

Tips for Working in Tribal Communities

The probability of Tribal participation is greater when one can show Tribal gatekeepers that they have taken the time to learn the value of culture, tradition, and humility. Tribal values emphasize family/clan/group/Tribe, not the self or individual as in Western society. When working with Tribal entities it is important to represent the greater good of the group. Questions are best framed in a manner that conveys awareness that our individual and group behaviors can help and/or hurt current efforts to solve community problems.¹

Encouraging Trust among Tribal People¹

- Show respect for elders, and tribal and spiritual leaders, by acknowledging and appreciating their roles and expertise. Seek their advice as the experts of the community.
- Schedule meetings and events around meals. Foster the sense of importance of eating together combined with community sharing.
- Always publicly acknowledge tribal participation at meetings. Make sure non-tribal participants know who is in attendance from the local reservations, and those recognized as leaders. This is a good time to recognize individuals new to the community, and to praise an individual's or organization's recent success.
- Model a spirit of cross-cultural collaboration by including and recognizing the efforts of both tribal and non-tribal entities throughout your event.

Engaging Tribal Leadership¹

- Know your local tribe(s) and where the reservations are located. If you are in an urban area, know which tribe(s) are acknowledged to have occupied the land where you or your training is located.
- Attend a local community event (gatherings, pow wows, storytelling, and other cultural events). Identify the leadership at the event, and humbly and respectfully introduce yourself.
 - ❖ When giving your introduction, give personal and family background in addition to professional. Who you are and where you come from is important in indigenous communities.
- When asking for support, frame your request in the context of how it will help the Tribal Community.
- Be yourself. Be sincere, transparent, and follow through with each commitment you make. You run the risk of being viewed as another in the chain of broken promises and dishonor if you fail to follow through.

Hosting an Event¹

- Ask representatives from the local tribes to help officially welcome attendees.
- When elders and tribal leaders are attending, make sure to recognize them formally in front of the group.
- When a new tribal representative arrives make sure to personally take the time introduce them to everyone before the meeting starts. This allows them to begin building face-to-face interaction.
- Model cross-cultural collaboration by your own behavior. Create the time and space for everyone's participation and point of view.
- Do not imply that you are an "expert" about a tribe, nor correct any tribal person when they are speaking about tribal or cultural affairs. Remember that much of the published literature about tribal people was written by non-Native Americans.
- Do not try to impress or flatter tribal people by dressing as a tribal member.
- At times, it is best to be silent. Practice good listening. Don't interrupt a speaker.

Recognize that time may not have the same meaning for tribal members. Meetings may not start on time or end on time. There is more value in the process than the structure of the meeting. Build in "conversation time" prior to and after the meeting, to allow time to address issues and build connections.²

Respect is by far the most important aspect of successful collaboration with the Native American community. It is crucial to be aware of the great status that a chief or chairman of the tribe has. Remember that Native American women, people, and Tribes are the experts on their own lives. Walk into meetings with sincere attitudes and the goal "to listen, understand, and learn to help."²

For more information, visit the Tribal STAR website at theacademy.sdsu.edu/programs/tribal-star

1. Liotta., Tlingit, and Kolb-Williamson, K., Luiseno Tribal STAR Program (undated resource). Tribal Star: Tips for following protocol when working in Tribal communities. Retrieved on August 7, 2017 from theacademy.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/tribal-star-tips-for-following-protocol.pdf

2. Tribal STAR Program. (undated resource). Recommendations for developing and maintaining tribal relationships. Retrieved on August 7, 2017 from

theacademy.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/tribal-star-engagement-practices.pdf

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National Indigenous Elder Justice Initiative
(701) 777-6084 • info@nieji.org