

PROTOCOLS WORKING WITH TRIBAL NATIONS

Understanding these protocols is essential when working with Tribal Nations. They reflect the values of respect, community, and sovereignty that are central to Tribal cultures. By following these practices you help build trust and foster meaningful, respectful relationships.

1. Understanding the Political and Cultural Context

- *Unique Relationship:* Understand the political relationship between Native Americans and the U.S. government, not a race-based one.
- *History is Important:* The historical context of these relationships is important to working with Tribes and must be understood.
- *Diversity of Tribes:* Recognize that there are over 500 Tribes, each with its unique history, culture, and language.
- *Cultural Sensitivity:* Many Tribal members may be cautious or even suspicious of outsiders due to their historical experiences. Approach with respect and openness.

2. Respect for Tribal Governance

- *Respect Tribal Leaders:* Understand that Tribal council representatives are elected officials and should be treated with the same respect as government officials.
- *Equality in Meetings:* Meetings should, if possible, be held between officials of the same level of authority. This helps maintain equality and respect during negotiations.
- *Communication with Tribal Government:* Formal communications should be addressed to the Tribal Chairperson and relevant council or committee members, ensuring that all appropriate individuals are included in the process.

3. Communication and Consultation

- *Key Players:* Don't assume one Tribe or leader speaks for all; take the time to identify key players and authorities.
- *Consultation Expectations:* Native Americans object to being "consulted" or "studied" unless there's real intention to address their concerns. Be prepared to negotiate and discuss why advice may or may not be implemented.
- *Time for Response:* Those you consult with may need time to reflect or consult others before providing feedback.
- *Different Communication Styles:* Understand that there are different ways of communication. Seemingly extraneous data may be reviewed and re-reviewed. During negotiations, prepare to discuss all aspects of an issue at hand simultaneously rather than sequentially.
- *Importance of Face-to-Face:* Traditional authorities might prefer face-to-face consultation rather than written communication, which can be seen as too impersonal or formal.

4. Practicalities of Communication and Meetings

- *Consideration of Resources:* Tribal governments may not have the resources to attend meetings or follow up frequently. They might have limited support staff, so flexibility is key.
- *Multiple Communication Methods:* Don't rely solely on written communication. Follow up with phone calls, faxes, or in-person meetings to ensure clarity and connection.
- *Hospitality:* Arranging meetings with refreshments or a meal is a vital part of building a relationship. Hospitality is a strong cultural characteristic in Indian country and is a sign of respect.

5. Gift exchange & Ceremony

- Gift Exchange
 - *Symbolic of Respect:* In many Native cultures, gift exchange is an important practice, especially in formal meetings. It symbolizes respect, goodwill, and a sincere desire to build a relationship.
 - *Reciprocity:* Gifts are often exchanged, and there is an expectation of reciprocity. This exchange fosters trust and shows that both parties are engaged in an equal relationship.
 - *Cultural Tradition:* Different Tribes may have different expectations regarding the type of gift (e.g., items that are locally significant or culturally meaningful). It is wise to ask or research beforehand to make sure the gift is appropriate.
- Drum Group and Prayer
 - *Spiritual Significance:* Many Tribes hold prayer and the use of a drum group in high regard, especially before events or conferences. The drum holds spiritual significance as a symbol of the heartbeat of Mother Earth, and the rhythm can serve as a reminder of connection to ancestors and the spiritual world.
 - *Blessings for Success:* Prayer before an event is seen as a way to invoke blessings for a successful gathering, ensuring that all attendees are protected and that the work done will have positive outcomes.
 - *Sense of Unity:* Participating in or witnessing a drum circle or prayer ceremony can create a deep sense of unity among all attendees, helping to bridge any cultural divides and enhance collaboration during the event.

6. General Behavior and Etiquette

- *Honesty and Integrity:* Like all business relationships, these are highly valued in Tribal interactions. Always be upfront and respectful in your dealings.
- *Serious but Respectful Tone:* While humor is appreciated, a serious, business-like tone is often preferred in discussions and negotiations.
- *Handshakes:* Always shake hands when meeting or departing. It is customary to shake hands with everyone present, showing respect for all attendees.