

# Strengthening State Arts Agency Relationships with Native Communities

**NASAA** NATIONAL ASSEMBLY of  
STATE ARTS AGENCIES  
Knowledge ▲ Representation ▲ Community

# Strengthening State Arts Agency Relationships with Native Communities

The United States is home to 9.6 million Native people who reside in every state and jurisdiction. Many of these individuals are descendants of the original Indigenous residents of and stewards of North America.

There also are [574 federally recognized Native tribes](#) in the United States. Each of these tribes has been recognized as a sovereign nation by the federal government and possesses a distinctive history, culture and model of governance.

Although every state is home to Native residents and/or nations, not all state arts agencies (SAAs) are in dialogue with the Native constituents that reside within their borders. Very few SAAs have designated Native arts liaisons or tribal consultation policies. Financial investments also are limited. In the aggregate, grants to Native organizations and Indigenous artists constitute a fraction of state arts agency funding: 1.2% of awards and 0.4% of grant dollars. This is comparable to the [0.4%](#) spent on Native communities by private philanthropy.

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## Project Objectives

To address these gaps, the [National Assembly of State Arts Agencies](#) (NASAA) launched the Strengthening State Arts Agency Relationships with Native Communities initiative. Recognizing that both federal and state governments have a blighted track record in their treatment of Native peoples, NASAA wants to help SAAs develop respectful and responsive collaborations with Native constituencies. Specific project objectives include:

- **Elevate the importance of establishing intentional and respectful state arts agency relationships with Native communities**, including tribes, Native organizations and Indigenous artists.
- **Lift up hallmarks of positive practices** for working with and supporting Native communities.
- **Share examples of selected state arts agency programs focusing on Native communities**, to inform and inspire more efforts nationwide.
- **Recommend credible resources that state arts agencies can consult**, prioritizing resources originating from Native communities themselves.

This work focuses on the importance of **relationship building** as a foundational first step. These relationships, in turn, can serve as a springboard for developing collaborations, programs and services that meet the needs of Native constituencies.

In recent years, other national organizations have held convenings and released excellent resources on Indigenous arts and Native philanthropy. Those resources, however, don't address the specific challenges associated with doing this work **within state government**. NASAA's project attempts to fill that niche. We hope it is additive rather than duplicative.

## Methods

A core principle of NASAA's initiative is to **center Native voices in the work**. NASAA convened a [Circle of Advisors](#) of Indigenous individuals to guide us. NASAA's primary role in this group was to listen and learn, to synthesize what we heard, and to seek feedback on how we interpreted information. NASAA also conducted extensive [interviews](#) with 70 individuals (as of June 2024). Interviewees included a wide array of Native leaders, artists, culture bearers, elders and educators from across the country. Given that this project focuses on state government actions, we also consulted with state and federal agencies and tribal liaison offices.

## Project Engagement

As of June 2024 (Learning and outreach are ongoing.)



NASAA's efforts to organize inclusive outreach consider not only current state borders but also significant ecological, cultural and language regions, indicated with grey shading.

Map source: Alfred Kroeber, University of California Berkeley

Other principles guiding NASAA's approach included the below:

- Although we were instructed by our dialogues with Native people, NASAA also **accepted responsibility for our own learning** through research and self-education. This included reviewing materials produced by Native experts, completing online courses in tribal

relations, and conducting site visits to Native events and institutions. See the [Recommended Resources](#) section for a curated collection of materials relevant to SAAs.

- It is not possible to generalize across Indigenous communities, each of which is unique in its culture, governance and goals. Therefore, the [examples](#) that NASAA has collected demonstrate **approaches attuned to individual Native groups**. We hope this will encourage SAAs to avoid generic solutions and learn about specific Native cultures.
- To **avoid uncompensated labor** and express our gratitude for the time and expertise contributed by Indigenous individuals involved in this initiative, NASAA offered honoraria to project advisors.
- NASAA remains committed to **continual listening and learning** after this report is published.



Corwin "Corky" Clairmont is a prominent Salish–Kootenai educator, artist and environmental advocate. He led a community-driven design process for the creation of the Eagle Circle Veterans Wall of Remembrance, a memorial honoring tribal veterans who served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Photo courtesy of Montana Arts Council

## Key Learnings

To build a knowledge base for action recommendations, NASAA consulted with our Circle of Advisors and conducted interviews with 70 (as of June 2024) Native artists, culture bearers, elders, educators, tribal officers and Native institutions across the country. We also spoke with tribal liaisons working for numerous state and federal agencies.

