

Engaging Tribal Communities



This information is intended to be used as a guide for development of new Systems of Care communities, as well as, for existing sites to use as a reference guide.

ENGAGING TRIBAL PARTNERS

American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), Tribes, Tribal partners and Indian tribes will be used interchangeably throughout this document.

Introduction

Tribal governments have common interests with many public serving entities. Both have a shared responsibility to use public resources effectively and efficiently; both seek to provide comprehensive services such as education, health care, and law enforcement to their respective citizens; and both have interconnected interests in safeguarding the environment while maintaining healthy and diversified economies (NCAI, 2009).

Just as individual states are “sovereign” governments, Indian tribes also are self-governed and have been for centuries. As tribes have expanded their capacity to exercise self-governance and the visibility of tribal governments has increased in recent years, it has become progressively more important for states to interact with tribes as fellow governments (NCAI, 2009).

In today’s environment, tribal and non-tribal entities, groups and communities are exploring the benefits of collaborative relationships. Furthermore, for these collaborations to be successful and transformative, it is imperative that non-tribal entities are knowledgeable of the unique status of tribal governments and the unique, diverse concerns of the tribal community in which they are working. The following is a guideline to help you in your outreach and relationship building efforts with tribal partners.

Why engage tribal partners?

As you will find with your outreach and relationship building efforts, all tribal communities are unique and different. Each tribal community has their own history, culture, customs and belief systems and each can be wonderful partners in serving children, youth and families as each has unique strengths rooted in their cultural history, customs, belief systems and tribal governments.

Who are your tribal partners?

This toolkit will help you identify significant partners of influence in tribal communities. As a common practice, you want to look to tribal programs, Indian Health Service providers & other Tribal serving organizations to partner with. You want to avoid the misconception that “A Native American” or one individual self- identified or otherwise acknowledged as American Indian, serving on a board or team is considered Tribal engagement. Tribal engagement refers to engaging formal partnerships that have legal or designated capacity to enhance large groups of tribal citizens.

A brief history of Oklahoma Tribes

Oklahoma has the second largest population of American Indians in the United States. According to the 2010 census, American Indians account for 8.6% of the general population in Oklahoma with 39 Tribal Nations represented in Oklahoma. Three of the top ten cities with the highest percentage of American Indian and Alaskan Natives are in Oklahoma, Tulsa, Norman, and Oklahoma City.

Historical & Intergenerational trauma through National policy

- The 1700's through 1830's is known as the removal period in American Indian history. Many tribes faced forced removal from their original homelands through various mechanisms of persuasion. None of which were compensated accordingly to the loss of land, life and freedom. By the 1830's, most tribes were limited to federally reserved land, the rest were placed in what was known as Indian Territory or now known as Oklahoma.
- From the 1800's through the 1960's, government military-style boarding schools and church run boarding schools were used to assimilate AI/AN people.
- The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934 was an early step in the renewal of tribal self-governance, in the forms of the creation of constitutions and employment of counsel. However, all tribal actions were to be reviewed and authorized by the Department of Interior.
- Federal "Termination Policy" in the 1950's and 1960's ended government to government relationships with more than 100 tribes. This resulted in loss of trust land, discontinued Federal support, and loss of tribal identity. Many of those terminated tribes were re-established Federal recognition through the Congressional process in the 1980's and 1990's. Many continue to struggle for Federal recognition today, two of which are in Oklahoma.
- Federal "Relocation Policy" in the 1950's and 1960's was an attempt to move AI/AN families to urban areas with a promise of jobs, housing and a "new life." These policies were an extension of previous assimilation efforts by breaking up family and communal structures.

Self Determination

- Public Law 93-638, Indian Self-determination and Education Assistance Act in 1975. This legislation made self-determination, rather than termination, the focus of government action. It authorized Federal government agencies to enter into contract with and make grants directly to federally recognized Indian tribes.
- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a federal law that seeks to keep American Indian children with American Indian Families http://www.nicwa.org/children_families/. Congress passed ICWA in 1978 in response to the alarmingly high number of Indian children being removed from their homes by both public and private agencies.

Tribal Governments and Self-Governance

Tribal Self-Governance has created opportunities for Tribes to exercise their inherent self-governing powers through greater control over Tribal affairs and enhanced Tribal governmental responsibilities. As sovereign entities, Tribal Governments are responsible for the well-being of tribal citizens within their self-determined catchment areas. Many of the Tribal Governments manage a wide array of tribal programs. The following is a sample list of tribal programs that a tribe may manage. This list is not extensive. Follow up with each tribe individually to find out a listing of tribal programs they manage.

- Indian Child Welfare (ICW) programs
- Health care
- Education (secondary & post-secondary)

- Law enforcement
- Tribal court
- Tribal youth programs
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Housing
- Social services
- USDA
- Native American Graves & Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)
- Environmental services
- Cultural preservation
- Substance abuse treatment & prevention
- Mental health

Engagement of tribal programs is necessary to sustaining your tribal partnerships. Usually the director or coordinator can be found in the tribal directory. Many times, tribal programs may be looking to utilize other community resources to adequately serve their communities. For instance, tribal youth programs are delinquency prevention programs funded through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention for tribes to engage community members in designing culturally appropriate prevention strategies. Within their development, steering committees and other coalitions may be formed. If you are asked to be included in such a committee, it would be a great opportunity to further build your relationships.

