

TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT, PART 2 HIGHLIGHTS

The California Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Pala Band of Mission Indians delivered this training on October 30, 2025

Introduction to Native American Culture

Each Tribe has unique culture and traditions. They are not all the same. A cultural competence training will not make one an expert on Native cultures. Traditional Native American culture is often the opposite of traditional western culture. For example, there is often an emphasis on the importance of proper relationship, whereas western culture tends to have an urgency in task completion.

Native Americans tend to be on a spectrum of cultural values, depending on their relationship with their Tribe, traditions, and their level of acculturation. Using cultural humility, we do not impose stereotypical beliefs on Natives; rather, we embrace respectful curiosity.

Preparing for Engagement

The public, including decision makers, often have misconceptions about Native Americans, their culture, and experiences. It is critical that we consider what biases we grew up with and let these go.

It is important to research the Tribal Community one will be engaging. What is the history of their relationship with government? What story of their people do they feature on their website, if they have one?

Before Tribal engagement, consider:

- Do the staff assigned with engagement have demonstrated success with cultural humility?
- Do they have conflict resolution and other skills that promote respect and mutual success, should challenges occur?
- Do they clearly understand what level of authority they have to speak on behalf of the organization?

Resource: A test to measure one's implicit associations with Native Americans & other groups, please see: [Project Implicit \(harvard.edu\)](https://projectimplicit.harvard.edu)

Outreach: Who do you Contact? How?

Methods of outreach will depend on the context and the purpose of the outreach. To contact a Tribe's Housing Director, contact the Tribe's main telephone line and provide an introduction and the purpose for the call. The receptionist will route the call to the appropriate individual.

To contact urban Native American organizations, it is recommended to contact their director. When in doubt, call the receptionist and inquire who is the most appropriate person to speak with.

Government-to-government consultations tend to require a formal approach, with correspondence to the Tribal Chairperson or President. State entities under the Governor's executive oversight require compliance with Executive Order [N 15 19](#) and legislation, such as [AB 223](#).

Building and maintaining relationships with the Tribal Communities in your region are most successful as an ongoing activity, woven into the work of the organization – as opposed to a one-time event with a time sensitive goal. Tribal Communities value in-person engagement and telephone calls. In some contexts, email communications are also valued.

Resource: Map of Continuum of Care Homelessness Response Systems and Federally Recognized Tribes by Jurisdiction: [CA Counties, CoCs and Federally Recognized Tribes](#)

Addressing Individuals with Respect

It is important to address Tribal leaders as high-level leaders; for example, using their titles and deferring to them first in conversation. Tribal leaders will share if it's appropriate to refer to them by something else.

It is equally important to address Elders and others respectfully, addressing them formally until they provide permission not to do so.

Agenda Development/ Event Planning

It is critical that government collaboratively plan events and meetings, allowing Tribal Representation to lead or to co-lead the work together. What this looks like can vary. For example, they may want to prepare a draft agenda for you

to react to, visa versa, or it may be most useful for the agenda to be developed together. Other recommendations include:

- Plan for extra time at the end of the meetings, to ensure that important conversations are not cut off. This demonstrates respect, listening, and the development of good relationship.
- Honor Tribal leadership first in introductions, then community members.
- Allow space for blessings or other community needs.
- Individuals who open meetings or events with welcomes and blessings should receive an honorarium as gratitude.
- A gift should be brought to Tribal Leadership when visiting a Tribe for the first time.
- It is recommended that food be shared, if possible.

Communications & Etiquette

Purposeful communications are key in building relationship. A few recommendations include:

- It's important to avoid assumptions in communications, requesting clarity to ensure mutual understanding. The same words can mean different things to different people.
- It is important not to interrupt anyone speaking and to place the quality of the relationship over the priority of task completion.
- Native Americans may communicate through stories and may also tell jokes, once they are comfortable with you.
- It is helpful to take written notes and share with Tribal Partners prior to finalization, to ensure that all parties are on the same page as to what was shared and the next steps.

Challenges in Engagement

Government can often have challenges that must be mitigated or overcome, to respectfully and effectively partner with Tribal Communities. This provides an opportunity for inclusion and internal advocacy, as we expand to ensure our opportunities include California Tribal Communities.

Utilizing the lessons shared in the Tribal Engagement, Part 2 Training will help avoid unnecessary challenges.

Resource: For additional resources, please see the California Interagency Council on Homelessness [Tribal Affairs](#) site, or contact CalICH@BCSH.CA.Gov.