Through all these dialogues, NASAA sought to educate ourselves and gather ideas about how state arts agencies can improve their relationships with and services to Native communities. To this end, we asked for candid feedback and explicit examples of government practices that are problematic and counterproductive as well as guidance on positive approaches.

Top take-aways are outlined in this section. Throughout this report, boxed quotations capture comments made by Indigenous interviewees. NASAA did not record the interviews (to protect the confidentiality of informants), so quotations may not be verbatim. They do, however, convey the essence of important ideas voiced by multiple Native people with whom NASAA consulted.

All information shared in this report reflects the perspectives of those individuals with whom NASAA talked. As such, this information should be viewed as a window into the beginning of relationship building—but not the full picture. Because it is not possible to generalize across Native cultures, NASAA encourages state arts agencies to use this document as impetus to learn more about the diverse experiences and views of the Native communities in their states.



Community members learn traditional methods for building canoes at the [Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center](#). Photo courtesy of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center

## Understand How State Government May Be Perceived

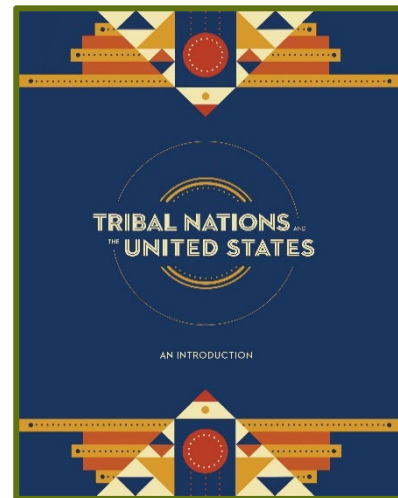
- **Tribes are sovereign nations with the legal right to govern themselves.** But that self-determination sometimes rubs up against what state government views as its prerogative and power. Conveying respect for sovereignty is central to successful state government relationships with Native communities.

Everything starts with sovereignty. Tribes and the federal government are peers. It's hard for state government to realize that it's lower in that hierarchy. It requires an attitude adjustment.

Honoring tribal sovereignty means respecting the innate right of Native peoples to govern themselves. As sovereign nations, tribes develop their own systems for leadership and policy decision making and adopt their own laws and constitutions. Tribal governments have broad responsibilities that include law enforcement, education, health care, social services, natural resource management and public infrastructure.

There also is a powerful synergy between sovereignty and the arts. Sovereignty enables Native people to preserve their distinctive cultures, and cultural practices are a powerful component of civic life in Native communities.

For a concise introduction to Native nations and sovereignty, see [Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction](#), from the National Congress of American Indians.



- **Government has harmed Native people, and those traumas continue to reverberate.** Strained relationships between Native communities and state government are shaped by hundreds of years of [history](#) as well as by current conflicts around education, law enforcement, land use and other issues. For these reasons, many Native individuals have little incentive to initiate interactions with state government.

History carries weight, and negative history has a long memory. In some Native communities there is a deeply seated concern that government is here to displace us. Government workers need to understand that trust must be earned. It takes time.

- **Efforts to cultivate trust and establish new relationships can be very fruitful.** Advisors and interviewees expressed optimism that good collaborations between state

government and Native communities are possible. [Research](#) conducted by Harvard University's [Project on Indigenous Governance and Development](#) reveals many success stories across government functions. In the arts, NASAA's field interviews and programmatic research revealed multiple [examples](#) of productive arts partnerships that have flourished through the good-faith efforts of state arts agencies and Native communities. State arts agencies can help to create the conditions for this success by mining this NASAA project for information, taking responsibility for initiating new relationships and sustaining efforts over time.

- **Formal tribal consultation policies, [such as those required for federal agencies](#), can be a mixed bag.** On one hand, these government-to-government consultation requirements help to institutionalize the expectation of dialogue and formalize a commitment to collaboration. They also demonstrate state respect for the sovereign authority of tribal leaders. However, not all formal consultation efforts are effective. A high volume of consultation requests creates a capacity crunch for smaller tribes with fewer people authorized to play official liaison roles.

