Working with Native American Communities: A Practical Guide to Connecting with Tribal Populations

A presentation before the Southwest Community Impact Assessment Conference

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Native American

n.
- A member of any of the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.
- Any member of the peoples living in North or South America before the Europeans arrived.

adj. of or pertaining to American Indians or their culture or languages
The numbers game

- The American Southwest has the largest concentration of Native Americans in the U.S.
  - Approx. 900,000 tribal members reside in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Nevada and California (combined)
  - This accounts for more than one-third the population of American Indians in the U.S.
- Approx. 185 different federally-recognized tribes call the Southwest home
The numbers game

- Arizona has the third largest population of Native Americans
  - Approx. ¼ million tribal members live in Arizona
  - Equals approx. 5% of the total state population
- Up to 28% of Arizona’s land base are reservation lands
- 22 distinct federally-recognized tribes call Arizona home
History isn’t a thing of the past

History is contemporary

- Things that happened in the yesteryears are very real and vital today
- Accountable for promises made by predecessors
- Distrust for government
Overcoming the barriers

- Establishing trust and rapport is the key to success
  - Hands-on approach
  - Face-to-face interaction
- Be cognizant
  - Listen and understand
  - Don’t sell or make hollow promises
Understanding the communication process

- Holistic decision-making
- Egalitarianism
- Reaching consensus
Keep in mind

- Suspicion of outsiders
  - Overcome the big city mentality
  - Earn trust
  - Dress casually
  - Shop locally

- Cultural practices
  - Time urgency
  - Interpretation
  - Photography
Keep in mind

- The “wild west” mentality
  - Irreverent humor
- Tribal governments as sovereign
  - Same respect as other elected officials
  - Multiple layers of government function
  - More comfortable with federal than state, counties or municipalities
Keep in mind

Media

- Radio is huge
- Newspapers work, but most are weeklies
- Local TV is almost non-existent
- Community centers
- Fliers are key
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