**Pow wow** From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A **pow-wow** (also **powwow**, **pow wow**, **pauwau**[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow" \l "cite_note-1) or **pau wau**[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow" \l "cite_note-2)) is a gathering of some of North America's [Native people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_people_of_the_Americas). The word derives from the [Narragansett](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narragansett_(tribe)) word *powwaw*, meaning "spiritual leader". A similar gathering by California Native Peoples usually in the fall is called a Big Time. A modern pow-wow is a specific type of event for Native American/First Nations people to meet and dance, sing, socialize, and honor Native American/First Nations culture. There is generally a dancing competition, often with significant prize money awarded. Pow-wows vary in length from one day session of five to six hours to three days. Major pow-wow or pow-wows called for a special occasion can be up to one week long.

The term also has been used to describe any gathering of Native Americans of any [tribe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribe), and as such is occasionally heard in older [Western](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_movie) movies. The word has also been used to refer to a meeting, especially a meeting of powerful people such as officers in the [military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military). However, such use is sometimes viewed as disrespectful to Native culture.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow#cite_note-3)

Planning for a pow-wow generally begins months, perhaps even a year, in advance of the event by a group of people usually referred to as a pow-wow committee. Pow wows may be sponsored by a tribal organization, by an American Native community within an urban area, a Native American Studies program or American Native club on a [college](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College) or [university](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University) campus, tribe, or any other organization that can provide startup funds, insurance, and volunteer workers.

**Host drums and drum groups**

Music for pow-wow dance competition and other activities is provided by a "Drum," a group of performers who play a large, specially designed drum and sing traditional songs. The number of members of a drum group may vary, but is usually at least four people, and can be far more. Some members of the drum group may wear traditional regalia and dance as well as drum, other times drummers simply wear street clothing. Drums usually rotate the duty of providing songs for the dancers, each taking a turn at the direction of the pow-wow management.

The Host Drum of the pow-wow is a drum group primarily responsible for providing music for the dancers to dance to. At an Intertribal pow-wow, two or more drums are hired to be the host drums. In some places there is a Host Northern Drum and a Host Southern Drum. Depending on the size of the pow-wow and the region where it is held, there may be many drums, representing nearly every tribe or community attending the pow-wow. At some pow-wows, the drums are judged on the quality of their performances, with prize money awarded to the winners.

Each drum has a Lead Singer who runs his or her drum and leads the singers while singing. Host drums are responsible for singing the songs at the beginning and end of a pow-wow session, generally a starting song, the grand entry song, a flag song, and a veterans or victory song to start the pow-wow, and a flag song, retreat song and closing song to end the pow-wow. Additionally, if a pow-wow has gourd dancing, the Southern Host Drum is often the drum that sings all the gourd songs, though another drum can perform them. The host drums are often called upon to sing special songs during the pow-wow.

**The event**

**Setup**

A pow-wow is often set up as a series of large circles. The center circle is the *dance arena*, outside of which is a larger circle consisting of the MC's table, drum groups, and sitting areas for dancers and their families. Beyond these two circles for participants is an area for spectators, while outside of all are designated areas with vendor's booths, where one can buy food (including [frybread](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frybread) and Indian tacos), music, jewelry, souvenirs, arts and crafts, beadwork, leather, and regalia supplies.[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow#cite_note-5)

At outdoor pow-wows, this circle is often covered by either a committee-built arbor or tent, or each group, particularly the MC and the drums, will provide their own. While most of the time, a tent provides shelter from the sun, rain can also plague outdoor events. It is particularly important to protect the drums used by the drum groups, as they are sensitive to temperature changes and, if it rains, they cannot get wet. Most vendors provide their own tents or shelters at an outdoor pow-wow.

**Powwow etiquette**

Powwow etiquette is required; such as rules for when photography is or is not acceptable, protocol for the Grand Entry, and so on. A few guidelines are common; clothing worn by participants is known as "regalia" and not to be called a "costume." Some rules are for common sense courtesy: drums have special rules and should not be touched or played by those not a part of the drum group. People and their regalia should not be touched without permission. However, details of powwow etiquette vary from one geographic region to another.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow#cite_note-6)

**Opening**

A pow-wow session begins with the Grand Entry and, in most cases, a prayer. The Eagle Staff leads the Grand Entry, followed by flags, then the dancers, while one of the host drums sings an opening song. This event is sacred in nature; some pow-wows do not allow filming or photography during this time, though others allow it.

