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How to specify ethically - First nations engagement

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1. In Indigenous cultures, how is the concept of 'Country' understood, and why is it significant?

In Indigenous cultures, 'Country' refers to a holistic connection between land, water, skies, plants, animals, and people, encompassing spiritual, cultural, and ecological dimensions. Indigenous Peoples have a reciprocal responsibility to care for Country, drawing on centuries of environmental knowledge to protect and sustain it.

2. How can Indigenous art and design elements in architecture create culturally meaningful spaces and promote reconciliation?

Incorporating Indigenous art and design elements transforms buildings into cultural narratives by using symbolism, patterns, and storytelling to reflect the stories of the land and its traditional custodians. These designs promote reconciliation by reflecting a commitment and respect for Country, fostering inclusivity, reinforcing cultural identity, and creating spaces for cultural learning and understanding.

3. What is the difference between transactional engagement and long-term partnerships when working with Indigenous communities?

Transactional engagement focuses on completing a specific task with minimal interaction, whereas partnerships involve ongoing collaboration, trust, and mutual respect.

4. How can architects ensure their engagement with Indigenous communities is culturally responsive and respectful?

Architects should engage early with First Nations communities to build trust and allow meaningful input at each stage of the project. Architects should recognise unique community protocols, seek permissions from cultural custodians, and avoid assumptions. Co-design principles should be applied by involving Indigenous communities as equal partners in the creative process.

5. What challenges might architects face when incorporating Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (CIP) into projects?

Indigenous designs or stories may belong to a community rather than an individual, requiring consultation with community representatives to obtain permission. Additionally, some designs rooted in sacred or ceremonial traditions may have restrictions on their use or replication.

6. What practical steps can architects take to ensure legal and ethical compliance when using Indigenous artwork and cultural designs in their projects?

Architects should verify artwork ownership, secure written agreements for usage, and use ethical frameworks like the Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property protocols to protect cultural integrity. They should also engage with community representatives for permissions, credit artists appropriately, and avoid altering the work without consent.