





INTERACTIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Community members come to First Light to connect, celebrate, grieve, heal, and belong. They are not there to answer questions about their culture, explain their traditions, or be a learning experience for anyone, unless they choose to do that freely, themselves. Please keep that in mind in every interaction.

➔ ASK STAFF, NOT COMMUNITY

If you have a question about cultural protocol, what something means, or how you should behave in a particular moment, find a First Light staff member and ask them quietly. Do not put community members in the position of educator

➔ FOLLOW THE LEAD OF FIRST LIGHT STAFF

If a staff member redirects you, adjusts your task, or asks you to step back from a situation, we ask that you do so respectfully to help maintain a positive experience for community members. Any questions or concerns can be shared with staff at an appropriate time and space.

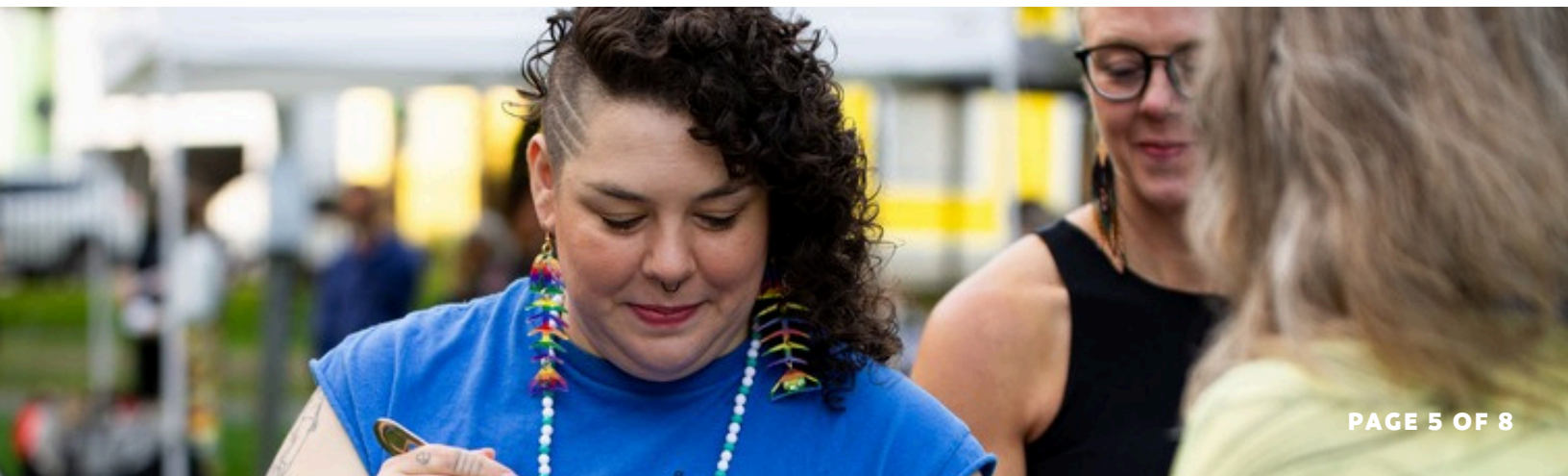
➔ COMMUNITY FIRST, LEARNING LATER

We welcome genuine curiosity about Indigenous culture, and there are respectful ways and times to learn. First Light offers experiential learning opportunities and can provide a volunteer orientation session in advance, creating space to connect with staff and ask questions. While volunteering, your role is to support the work and help hold space for community, rather than seeking a personal learning experience in the moment.

➔ SMALL COMMENTS CARRY WEIGHT

Something that feels like a small or innocent remark to you may land very differently with a community member who has a lifetime of those remarks behind them. If you are unsure whether something is appropriate to say, it probably is not.

If these expectations are not followed, volunteers may be asked to step away from the event to ensure the space remains safe and respectful for community.





WHEN YOU ARE UNSURE

You will not always know the right thing to do in a given moment, and that is okay. What matters is how you handle uncertainty. If you realize you have made a mistake, stop immediately and connect with a staff member. How you respond matters more than getting everything right the first time.