If military veterans or active duty soldiers are present, they often carry the flags and eagle staffs. They are followed by the head dancers, then the remaining dancers usually enter the arena in a specific order: Men's Traditional, Men's Grass Dance, Men's Fancy, Women's Traditional, Women's Jingle, and Women's Fancy. Teens and small children then follow in the same order. Following the Grand Entry, the MC will invite a respected member of the community to give an invocation. The host drum that did not sing the Grand Entry song will then sing a Flag Song, followed by a Victory or Veterans' Song, during which the flags and staffs are posted at the MC's table.

**Dances**

Most of the various types of dances performed at a pow-wow are descended from the dances of the Plains tribes of [Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada) and the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States). Besides those for the opening and closing of a pow-wow session, the most common is the *intertribal*, where a drum will sing a song and anyone who wants to can come and dance. Similar dances are the *round dance*; *crow hop* when performed by a northern drum or a *horse stealing song* by a southern drum; there is also "double beat", "sneakup" and, for Women's Traditional and Jingle, "sidestep". Each of these songs have a different step to be used during them, but are open for dancers of any style.

In addition to the open dances, contest dances for a particular style and age group are often held, with the top winners receiving a cash prize. To compete in a contest, the dancer must be in regalia appropriate for the competition. Larger powwows have more specific categories. The dance categories vary somewhat by region, but general categories are as follows:[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow" \l "cite_note-7)

Normal intertribal dancing is an individual activity, but there are also couples and group dances. Couples dances include the *two step* and *owl dance*. In a two step each couple follows the lead of the head dancers, forming a line behind them, whereas in an owl dance each couple dances alone. Group dances include the *Snake and Buffalo* dance, where the group dances to mimic the motions of a snake in the beginning of the dance, then change to mimic the actions of a herd of buffalo.

At pow-wows where there is a large Southern Plains community in the area, the *Gourd Dance* is often included before the start of the pow-wow sessions. The gourd dance originated with the [Kiowa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiowa) tribe, whence it spread, and is a society dance for veterans and their families. Unlike other dances, the gourd dance is normally performed with the drum in the center of the dance arena, not on the side.

**Music**

**Pow-wow music** is the [Native American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Indian_music) [drumming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drums), [singing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singing), and [dancing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dancing) performed at pow-wows. Though there are many [genres](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genre_(music)) unique to different [tribes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribe) pow-wow [music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music) is characterized by pan or intertribalism with the [Plains cultures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plains_Indians), the originators of the modern pow-wow, predominating. For information on dancing, see [*Dances*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow#Dances).

**Singing**

[Hoop Dancers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_American_Hoop_Dance) are featured at some Pow Wows. The hoop has no beginning or end; it represents the continuity of the spirits of all living things.

While the drum is central to pow-wows, "the drum only helps them keep beat. Dancers key on the melody of the song. [Rhythms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhythm), tones, [pitch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pitch_(music)) all help create their '[moves](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dance_move)'." (p. 85) Note that Bill Runs Above did not mention the lyrics of the songs, and while they are no doubt important, most lyrics of most songs employ [vocables](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vocable), syllable sounds such as "ya", "hey", and "loi" (p. 86).[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow#cite_note-13) This is particularly evident in intertribal songs, such as the [AIM Song](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIM_Song), which cannot be biased towards a certain [language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_languages_of_the_Americas).

The [song structure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_structure) consists of four *pushups*, singing the chorus and verse through four times. In each chorus the melody is introduced or *led off* by the lead singer whose is then *seconded* by another singer who begins to vary the melody before the end of the leader's first line. They are then joined by the entire chorus for the rest of the pushup. Three *down strokes* or *hard beats*[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow" \l "cite_note-14) mark the end of the chorus and beginning of the verse, and during these drummers while alter their dancing such as by hopping low like fancy dancers. An increase in tempo and volume on the last five beats marks the end of the final verse. The dancing stops on the final beat and then a *tail*, or [coda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coda_(music)), finishes the song with a shortened chorus.[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow#cite_note-autogenerated86-15) Sometimes a drum group will sing the song more than four times, particularly when the song feels good and the singers seize the moment for an extra pushup or two (or more), or when a dancer blows a whistle or passes his staff or fan over the drum to signal that the song is to be continued four extra pushups while he prays.

