

Project Overview

What is this project?

In response to tribal leader requests for more basic information about research, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Policy Research Center has developed a curriculum and training to equip tribal leaders, Native students, and other Native community members to understand and manage research and program evaluation. With an emphasis on an Indigenous perspective and approach, this tool presents learners with typical research scenarios that tribal leaders face and gives them an opportunity to consider Western research activities. Over the course of three years, the research curriculum has been piloted in five different communities from Arizona to Alaska. The experiences and feedback received from tribal leaders, tribal staff, members of the community, and Native students who participated in a pilot training shaped the final version of the five module curriculum.

Why undertake the project?

American Indians and Alaska Natives are underrepresented in many major data collection efforts and statistical analyses, making it difficult for tribes, states, and the federal government to provide policy solutions and social programs that effectively target and benefit Native communities. Access to data allows tribal leaders to make informed decisions, be proactive about shaping the future of their communities, secure funding for programs to benefit the community, and refine the programs currently offered to tribal citizens. However, many Native people are wary of research and do not trust researchers. This is largely due to the fact that the term 'research' generally reminds Native people of the myriad projects historically conducted by outsiders that did not benefit Native communities, and even, in some cases, resulted in harm to Native communities.

As increasing numbers of Native people are developing the skills and experience to understand and conduct research that could greatly impact their communities, Native communities are becoming more comfortable with a number of research and program evaluation activities. However, the research process requires specific skills, and without these skills, it is difficult to evaluate the potential impact

(positive or negative) of particular projects. Through this curriculum, tribal leaders and Native communities can build their capacity to engage with research, allowing them to identify, access, and better understand data that may benefit their communities.

About the curriculum

By recognizing the value of both Indigenous ways of knowing and Western research approaches, tribal leaders can choose to reap the benefits of Western research while still respecting their own community standards. This research curriculum is intended to be a resource for tribal leadership as they fulfill their role as responsible stewards of their communities. This curriculum helps to start a dialogue about reconciling Indigenous and Western worldviews and provides practical information on how to engage with a broad range of research techniques.

The five modules broadly cover the most critical issues facing Native communities interested in research.

MODULE 1: FOUNDATIONS OF RESEARCH: AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE

- > Introduction to how tribal values relate to research; these will be emphasized throughout the curriculum
- > Introduction to the context and situations in which a tribal leader may need a working knowledge of research and related issues

MODULE 2: MANAGING THE DESIGNING AND PLANNING OF RESEARCH

- > Designing a research study, including how-to lessons and practical considerations
- > Guiding a research design process
- > Developing a research plan

MODULE 3: USING ETHICS AS A GUIDE FOR MANAGING RESEARCH

- > Identifying and understanding the basic ethical considerations related to conducting research
- > Developing skills for applying ethical considerations to research

MODULE 4: CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHERS

- > Identifying the basic considerations involved in choosing and evaluating a research partner
- > Identifying key characteristics of effective tribal research policy, Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), cooperative agreements, and various research agreements
- > Introduction to developing a skill set for contributing to a successful partnership

MODULE 5: UNDERSTANDING EVALUATION

- > Designing and implementing a program evaluation(s)
- > Validating basic principles of culturally competent evaluation techniques in tribal communities
- > Identifying what an evaluation can be expected to measure