Communities

Tribal serving organizations can be critical in engaging intertribal coalitions and consortiums. Most Tribal serving organizations focus on social and/or health issues and bring many tribal representatives together for conferences, trainings and dialogue.

- Veteran & Elder groups: A general characteristic in many tribal communities is that they hold their Veterans and Elders in high regards. Many tribal communities will have an elders program or Association of Veterans that functions as support for elders and veterans in a specific tribal community. In some instances, members of these groups may also have considerable influence on elected Tribal government officials. It was stated by Chairman Shotton of the Otoe Tribe, when he was introduced at the State of Oklahoma's 3rd Annual Tribal Consultation meeting as a tribal leader, that "although I am an elected Tribal official, I am not the only tribal leader. There are many leaders in our tribe, some elected and some by lineage."
- Public Schools and Indian Education programs: Public schools with high populations of American Indian students receive Title VII and Johnson O'Malley Funds. Each can be different in execution but share common interest in helping public school systems meet the unique needs of their American Indian students. Contact the Indian education program in your area or schools; they are great resources to parents, students and other tribal serving

community coalitions in your area. In some instances, a Tribe may have the responsibility of providing the Johnson O'Malley Indian Education assistance to the schools.

- Cultural ceremonies, celebrations and/or gatherings: Tribal communities continue to find their strength in carrying on traditions and cultural gatherings. Some tribal communities engage in their traditional ceremonies that are usually held during an appropriate season, at a designated site for an allocated length of time. Many tribes also maintain other ceremonies that may include burials, adoptions, naming, and coming of age. One commonality is that all ceremonies are purposeful and meaningful, each significant and sacred to the tribal community in which it is taking place. However, each ceremony is different from tribe to tribe. Celebrations and gatherings, often times tribal communities host social gatherings or celebrations sometimes specific to that tribe or region, are known as inter-tribal. When an inter-tribal gathering is called a powwow then it is open to the public and anyone and everyone is encouraged to attend.
- Faith-based: There are many faith-based practices in tribal communities. Both traditional practices and Christianity have been adopted by many tribes throughout the years. It is appropriate to engage "Indian churches" that operate as pillars of hope for Native American families.

Indian Health Services (I.H.S.)

I.H.S. is the Federal Health Program for American Indian and Alaska Natives. As per Federal trust agreements, the U.S. Federal Government has a responsibility to provide health care for AI/AN. There is a misconception that I.H.S. provides adequate health care for all AI/AN populations. In fact, the I.H.S. system is consistently underfunded and is notorious for the lack of quality care received at I.H.S. facilities. Although recent transformations hope to result in better care and outcomes for AI/AN consumers, the underfunded system continues to be the major health care provider for AI/AN people. As a result of those misconceptions and the lack of funding, many tribal people go without health care. In recent history, we have heard reports of non-tribal facilities referring tribal citizens back to I.H.S. or tribes. **Please note that an American Indian person can choose where they will receive their health care services from, provided they have a payer source like any other citizen.**

Culture Card

Myth: AI/AN people are spiritual and live in harmony with nature.

Fact: The idea of all AI/ANs having a mystical spirituality is a broad generalization. This romantic stereotype can be just as damaging as other more negative stereotypes and impairs one's ability to provide services to AI/ANs as real people. For more myths, facts and other helpful tips go the following link to the culture card: [A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness](#)



Considerations while building relationships

- Respect for Tribal government or tribal program(s) service area.
- Identify a point of contact and stay consistent.
- Issues must remain the focus, as with any governing entity, political struggles may occur. During these times it is important to remain loyal to the issues.
- Must have respect of cultural differences. Each tribal community is different with their own community strengths.
- Have patience. When we consider historical trauma, it may take a while to build trust and meaningful relationships.
- Don't try to oversell the importance of your system over theirs.
- Be a member of the solution; don't try to be the solution.
- Involvement must be government-to-government or Council-to-government. Again we want to avoid the misconception that "a Native American person" is tribal engagement.
- Tribes can and do seek the most qualified individuals for positions within the tribe. Qualified individuals may or may not be of that particular tribe or even of American Indian descent, meaning they hire non-tribal people as well. Although a person may not be American Indian they do represent the tribe that has employed them and could be a great contact.
- Success comes from being present and engaged. Accept invitations to participate in the Tribal events, meetings, etc.
- It's okay to ask how we can get involved.
- Research and be flexible with regard to time, location, time-frame, etc.
- Be willing to do the same for the Tribe that you would ask of them.

Remember:

- o All Tribes are different.
- o The importance of language & communication.
- o All Tribes are sovereign nations/ governments.
- o Get to know the Tribe and culture.

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