

Red Dress Event Toolkit for HEU Locals

HOW TO HOLD A RED DRESS EVENT IN YOUR COMMUNITY



BACKGROUND

Red Dress events started with the Red Dress Project, an art installation by Jaime Black that toured Canada.

Today, these events are community events organized by local groups that want to raise the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S) in their communities.



WHY HOLD A RED DRESS EVENT?

- **Raise awareness** – Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited People is an issue across the country and in every community. It affects Indigenous communities everywhere. Despite this, it is not a topic that often gets media and broad public attention. Holding a Red Dress event creates an opportunity to raise awareness about this issue in your community.
- **Strengthen your local's role in the community**
- **Create partnerships** and collaboration with local community groups
- **Build relationships** – These events allow Local members to connect with and build relationship with Indigenous community groups and leaders in your community.

COVID-19

As of publishing this toolkit (April 2022), many Provincial Health Officer restrictions around COVID-19 pandemic have been lifted and outdoor gatherings are permitted. However, in the event that COVID-19 restrictions are once again imposed, please keep current public health restrictions in mind when planning your events and follow the PHO orders on gatherings to keep your community safe: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/info/restrictions#pho-order

If you are looking for alternatives to in-person gatherings, there are ways to hold Red Dress events virtually. For instance, you could host or co-host an online event through Zoom, featuring local Indigenous leaders to speak on the MMIWG2S issue. Or you could livestream your online event.

Steps to organizing a Red Dress event



RESEARCH

An important first step in organizing a Red Dress event is to learn about the traditional territory on which your event will be taking place. Look up and understand which Indigenous nation(s) the land belongs to. You may already know this. But if you don't, this is an opportunity for you to learn about the Indigenous history of your neighbourhood, town or city and is an important first step in reconciliation.

There are a couple of ways to find out about local Indigenous territories and languages:
www.Native-Land.ca • www.Whose.Land

Organizing a Red Dress event is also an important opportunity for you, other organizers and participants to learn about Indigenous reconciliation issues more broadly. Good starting points are the following:

- Read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)'s research and reports about the history and truths of residential school experiences for Indigenous peoples, in particular the TRC's 94 Calls to Action: https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf
- National Inquiry in Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (www.mmiwg-ffada.ca) This site offers some important findings and recommendations from the inquiry, including the final report: www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report



At HEU's 32nd Biennial Convention, delegates passed a Constitution Amendment to add an "Indigenous Land Acknowledgement" to the Order of Business (Article 1 Section A) in HEU's Constitution and By-Laws, with the following reason:

"Providing a land acknowledgement at the beginning of meetings and gatherings helps provide awareness of our presence on the territories of Indigenous Peoples. Land acknowledgements can also recount the history of the people, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism."



Steps to organizing a Red Dress event

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COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Organizing a Red Dress event at your local is not only a good way to raise awareness about MMIWG2S but it's also a great opportunity to build relationships and work with community organizations in your area, particularly those that have been supporting Indigenous women and youth.

- Reach out to your local Indigenous nations and Indigenous organizations in your area and let them know about your event. Create openings for them to be involved in the planning.
- Approach one or two community organizations in your community who might be interested in partnering on the event, particularly groups who support and work on behalf of Indigenous women or the Indigenous community in your area. It's important to centre Indigenous voices in your event, and this includes the planning stages. So, when you're asking Indigenous community groups to partner on your event, ensure that these groups are playing a leading role in the planning, and that they have the supports they need to be part of the planning (as many Indigenous groups work with limited resources/capacity).
- Seek advice and guidance from HEU's Indigenous Peoples' Committee by contacting HEU's Equity Officers: Sharryn Modder (smodder@heu.org) or Jennifer Efting (jefting@heu.org).
- Connect with the local nation where your event is held and invite them to do a greeting. Many nations have protocols on how welcomes/greetings are done so follow the guidance of your local nation (including any gifts/honourarium that will be required) and allow the nation to select who will conduct the greeting/welcome.



Steps to organizing a Red Dress event

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FIND A DATE

You can hold your Red Dress event on any date; there is no specified national day for Red Dress events. You may want to consider holding an event to coincide with significant dates that honour Indigenous women. Some significant dates include:

- **February 14th** – Many people and groups across the country have started using February 14th as a day to commemorate MMIWG2S. In Vancouver, there is an annual memorial march on February 14.
- **May 5** – National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
- **October 4** – National Day of Action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls



FIND A VENUE

Work with your local Indigenous/community groups who are partnering on your event to determine an appropriate location and venue for your event. For many Red Dress events, it's been important to find outdoor venues that have trees where red dresses can be hung.

It's also important to get approval from the local First Nation to hold an event at the location.



SPEAKERS

Getting speakers for your Red Dress event is a great way to build relationships with community leaders and community groups in your local area. Here are some tips when determining speakers:

- Prioritize and centre Indigenous voices at your event. Because this issue affects Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited people, try to find local Indigenous community members who can speak to the MMIWG2S issue and how it affects the local Indigenous communities
- Try to find speakers from within the community and local First Nation.



Steps to organizing a Red Dress event

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SUPPORT FROM HEU

Reach out to HEU's Indigenous Peoples' Committee for help and guidance in organizing your event.

Supplies/materials - HEU can support your Red Dress event in the following ways:

- Provide red dresses that have been used for previous events. Please get in touch with the Equity Officer.
- Red Dress pins and Red Dress t-shirts are available for sale (at cost) at: www.heu.org/boutique-pins and www.heu.org/boutique-shirts
- Provide you with Red Dress flyers and materials that you can circulate in your community
- HEU can provide resources to support local Red Dress events. If you're interested in accessing these resources, please contact Barb Nederpel (bnederpel@heu.org).



COLLECT RED DRESSES

You're encouraged to collect red dresses to hang at your event. HEU can provide supply some red dresses that will need to be returned. If you collect your own, you can use in your future Red Dress events in your community.

Dresses are often smudged before they're hung at the event.

Packing dresses should be done with reverence (and these represent the bodies of MMIWG2S. Be careful not to pack wet dresses!



SHARE YOUR EVENT

Plan to share your event in advance so that members of your local community can get involved

- Create an event page on Facebook and share it with your local's Facebook page (if there is one) or with members of your local
- During and after the event, be sure to take photos (where appropriate) and share images and video of the event online. You can forward your pictures to the HEU communications department so that it can be shared across the union. Send your photos to: members@heu.org, indicating your local and when and where the event took place.

SHARE YOUR SUCCESS

After your event, hold a meeting to debrief the experience. What worked and what didn't? What needs to be improved next time?



Past Red Dress Events



Here are some photos of past Red Dress events organized by HEU members.