Singing differs by region in that a high [falsetto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falsetto) produced deep in one's throat is used in the north while in the south a lower range is used. "To the unfamiliar listener, Indian singing sounds exotic, different, and difficult to comprehend," and the contrast in the quality or timbre of voice used in traditional Indian and European musics may have much to do with that difficulty. However, "to the trained ear, melodies flow, ascend and descend" while dancers react to changes in the structure of the melody and the song. Boye Ladd says, "If you give me a stink song, I'll dance stink. If you give me good music, I'll give you a great show," implying that one can appreciate the music through the dancing, which is readily appreciated by everyone.[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow#cite_note-autogenerated86-15) But others say that today's contemporary contest dancers are expected to dance their best no matter how well or poor the drum group is that is singing for their contest. Generally, Native American singing follows a pentatonic scale (as if playing only the black keys on a piano) and while, to the outsider, it may sound like we're just pounding a drum and going "Heya-heya-heya-heya" sometimes there are actual words in Cree, Pikuni, Lushuutsid, Niimipuu, Lakhota, Sahpatin, Salish, Ojibwemowin or many other Native languages.

Talented singers also sing off-the-beat, placing the words between the drum beats rather than on them, which "is probably the non-Indian's greatest obstacle in trying to learn Indian songs."[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pow_wow#cite_note-16)

**Pow Wow Etiquette** http://www.native-american-online.org/hobbies.htm

If you have never been to a Pow Wow, here are a few rules that may help you feel more at home. Keep in mind that customs vary from region to region and Pow Wow to Pow Wow. When in doubt quietly wait until there is a break in the action and ask the folks near the drum(s) to point you towards the Arena Director.

1) Dress and act appropriately. Hot pants, halter tops, swimwear, profanity and 'making out' have no place at Pow Wows. If you are going to dance anything other than open intertribals, wear your regalia.

2) Pointing with the fingers is considered poor manners by some nations. If you must point, use your head and nod in the direction you wish to indicate.

3) The seating around the Arena is reserved for dancers in regalia. Seats with blankets, shawls or regalia items on them are taken and should not be bothered. Do NOT sit on someone else's blanket unless invited. Uncovered seats are considered available.

4) Pets should be left at home. The Arena is a sacred place from the time it is blessed until the Pow Wow is over. At no time should pets be allowed in the Arena.

5) Listen to the Master of Ceremonies. He will announce who is to dance and when. Most Pow Wows conduct Intertribals in which the public may participate. Check with the Arena Director for more information.

6) Pictures should NOT be taken during Veterans Songs, Flag Songs, Prayers or any other time announced by the Master of Ceremonies. If you wish to photograph a dancer in regalia, ask first. If the picture is for publication or commercial use, that should be explained before the picture is taken.

7) Respect the Head Man and Head Woman Dancers. Their role entitles them to start each song or set of songs. Please wait until they have started to dance before you join in. In some traditions, it is considered improper to pass the Head Man or Woman Dancer within the Arena.

8) Show respect to the Flag, Honor and Veterans songs by standing until the song is completed.   
  
9) Some songs require that you be familiar with the routine or have special eligibility rules in order to participate. Trot dances, snake, buffalo, etc. require particular steps or routines. Veterans dances may be restricted to Veterans, Combat Veterans or in some cases, the relations of Veterans. If you are not familiar with a particular dance, observe and learn. Watch the Head Dancers to learn the procedures.

10) The Flag Song, or Indian National Anthem, is sung when the American Flag is raised or lowered. Please stand and remove hats during the singing of this song. It is not a song for dancing. Pictures are not allowed during these songs.