You need to be willing to be the only non-Native person in the room. That's key for us as Native people. From the first time we go to school, unless we are living in our own reservation communities, we are used to being the only Native person in the room. To flip that is a really powerful statement.

Also, formal consultation procedures don't always allow multiple community members to get involved. Advisors counseled state arts agencies to pursue organic and inclusive community engagement as well as government-to-government consultation.

Native individuals are often invited to a table to check off "representation" boxes. Tribes are tired of that. They are done with consultation that is purely performative.

- **Perfunctory consultation diminishes trust.** Government agencies sometimes approach Native groups with preconceived plans and seek endorsement of those ideas, rather than cocreating plans that take Native needs into account. Asking one Native person what they think does not constitute consultation. Ignoring a tribe's preferred consultation protocols is another common error.
- **Informal connections can be very meaningful.** Many Native people commented on the importance of government representatives "showing up" for Native programs and events and making the most of informal community engagement opportunities. Making the effort to meet people and learn about diverse Native communities and cultures—without making any formal requests—is one way to demonstrate commitment and goodwill.



Government is an unfamiliar protocol. Nobody will talk to you until you get a UEI (Unique Entity Identifier). People are reduced to being a number. It is impersonal and makes government feel unwelcoming.

- **Bureaucracy and red tape can impede the development of meaningful relationships.** Government systems that emphasize procedures over people make it difficult to establish connections.

- **State government does not hold a monopoly on bureaucracy.** Be prepared for some tribes to have highly complex systems. Successful work with Native communities may require a tolerance for process and ambiguity.
- **Government agencies and tribes may experience disconnects around how long things take.** Developing relationships, securing information and implementing projects may take longer than expected due to tribal resource shortages, sparse infrastructure or other factors. Grant and reporting cycles that seem natural to government agencies (organized around fiscal years or legislative sessions) may not align with tribal norms.
- **Don't presume that all Native artists, organizations or tribes desire state assistance.** Some people may not want to involve state government in their cultural practices. Others may be reluctant to take on the administrative burdens of state applications and reporting unless award sizes are substantial. SAAs can initiate outreach but should respect the decisions Native people make about their degree of involvement in SAA programs.

One thing that tends to be a point of contention—with artists or tribal governments—is the idea of time. State governments have application deadlines, assumptions about fiscal years, project start and end dates. Tribal governments have totally different cycles and procedures. State government is not nimble enough to adapt to that. It can exclude a lot of work that it would be great for the state to support.

## Honor the Complexity of Native Cultures and Identities

- **Interviewees often shared stories of encountering stereotypes and monolithic thinking (assumptions that all Native cultures are the same).** In reality, Native peoples embody a wide array of cultural, spiritual, economic and geographic differences that affect how government programs and policies should be designed.
  - Not all Native individuals live in rural communities or on reservations. In fact, 7 out of 10 Native people live in urban settings and comprise the nation's [urban Indian population](#). Urbanization is a result of past government policies (forcible removal and land trust termination) as well as contemporary migration.

- Urban artists, in particular, may reside in different states than those in which their tribal lands are located. Such individuals may be excluded by policies that restrict services to enrolled members of local tribes.
- [Alaska Native](#), [Native Hawaiian](#), [Taíno](#) and [Pacific Islander](#) populations have a significantly different history than tribes in the contiguous 48 states. Reservations generally do not exist (with the exception of the [Metlakatla Indian Community](#)) and the legal landscape for issues relating to recognition, economic development and self-governance are unique in those states and jurisdictions.

All of America's common negative beliefs about Indians are present in government: the belief that we [Natives] don't pay taxes and get free services, that we're drunks, that we run casinos and are rich, or that we are living in squalor. So many stereotypes. The reality is that there is just as much economic diversity in tribal communities as there is in America as a whole. Yes there is wealth, and yes there is poverty. We have all of that. For the average person, their belief of how Indian Country looks is so narrow. We need to educate the state and the public that there are many different cultures, many ways of governing.