STOP AND FIND A STAFF MEMBER

This is always the right move. First Light staff are there to support both the community and the volunteers. You will not be judged for asking. You will be appreciated for it.



DO LESS RATHER THAN MORE

If you are not sure whether an action is appropriate, wait. A moment of inaction (*with exception to safety risks*) is far less harmful than a well-intentioned mistake.



DO NOT IMPROVISE AROUND CULTURAL ELEMENTS

If something involves ceremony, sacred objects, or cultural practice and you have not been specifically instructed to assist with it, stay back. Do not touch sacred items, regalia, or cultural materials unless you have been clearly invited to do so by staff or community members.

CULTURAL CLOTHING (SOMETIMES CALLED REGALIA)

Indigenous cultural clothing is **not** a costume. The word costume means dressing up as something you are not. The clothing you may see at First Light events is the opposite of that.

Regalia, ribbon skirts, moccasins, medallions, and other cultural garments **tell a story about who someone is**, where they come from, their family, their Nation, and their community. Each piece may carry deep personal and cultural significance.

As a volunteer, you are **not** expected to know the name of every garment. If you do not know the specific name of an item, you can say **outfit or clothing**. *What matters is that you never use the word costume to describe what someone is wearing, and that you gently correct it if you hear it from others around you.* For First Nations people, we call our outfits 'Regalia'.

If you hear another volunteer, an attendee, or a member of the public use the word costume, you can simply say: "We actually use the word regalia, or just **outfit or clothing**, rather than costume." You do not need to make it a big moment. A quiet, matter-of-fact correction is enough. We understand that not everyone feels comfortable stepping into that kind of moment, and we never want you to feel forced to. But we do genuinely encourage you to try. Small corrections, offered kindly, go a long way in making this a space where community members do not have to do that work themselves.



Mistakes and slip-ups will happen, and that is okay. What matters is that you self-correct when you notice, keep showing up, and stay genuinely open to learning. Nobody expects perfection. We do expect effort and a willingness to do better.

Do not touch, handle, or attempt to try on any cultural clothing or regalia unless you have been clearly and explicitly invited to do so by the person wearing it or by a staff member. These items are not props or decorations. Treat them with the same respect you would extend to the person wearing them.

HONOURING OUR ELDERS

Elders hold sacred knowledge, experience, and responsibility within Indigenous communities. Their presence is something we respect and care for. As a volunteer, part of your role is to help create conditions where Elders are comfortable, supported, and able to fully participate.

This may look like:

- Making sure Elders have access to seating without having to ask
- Offering food, tea, or water, and ensuring they are served first
- Bringing things to them, rather than expecting them to move through busy or crowded spaces
- Being mindful of noise, pace, and physical space around them

If you are unsure what is needed in a moment, check in with a staff member. Do not assume, but always move with care and respect.

Small actions matter. The way we treat Elders reflects who we are as a community.





LEARNING MORE ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY

We know that many people who volunteer with us are genuinely interested in learning more about Indigenous culture and community. That interest is welcome here, and there are real ways to pursue it that do not place the burden on our community members.

- Participate in First Light programming as a community member, not just as a volunteer.
- Ask our staff about Experiential Learning opportunities, which are designed specifically for people who want a deeper understanding of our work and community.
- Come by and talk to us. Our staff are genuinely happy to point you toward resources, teachings, and learning that fits the pace and context that makes sense.

When you show up to volunteer, you may learn about cultural teachings and practices naturally through the work you are doing. But a volunteer shift is not a teach-the-volunteer moment. It is a moment to **serve our community**. The distinction matters to us, and we ask that it matter to you too

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

By completing your volunteer registration, you are confirming that you have read and understood this guide in full. You are agreeing to conduct yourself in accordance with these expectations at every First Light event you support.

If you have questions before your first shift, please reach out to our team. We would rather answer your questions now than navigate a difficult situation later.

Thank you for being here. Choosing to give your time to this community is something we take seriously, and so do you. We look forward to working with you.