11) Most Pow Wows are non-profit and depend upon donations, raffles, blanket dances, etc. for support. Donations are encouraged as a way to honor someone. Any participant can drop money onto the blanket to aid in the powwow expenses.

13) Certain items of religious significance should be worn only by those qualified to do so. Respect the traditions. Never intentionally touch another dancers regalia, person or property without permission.   
  
14) Giveaways, attributes of Indian generosity, are held at many dances. They are acknowledgments of appreciation to recipients for honor or service given to the people. When receiving a gift, the recipient thanks everyone involved in the giving.   
  
15) If you wish to ask for a special song from a drum, talk to the Area Director first and make sure the Master of Ceremonies is informed. It is traditional to make a gift (monetary or otherwise) to the Drum for special requests.   
  
16) Before sitting at a drum, ask permission from the Head singer. Do not touch a drum without permission.  
  
17) If at any time you are uncertain of procedure, etc., please check with the MC, Arena Director, or Head Singer. They will be glad to help you with your questions.  
  
18) Unless you are sure spectator seating will be provided, bring a chair. Remember that the seating immediately around the Arena is for dancers only.  
  
19) Alcohol, recreational drugs and firearms are prohibited at most Pow Wows.  
  
20) If you see a lost feather, or you yourself drop a feather, do NOT pick it up. Notify the nearest Veteran, the Head Veteran, Head Man Dancer or Arena Director immediately.

21) Before dancing barefoot speak with the Arena Director. At some events this may only be done by Sundancers known to the organizers.

22) In some places it is OK for adults to dance while carrying infants or small children. In other places this is considered contrary to local etiquette. Ask before doing so.

23) If you have a question, ask. Most dancers, singers, elders and staff are happy to help. Offer a cold drink or other small, symbolic gift to those who help you.

**Pow Wow Etiquette** http://www.algonquinsofpikwakanagan.com/pow\_wow\_etiquette.php

A Pow Wow is a sacred cultural activity and many newcomers to a Pow Wow don't always understand the meaning and importance of the event. Below is a list of 'Do's and Don'ts' to be aware of during the ceremony. These are fairly general rules and will apply to any Pow Wow event regardless of the Nation. Please endeavour to follow these rules whenever possible.

1. **Photographers:**  
   Please note that there are times during the Pow Wow celebration that photographs are NOT permitted. Neither are audio recordings or the use of motion picture cameras. Please pay attention to the MC, he will let you know when you are not permitted to use these types of equipment. Please honour this request. Many ceremonies during a Pow Wow are sacred and must not be recorded. Also take note that some people may not want to be photographed. Please respect this.  
     
   **ABSOLUTELY NO ALCOHOL, DRUGS & PETS**  
     
   Anyone who appears under the influence of drugs or alcohol will be asked to leave the Pow Wow site. Pets are not permitted on the Pow Wow grounds.  
     
   The Pikwàkanagàn Pow Wow Committee is NOT responsible for any accidents, personal loss, injury or damage.  
     
   **Pow Wow Etiquette:**  
   1. Allow Elders and disable people to sit in areas designed for them, with a family member or companion.  
   2. Allow dancers to be on the benches/chairs immediately surrounding the dance area.  
   3. Honour songs should be respected standing and removing hats without Eagle feathers is appreciated.  
   4. Please obtain permission from individuals for photo approval.  
   5. Please do not stand in front of others, this shows respect for others.  
   6. Please take direction from the MC and Pow Wow Elder.  
   7. Requests or direction is taken to the MC or Pow Wow Committee.  
   8. The Grand Entry is considered sacred; the influence of drugs or alcohol is not acceptable for any participant.  
   9. Appropriate clothing is mandatory in the dance area and throughout the Pow Wow grounds.  
   10. Pets are not permitted on the grounds. Unless they are seeing eye dogs.  
   11. A women who is on her time is not allowed in the dance area.  
   12. Photographs are not permitted during Grand Entry, Honour Songs and Retiring of the Flags unless stated.  
   13. The drum arbor or drum pit is designated for drummers and singers only.  
   14. Please, keep the Pow Wow ground clean.  
   15. Caring for Mother Earth is a very important teaching for everyone. Please respect our grandfather rock, do not sit on him.