*Spirit Deer* sculpture, created in 2021 by Taos Pueblo artist Sean Rising Sun Flanagan, is on display at the Jemez Historic Site. Photo courtesy of New Mexico Arts

- The frameworks of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and Black, Indigenous and/or people of color (BIPOC) were rejected by multiple Native interviewees.** Some individuals were wary of tokenism and expressed skepticism about the depth of DEI outreach efforts that advance other cultures' notions of equity, rather than centering Native needs. Citing the lingering effects of forced assimilation and cultural erasure, these interviewees didn't want to be categorized as BIPOC, and held a primary identity as members of their tribe. Sovereignty, rather than race, was of paramount importance to them. Other interviewees were comfortable with the BIPOC shorthand but observed that DEI concepts are politically polarizing. They suggested that it may be more strategic to embed Native services and tribal consultation practices into government work without using a DEI justification, so that the work can endure regardless of political trends.

It's a sore thumb that there is so little acknowledgment or understanding of Native sovereignty within DEI work. DEI leaves out Native people on multiple levels. There is a large lack of cross-cultural competency among so-called equity experts, and scant examination of the "I" in BIPOC.

- Work with tribes is not about singling out one ethnic group.** Many federal policies and programs designed to benefit Native populations are based upon the legal classification of tribes as distinct governmental or political units—not ethnic groups. This principle is embedded throughout federal law and was affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in [Morton v. Mancari](#). Federal block grants often require tribal consultation as a planning or implementation requirement. And numerous states, through legislation or executive order, require agencies to consult with tribes on policy and planning affecting Native lands and peoples. In these ways, work with tribes is an important form of regulatory compliance rather than cultural preference.
- Political differences are present within all communities,** and Native communities are no exception. Disagreements exist around issues relating to federal and state recognition, [blood quantum](#), distribution of resources, education strategies, social justice topics, environmental priorities and many other aspects of life.

Lack of understanding of Native culture can lead to bad policy. Culture and governing are not separate ideas. That artificial separation was imposed on Native communities by other governments. By contrast, arts and culture are integral to Native governance. Cultural ways of knowing infuse family and tribal life.

- In many Native cultures, concepts of art, health, work, education and spirituality are deeply interconnected.** State and federal governments tend to enforce a segregation of those services, which Native peoples may experience as disjointed. Integrating cultural practices into all policies and programs affecting Native communities (health care, education, family services, environmental policy, etc.) can lead to positive outcomes.



Turtle mosaic designed by Elizabeth James-Perry, Aquinnah Wampanoag. Photo by Bettina Washington, courtesy of Elizabeth James-Perry

## Practice Fraud Prevention

- **Unscrupulous individuals and organizations may claim Native heritage in order to gain visibility or access to resources.** This trend has accelerated in recent years as global markets for Indigenous art have grown, as technology has made it easier to imitate handcrafted items and replicate them en masse, and as the DEI movement has opened new opportunities for BIPOC individuals and groups. Apart from the [adverse effects](#) of displacement and [cultural appropriation](#), fraud poses a serious economic threat to Native communities. Despite good intentions, state arts agencies can accidentally become entangled with individuals feigning Native ancestry or corporate entities posing as Indian nations (known as CEPAINs).

It's important for SAAs to have some knowledge of the people you are bringing together to speak for and about Native people. There is displacement and there is fraud. Arts agencies should not legitimize people whose claims to being Native are untrue. Giving them funds or a platform to influence policy can be problematic. We [tribes] have to work some matters out for ourselves, but preventing fraud is everyone's job.

Identity distinctions and conflicts are very real, very difficult to navigate. It's okay to start with federal and state recognition. Funds need to go first to people who are absolutely Native, not imposters. That needs to be the true intention. Find ways to invest in artists living in tribal communities, working on their own land. That's where it begins. You learn and grow from there. After that you can layer on other Indigenous identities, urban Indian dynamics, etc.

- Working with federally recognized tribes is one way to shape programs with confidence.** Each of the [574 federally recognized Native tribes](#) in the United States has formal protocols for validating lineage and granting citizenship. Focusing eligibility on individuals enrolled in those tribes (or on groups led by or affiliated with them) can reduce the likelihood of fraud. It also can be a useful strategy for building credibility and trust within the Native community.
- Take note of state recognition.** Through legislative action, [15 states](#) have acknowledged the presence of tribes that have not received federal recognition. State recognition establishes formal government-to-government relationships and acknowledges the political status of a tribe, but it [does not qualify tribes for the same legal rights](#) that federal recognition confers. Relationships and power dynamics between federal- and state-recognized tribes can be highly nuanced. Conflict may exist in some places.

