

## Research Regulation Options for American Indian/Alaska Native Communities

*By Puneet Chawla Sahota, Ph.D.*

Finding new ways to regulate research is becoming an increasingly important issue in Indian Country. American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities have had some negative experiences with research in the past. However, research can also be an important tool for AI/AN communities for improving policies and practices. Regulating research can help communities to maximize the potential benefits of research. There are several different possible structures for AI/AN community research review processes.

Smaller AI/AN communities or those that receive a low volume of research requests could consider the following options:

**“Contract” with existing IRBs outside the community** (e.g., Indian Health Service (IHS) or local university IRB) to review research proposals.

**Partner with other AI/AN communities** to form a consortium research review board

**Delegate the function of research review to existing committees** within the community (such as a Health and Social Services Committee).

Larger AI/AN communities or those receiving a high volume of research requests may wish to set up their own separate research review board. Different types of review boards include:

**A tribal Institutional Review Board (IRB).** The federal model of an IRB provides a useful framework for a research review board. Some AI/AN communities may wish to diverge from the federal IRB model in certain areas, such as in the required membership or the review functions for their research review board (e.g., reviewing publication manuscripts in addition to research proposals).

**A Community Advisory Board (CAB).** CABs are involved in a research project from start to finish and help to design the research study, develop data collection tools, analyze data, and disseminate the research findings to the community.

**Other kinds of tribal research review boards** or some combination of the above options.

Regardless of the model for a research review board that an AI/AN community selects, some means of enforcing research review decisions is necessary. Possible enforcement methods might include a legal contract between the researcher and the community; requiring the researcher to pay a fee or deposit that would be forfeited in the event of misconduct; exiling unethical researchers from the community; and reporting unethical behavior by researchers to their professional organizations, institutions of employment, and/or the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Policy Research Center (PRC).

For more information on options for AI/AN community research regulation policies, please see the NCAI PRC paper “Research Regulation in American Indian/Alaska Native Communities: Policy and Practice Considerations” (<http://www.ncaiprc.org/research-regulation-papers>).