



Connecting Prevention Specialists to Native Communities

Engaging Tribal Leaders and Other Tribal Stakeholders for Prevention Efforts

Role of tribal leaders:

Tribal leaders work and care deeply for their communities. In return their roles have great influence and respect. Tribal leaders are knowledgeable in that they know their people, their culture, and are engaged in a variety of issues facing their communities. As a leader within their Native Nation, they play a crucial role in the success of prevention efforts and awareness. Tribal leaders have dual roles as a community leader and as a community member.

Tribal leaders play a key role in:

- Advocacy
- Education and training
- Guidance
- Setting goals and targets

Stakeholder mapping/Identifying relevant stakeholders:

Different leaders play various roles across several groups in the community. Before engaging any leader, identify who could be closely connected to your program and is empowered to work with you, this identification can be done by asking relevant questions such as:

- Who is the target audience of your program/initiative? (probe: about issues related to diversity and inclusion, such as gender, age group, interests etc.)
- Who else will be interested in this initiative?
- How can the leader have an impact on the success of your program or initiative?
- Is this leader directly or indirectly impacted by your program or initiative?

Tribal leaders can include:

- Tribal Chiefs
- Tribal Elders
- Tribal council members
- Women's group leaders
- Youth Leader
- Pipe Carriers
- Spiritual leaders
- Medicine people / healers
- Two - Spirit leaders
- Tribal college presidents
- Tribes are unique and may have leaders specific to them, find out who those leaders are

Where can you meet tribal leaders to engage them?

- Contact their office directly to schedule a face-to-face or phone meeting
- At community events
- Elder talking circles
- Tribal government offices
- Community centers
- Tribal businesses
- Public tribal council meetings
- Tribal town hall forums

Steps to prepare for engagement and follow up

Preparation

Have a clear objective for the meeting with the tribal leader and prepare 2-3 key points of information you want your audience to hear, understand. Remember, these key messages should be simple, concise, memorable, and relevant to the community and the tribal leader(s) you are engaging.

It is important to plan ahead for who will speak if you have more than one person meeting with the leader. Take some time in advance to prepare your key message that will work towards creating a connection and are easy to recall and relate with. Be sure to plan on being clear, brief, and to the point while saving the strongest points for the end of the conversation.

Get to know the leader and tribal community before any meeting or proposals. Know the leader's role, their priorities in the community, any relevant existing programs.

Create a packet of information that you can share and leave with the Tribal leader. This package could include information about your organization, programs and initiatives, local initiatives and program, statistics on the behavioral health challenge you want to address or any materials that may require the Tribal leader's further action and attention. Leave one packet with the Tribal leader and leave one behind for a staff member, as well.

If the Tribal leader has staff or others they work with, get to know them and work with them for guidance. They are often very knowledgeable of individual and community issues and will inform the leader of your views and requests. Treat a meeting with a staffer just as you would treat a meeting with the actual leader.

During the Meeting

Do not be late. Tribal leaders are involved in governance, economic development, healthcare etc. All of these take their time and energy. It is important to be respectful of their time. Even if a leader may be running a little bit late, showing up on time indicates how important this issue is to you. If you are on time and the leader is late, then leader may feel apologetic and grant you some special attention.

If possible, invite someone from the community with you to the meeting, preferably someone also involved in prevention effort to introduce you and share meaningful firsthand experiences with the current prevention efforts or prevention needs.

When introducing yourself, simply say your name, where you are from, and something about your family. Do not give too much information about your credentials. Telling about your family is more important than telling about your job and credentials.

Early in the meeting, present a clear ask to the leader. Know what you would like this leader to do (e.g. attend an event, speak about the issue publicly, host a training), and clearly ask this of them early on. Then repeat this ask at the end.

Emphasize respect. Respect and treat Tribal leaders the way you would other government leaders, CEOs etc. Tribal leaders are often also community elders and/or spiritual leaders. Your behavior should follow Tribal protocols for these kinds of interactions. A meeting of this nature is not the time to criticize a leader but to persuade them that the prevention effort deserves their attention and action. If a leader disagrees with you, remain respectful, present your reasoning and evidence, but do not become argumentative, negative, or defensive. Emphasize the positives of your standpoint, and always try to end the meeting on a positive note.

Make the engagement simple, highlight key issues and any local statistics, long term effects of your project, and share information in a local, relatable context. Do not focus too much on the statistics, too many numbers can be lost on a person that is not well versed on the issue.

Ask questions to listen and gain more understanding of the needs of tribal leader and the community. Listen after you ask a question, their input can reveal important details regarding potential pitfalls and will help you make informed decisions. Be patient with silent lapses, as they may be thoughtfully considering your words. Do not interrupt and allow time for others to have a chance to speak before continuing.

Be prepared for questions and be sure to answer any questions clearly or set up a time frame and method for following-up if an answer is unknown.

Always end the meeting with a show of appreciation and ask how the leader can expect you to follow up on any items.

Follow up

Remember that engaging tribal leaders and other stakeholder involves building a long term and sustainable relationship. Avoid coming in once and leaving without follow up or maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with the community. Remain in touch during program implementation.

Following up is where you work with the leaders to carry out what you have mutually agreed upon. It is important that you do not wait for the leader to follow up with you. Be proactive and send a letter or email thanking the leader and their staff and reiterating the steps for following up.

Be sure to send any additional information that the leader requested.

Following up will probably include working more closely with a member of the Tribal leader's staff, and make sure that those lines of communication are clear.

If you are asking for the leader to speak in public, be prepared to help the leader craft talking points on the issues.

Request feedback on the program during follow ups.



Other things to consider throughout the process of engaging tribes and tribal leaders

Every tribe is different with their own unique leaders, do not generalize.

Take time to learn and understand who makes the decisions in the tribe(s) and who is empowered to work with you.

Listening is very important, Tribes and their leaders have traditional and scientific knowledge about the areas of cultural, religious and other concerns for them. That knowledge should be respected and valued. Do not assume you know what their needs and concerns are and respect the needs and priorities of the tribe and their leaders.

Be patient and flexible, expect time changes or postponement for scheduled meeting.

Understand the tribal leader's areas of concern about changes a new initiative or program may bring to the community.

Engaging tribal leaders is important, however community members also need to be engaged though the process as well.

Thoughtful gifts in appreciation such as traditional tobacco can go a long way. Seek guidance about this if you are unsure.

Remember, it is always important to build relationships based on trust. You can accomplish this by having a sit-down conversation about related topics or sharing a meal together.

This publication is based on community-based participatory research and programming.

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