## Additional Insights

- Indigenous individuals who are not enrolled citizens of a federally recognized tribe are often left out of policy decisions and have a difficult time accessing resources.** Non-enrollment can occur for many reasons, including diaspora, adoption, or forced assimilation through boarding schools or other means. There are also important regional patterns to note. Those tribes that experienced first contact with Europeans in the eastern and southern United States were devastated early in the colonial history of the country due to armed conflict, disease and forced removal. The few survivors of such groups are often scattered and may not meet the requirements for federal recognition. Whatever their backgrounds, unenrolled Indigenous individuals face multiple forms of social and cultural isolation and cannot tap into services or resources available to enrolled people. It can be tricky to determine how to meet the needs of these populations. Consider the circumstances carefully and seek guidance from local Native leaders on this point.

Every time there is a federally recognized tribe in the room, they will advocate for dollars to only go to federally designated groups. That's a thing to know and expect. It is important, it is legitimate—but it also leaves a lot of people out.

- **Approach the intersection of Native arts and folk/traditional arts with caution.** Native art is dynamic and occupies a full spectrum of emerging and experimental aesthetics as well as ancient and culturally embedded practices. While some Native culture bearers proudly embrace their role as traditional arts practitioners, other Native artists find the folk/traditional arts paradigm to perpetuate stereotypes about Native creativity. SAAs will be viewed as helpful to more Indigenous artists if they embrace a full and vibrant continuum of Native art. In some settings, it may be helpful to assign tribal liaison duties to someone other than an agency's folklife staff.
- **Understanding Native history and culture requires thinking across state borders.** While state borders and residency statutes are important reference points for SAAs, those boundaries may have less meaning in Native communities. Tribal lands frequently straddle state borders. Diaspora is an important dimension of Native history, and many Native individuals have ancestral links to multiple tribes. This can have implications for funding eligibility. Projects seeking to connect with the original Indigenous residents of an area or engage in language preservation or [repatriation](#) may need to work across state lines.

The state maps that we have organize how we work, but they are not always the most relevant to Native peoples. Those borders were plunked down upon us. Ecological and cultural landscapes matter as much as state or county borders. State arts agencies need to understand that.
- **Successful tribal relations work requires a substantial commitment of time and considerable adaptation.** If a government agency embarks on this work with high hopes and unrealistic expectations about the time investments and financial flexibility required, it runs the risk of overpromising and underdelivering. This may undermine trust and further damage relationships. It may be better to refrain from doing work with Native communities (or to confine it to a very small and targeted programmatic scale) rather than to pursue something beyond an SAA's capacity to do well. "First, do no harm."
- **Celebrate progress.** Although challenging, fostering connections between arts councils and Native communities can be extremely meaningful, joyful and fulfilling.

## Action Recommendations

This initiative presents an opportunity to advance tangible action recommendations to state arts agencies. These recommendations, informed by NASAA conversations with the Circle of Advisors and our field interviews, are outlined below.

NASAA is not recommending specific programmatic strategies, because what is culturally appropriate (and financially feasible) will vary greatly from state to state. Rather, these recommendations focus on positive practices SAAs can adopt to lay a good foundation for working with local Native communities and tailoring programmatic strategies to their needs. Items are numbered for reference, not to imply a priority order.

Selected examples illustrating how the [key learnings](#) and these action recommendations can be embodied by state arts agencies can be found in the [Program Profiles](#) section.



Nathan Bush, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, practices traditional Cherokee copper art and blacksmithing. He works at the Oconaluftee Indian Village in Cherokee, North Carolina. Photo courtesy of Jesse Barber and South Arts

## Action Realm #1: Education

### 1A. Do your homework to learn about the Native populations in your state.

- What Native groups are indigenous to your area? What Native populations live in your area today? What are their histories and cultural traditions? What current or historical events may be especially relevant in shaping those groups' perceptions of government?
- Which groups have received federal or state recognition? Are there unrecognized groups or detribalized people present? What is your state's urban Indian community like?
- If your state boundaries overlap reservations or tribal lands, what are those Native land boundaries? To which tribe(s) do those lands belong?
- Explore as many learning and teaching resources as possible, prioritizing those originated by and for Native communities themselves.

Every region has distinct narratives and archetypes. There are many cultural differences to take into account. Things will be different from state to state, but the common thread is beginning with an understanding of the cultural distinctiveness of each tribe. That can inform specific policies and practices that work for each location.

