

FIRST STEPS

A RESOURCE FOR ENGAGING
WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN STEM





PURPOSE

All relationships begin with a “first step.” Both parties want to put their best foot forward, so that the bridge between the two is built with respect and knowledge. As education professionals seek to engage with Indigenous entities to support Indigenous youth in Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) education, sometimes they may need resources that will help ensure that they are stepping respectfully and intentionally.

We begin this document with an understanding that tribal sovereignty is of the utmost importance. All Indigenous people have a unique culture and history, so there would never be one single resource that would provide a checklist of things to do before engaging with tribal entities. Taking a cue from our sponsoring organization Beyond 100K, who center ethnic, racial, and social equity in their work, we hope that this resource can suggest ways to initiate engagement for long-lasting partnerships in a new and innovative way.

We hope that you will engage with this resource and contribute to it in a way that makes it a stronger, richer source of information for their Tribe or Village. We welcome your input and your feedback—let us partner in taking our First Steps together.

**RESPECTFULLY,
THE SUPPORTING STEM EDUCATION
IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES PROJECT TEAM**

SETTING THE STAGE

As you start to identify a Tribe, tribal leader, or tribal member who you want to get in contact with or would like to work with on a project, there are a few useful general points to consider:

- **Don't make assumptions.** Research ahead of time to have a better understanding of tribal organization, hierarchy and cultural practices. This document can be a starting point, and you will need to do more research on your own.
- **Every Tribe is different and unique**, including their history, cultural practices, and current conditions.
- **Cultural sensitivity and Indigenous perspectives are incredibly important.** Coming in with the "answers" or predefined notions without considering tribal preferences may not be appreciated or welcomed.
- **There might not be "one" answer.** There are different interpretations of key points, depending on who you are connected with or where you do your research.
- **Discussions and questions about a Tribe's land base are complex, full of historical context, and are often deeply emotional and personal.**
- **Some information, such as place based traditions, knowledge, and sacred sites, are rarely shared with people outside of the Tribe.** Some responses could be perceived as "cold". Be patient and do not take it personally or be discouraged to continue the conversation.

Tribal leaders and members are guided by what's best for their Tribe, their culture, and their communities. Other motivations are understood, but often secondary.



SETTING THE STAGE

Establishing a relationship with tribal community members is critical when attempting to gather support on a project. Before meeting in-person, find out the following:

- Who should I talk to first?
- How do they refer to themselves?
- Do I need permission to walk around the area?
- Do I need permission to enter tribal lands?



Carefully consider the source for your research.

- Is it a tribal source?
- Is it credible across multiple perspectives?
- Have you done a deep dive into the Tribe's main website or Facebook site?
- As part of that relationship building, it is important to provide the space for the tribal member or leader to ask their own questions.



Trust is built over time. It is important not to take it personally as trusting is not always immediate - it is a process that occurs in steps. The following are factors to consider for strengthening your working relationship when seeking approval or advice from a tribal community.

We understand there might be topics that would be off-limits, such as religion and cultural ceremonies. Please be respectful as a visitor to follow traditional rules. Be open to learning the Tribes' language for greetings and other words they may share with you..

CULTURE & TRADITION

- Are there names or words for the Tribe and/or their people, that they use to identify themselves that haven't been defined or given to them by other cultures? **Ask if there are certain traditional or political names to use when addressing leaders or members.**
- Are there ceremonial or traditional religious customs that strongly define tribal members' identities?
- Are there leadership, gender, and/or family roles that need to be observed by non-tribal members?
- What language preservation activities are taking place at the Tribe?
- Are there historical or current cultural assimilation or appropriation issues for the Tribe that need to be clearly understood?
- Does the Tribe or members have a creation story they are willing to share?
- What cultural connections or reciprocity does your Tribe have with the land?



EDUCATION

When engaging about education, it is crucial to remember past educational experiences, such as boarding schools and sensitivities around research and data. One should appreciate and incorporate traditional ways of knowing, such as Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) when appropriate.

- What type of educational model and structures does the Tribe have? (For example: Headstart, language immersion programs, Education Department for PreK-12 and college support, early learning childcare center)
 - What are the main K-12 schools the Tribe has within their boundaries or jurisdiction and where are they located?
 - What are the main challenges faced by the K-12 schools? (For example: teacher shortage and preparation, transportation, funding, incorporation of Indigenous Language and knowledge into schools, STEM programs, community projects, home life difficulties)
 - How are K-12 schools funded? What funding challenges do schools have? (For example: funding for the STEM progression and lack of facilities)
 - Are there opportunities or enrichment that the Tribe would like to see offered to all of their students? (Examples can include established education centers, employment and internship opportunities, hands-on learning, access to technology, programs that inspire interest in STEM, family engagement.)
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RESOURCES



- [NATIVE KNOWLEDGE 360° EDUCATION INITIATIVE: Transforming teaching and learning about Native Americans](#)
- [National Museum of the American Indian \(NMAI\) Native Knowledge 360° Essential Understandings about American Indians](#)
- [Honoring Original Indigenous Inhabitants: Land Acknowledgment](#)
- [Federally-Recognized Tribes](#)
- [National Congress of American Indians](#)
- [American Indian Higher Education Consortium \(AIHEC\) Tribal Colleges and Universities Map](#)
- [Native News online](#)



[An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States \(REVISIONING HISTORY\)](#)
by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Beacon Press; Reprint edition (August 11, 2015)

[The Rights of Indians and Tribes](#), by Stephen L. Pevar, 4th Edition, Oxford University Press, 2012

[A Long Terrible Shadow](#), by Thomas Bergs

[American Indians, American Justice](#), by Vine Deloria Jr.

[Native Roots: How the Indians Enriched America](#), by Jack Weatherford

[Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World](#),
by Jack Weatherford

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project team would like to thank all contributors and advisors who have provided feedback during the ongoing development of First Steps.

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Pueblo of Jemez:

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