

## **Twenty Suggestions for Consulting with Tribes**

1. Consultation is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process. Believe in the spirit of consultation and be prepared to negotiate for what you want, but also be prepared to negotiate a compromise. Consult, don't debate. For federal managers, understand that the mandated "government-to-government relationship" does not mean that the head of each government will meet at the same table, only that the tribe should have more status than a federal agency or program when final decisions must be made (although the tribes rarely have such status in real situations).

2. Go to them, if possible, or at least have your consultation meeting at a convenient, neutral place if more than one tribe is involved. Face-to-face interaction is preferred to long distance interaction. Don't expect letters or facsimiles to work as well as face-to-face conversation. Do not equate a lack of a response with approval or no objection to your project. Follow up a letter with a telephone call, and perhaps another letter after a reasonable period of time if you do not receive a response.

3. Learn the names and positions of the people with whom you will be meeting. Don't expect to meet with the leader of the tribe anymore than you would expect your leader (be it the Dean of your college or the President of the United States if a federal employee) to attend every meeting with the tribes, but treat the authorized tribal representative with the same respect you would treat the leader of the tribe.

4. Try to have seating arrangements in a circle or circles. This puts no one at the head and no one at the end. If this is not possible, apologize at the beginning and give an explanation of why seating arrangements are the way they are. Feed, if possible, especially if the meeting is lasting through the lunch hour, or at least try to find ways of getting refreshments to those involved.

5. Greet people with a handshake if possible. Take your cues from the person across from you. If offered a firm handshake, grip the other person likewise. Sometimes Indians use only a single, definite "shake", sometimes more. Don't "pump the handle". Additionally, the position of the hands in the handshake is not necessarily "web-to-web", that is, the web between your thumb and forefinger touching the web of the hand of the other person. Occasionally the handshake is nothing more than a light touching of the fingers. Women must be more aware of the handshake issue than men.

6. Stand when meeting people, and try not to turn your back to anyone. Among some cultures, turning your back on someone is tantamount to shunning him or her. If you must turn your back to someone, apologize and explain your actions. Be certain that they know you do not mean to offend them.

7. Ask someone to open the meeting with a prayer, and ask the same person to close with a prayer if possible. This closes the circle. After the opening prayer, briefly summarize why you have asked those present to attend. If you are not known to the community, try to have intermediaries present -- people known to the community with which you are consulting and the

community of which you are a part -- to introduce you if possible. If the community with which you are consulting does not know you, make yourself known to them by good works.

8. Practice introducing yourself as an Indian would to another Indian, as your personal family history would dictate you introduce yourself to others. Try not to introduce yourself in relation to your job, although your job surely will come to the attention of those around you.

9. When making presentations regarding projects or proposals, tailor your speech and your vocabulary to your audience. Have someone specifically designated to take notes so that you are not trying to write and listen at the same time. And, very importantly, ask permission before recording anything. Notify the participants at the beginning if you intend to record, but give everyone the opportunity to refuse to be recorded. Easily understandable visual material (large color maps, photographs of project areas, project timelines) posted around the room or as part of the presentation makes it easier for people to understand the impact of the proposal on their landscape and to relate it to their "world".

10. Try not to ask direct questions, but rather phrase more open-ended ones. Open-ended questions may receive a response at any time in the meeting. Also, expect to receive responses at a later date, and do not expect one meeting to be the end of the interaction.

11. Listen, and don't be in too much of a hurry to talk. Let there be silence as necessary, especially a respectful silence after a speaker has finished. Don't necessarily stare into the speaker's eyes. Look a little to the right or left, and only glance into the person's eyes. If you must focus on a point on the speaker's face, focus on the mouth. If you are not certain of where to look, ask, and explain your hesitancy to look in their eyes. Tribal groups respect your attempts to respect their cultural manners.

12. Expect longer speeches or monologues rather than simple back-and-forth conversations, and expect to hear recitations of past governmental wrongs, though not necessarily your agency's. In long speeches or monologues, use verbal and nonverbal cues to signify that you are listening, rather than interrupting the speaker. Nods of the head or the noncommittal "hummm" let the speaker know that you are attentive to the words. Once the speaker has finished (and following a respectful silence), try to recapitulate the speaker's concerns as you see them, and give the speaker the opportunity to correct you, if necessary. But it is imperative that you to let them know that you are not cutting off their opportunity to comment, but rather that they can add to their comments at any time if they so desire.

13. Be aware of the difference between the leadership functions and wishes of traditional leaders and elected officials. Do your homework, and try to learn about the people with whom you will be trying to establish a relationship, but do not expect to become "one of them", and do not expect to make them "one of you". Be aware of the differences in social status of those around you. Not all persons have equal status, but treat them all respectfully. Be especially respectful of the elders, and try to make them comfortable.

14. Don't try to "shepherd" the group too much toward your goal, but gently steer the group back to the topic if it gets too far afield. Try to keep the topic of the consultation focused on a single issue, but be prepared to let the tribal members "vent" about what you might perceive to be unrelated issues. Don't try to consult about more than one program (the "shotgun approach" to consultation), or group the projects carefully if you must.

15. Be aware of nonverbal cues such as body language. Crossed arms and legs signify closure. Finger pointing is also considered to be rude in many tribal groups. Sitting when speaking signifies a lack of respect to some cultures. Tables across the front of a room present physical and social boundaries between the participants.

16. Be aware of the differences between tribal decision-making processes and western decision-making processes. Western processes are usually hierarchical, where "decision makers" are generally higher ranking and only "consider" lower ranking individuals' comments. But American Indian decision-making processes are often more consensus oriented, where all tribal members may be consulted and given the opportunity to contribute to the final decision.

17. Be aware that different cultures assign different roles and responsibilities to the sexes. In some cultures there are some things that only men or only women may speak about, some things that should not be discussed in mixed company, some objects that are not meant to be seen or touched by a specific sex, and some duties that are to be performed only by a man or a woman.

18. When you must close the discussion portion of the consultation, do so with a statement about any progress that has been made, but make certain that everyone knows that the discussion is not closed. Do not commit to anything you cannot or will not follow through with, but do not hesitate to commit to those things that you can (and will) follow through with. Speak honestly about what you can and cannot do, and what you will or will not do.

19. After the closing prayer, and when the formal portion of the consultation meeting is finished, make an effort to mingle with the people who have assembled. Talk with them quietly, with respect, and with a subdued voice. Let the meeting wind down as much as possible before leaving. Take cues from those around you, and let the tribal group in charge of the meeting place help you find the correct time to leave.

20. After the consultation is over, and when you have returned to your office, immediately draft an official "Thank You" letter for the group who sponsored the meeting, a letter of appreciation for those tribal officials who attended, and a tentative understanding of what was accomplished at the meeting. Such letters should be mailed within a week, if at all possible, so that everyone involved is reminded of what happened and what was agreed to by the parties involved. These letters should also relay time limitations, deadlines, and other important points.