### 1B. Identify organizations in your state that are already interacting with Native communities and have garnered their trust.

Learn about their goals, their activities and whom they reach. Consider ways that you can collaborate with them or amplify their efforts to serve Native constituents.

Agency staff need to show up and see what is already going on. They can work with local "navigators" to bridge relationships.

- More than 30 states have state offices of tribal relations or government commissions for tribal affairs. Is there one in your state? If so, introduce yourself and learn what training, resources and services they offer to state agencies as well as to tribes. Ask if it would be appropriate to share information about your SAA at a meeting of tribal leaders.
- Have any of the tribes in your state established arts councils or similar bodies charged with coordinating cultural activities? If so, outreach to them will be important.
- Are there tribal museums, libraries or archives present in your area? What programs or services do they offer and how are they supported?



- Is there a [tribal college or university](#) present in your region? What cultural or arts programs do they offer? What roles do they play in the local Native community?
- Is there an intertribal association in your state? How about urban Indian centers or Native youth development organizations?
- Are [Native Community Development Financial Institutions](#) present?

Agencies need to think through how they can have more regular encounters with Native artists and community members. Regular contact will build trust and lift up opportunities for project grants and partnerships.

### 1C. Show up.

- Visit sites and attend events significant to Native peoples in your area. This may include dances, powwows, Native arts markets, cultural activities at Native community centers, etc.
- Learn the appropriate etiquette and customs for visiting reservations or participating in social or ceremonial events.
- Offer to pitch in. Set up chairs, pick up trash, run errands or volunteer to help in other ways.
- Don't make yourself the center of attention.
- Develop rapport before asking for anything.

Social and cultural norms vary among Native groups. Before traveling to tribal lands or attending Native events, inquire about what visitor behavior is considered appropriate. For instance, see these resources from the [Indian Pueblo Cultural Center](#):

- [Visiting a Pueblo](#)
- [Pueblo/Native American Writing Etiquette](#)



A public dance at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center. Photo courtesy of the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center

### 1D. Don't be afraid to ask questions—but do take responsibility for your own learning.

- Avoid assumptions about what Native individuals and groups want. Ask for specifics.
- If someone declines to speak with you, convey respect for that choice. But don't give up on your learning quest. Seek information and insight elsewhere.
- Many Native individuals and organizations spend extensive time and effort explaining their histories and needs to non-Native entities. This can be emotionally draining and also taxes the capacity of communities that have limited resources.
- Pay advisors and consultants for their time. Knowledge of Native history, culture and governance is a realm of specialized professional expertise. Individuals providing information and advice or should be compensated accordingly.

Some people want to paint themselves as allies, but they are still just coming to extract.

### 1E. Seek opportunities for formal training.

- Pursue structured training in tribal relations. Multiple state and federal agencies offer such programs for public employees. Online programs also are available. See the [Recommended Resources](#) section for on-demand training options.
- Prioritize trainings that are led by Indigenous individuals. Seek courses that are led by experts on tribes located in your specific region.



The Alaska Contemporary Art Bank purchased tiles by Inupiaq artist Edwin Mighell, including this "Ptarmigan" pattern. Mighell makes clay from glacial silt collected in Cook Inlet. Photo courtesy of the Alaska State Council on the Arts

## 1F. Learn about policies that affect Native arts and culture.

- The policy landscape for Native art is complex. It's useful for state arts agencies to become aware of relevant federal, state, local and tribal laws and how they are implemented or enforced.
- Learning who holds authority and power (explicit and implicit) can help a state arts agency determine how to approach consultation and demonstrate respect. Be attentive to tribal laws and traditions that may affect how certain aspects of culture are practiced, whether and how they can be shared with outsiders, how art forms are taught, and how resources are allocated or shared. These structures affect artists and also may clash with governmental grant guidelines. Learn how decisions are made—and by whom—on tribal councils and in organizations affiliated with tribes.
- Become familiar with federal laws that affect the production and authentication of Native art, such as the [Indian Arts and Crafts Act](#) (IACA) and the [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#). These policies—and violations of them—have a direct bearing on the work and livelihoods of many Native artists.
- Become familiar with [multiple laws](#) (including the [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act](#)) and [preferred practices](#) affecting the handling and repatriation of [cultural patrimony](#) and funerary objects. This is especially important for place based programs, activities on public lands and museum work.
- