



POWWOW INFORMATION & PROTOCOL



The wacipi (or powwow) celebrations evolved from past reservation days to include new art and designs appearing and changing from year to year.

The word originates from the Algonquin term “pau wau,” a phrase the first Europeans associated with dancing. Although pau wau meant “he dreams” to the Algonquins, the term was eventually accepted by Europeans to refer to dancing, later being spelled “powwow.”

Powwows were originally held in the springtime to celebrate the beginning of new life but are now held throughout the year. The celebrations often have religious significance, but are also a time for people to gather, sing, dance, feast, pray, renew old friendships and make new ones. These celebrations are still an important part of life for many Native Americans.

The dance styles, dress and music at a powwow are elaborate and colorful. Intricate beadwork combined with rhythmic dance steps are unique to various types of dances being performed.

This social event can last for one, or many days, as tribal nations gather for family gatherings, honor ceremonies and fellowship. Dances are for men or women and are divided into age groups.

The Grand Entry opens the parade of dancers and is a time for contestants to score points by displaying their style and regalia. Dancers always enter the arbor and dance sun-wise, or clockwise, around an eagle staff. The dances are as varied as the colors in the regalia.



Fred Walker
fwalker@nd.gov • 701.328.3502 (m)

NORTH
Dakota Be Legendary.™



- **Men's Traditional Dancer** – Decorated with bead and quillwork and a circular bustle of eagle feathers. Portrays the traditional “dancing out” of the story of a battle or a hunt.
- **Men's Grass Dancer** – Outfitted with colorful fringe and dancing in movements that resemble grass blowing in the prairie breeze.
- **Men's Fancy Dancer** – Wears two brilliantly colored feather bustles, displays fancy footwork, speed, acrobatic steps and spinning motions.
- **Northern Plains Women's Traditional Dancer** – Moves subtly, bending her knees in small up and down body movements, while shifting her feet and turning her body slightly. Some traditions say the movement symbolizes a woman watching for her warrior to come home.
- **Women's Fancy Shawl Dancer** – Wears decorative cloth dress, beaded moccasins with matching leggings, fancy shawl, and jewelry. Her dance suggests the movement of a butterfly and is similar to the men's freestyle dance.
- **Jingle Dress Dancer** – Outfitted in hundreds of small, jingling metal cones, traditionally made of snuff can covers. In one account, women wearing jingle dresses appeared to a holy man in a dream and taught him how to create the dress, the dance and its music.

The audience will be invited by the MC to join in the intertribal dance, but following established protocol is important:

- Stand when the Grand Entry processional is entering the dance arena. Stand and remove hats during the flag song; also stand if an eagle feather is dropped as well as during the song being sung for the feather. The announcer will notify the crowd when to stand.
- Do not talk to dancers when they are dancing. Ask permission to take a photograph.
- Never pick up a piece of a dancer's outfit. Point it out to them and they will pick it up.
- Ask the powwow committee in the announcer's area to clarify videoing or taping the singing.
- Bring a lawn chair or blanket.
- Don't touch regalia worn by dancers. Ask permission to look closely at the regalia.
- Be open-minded and willing to learn, share and dance with tribal people.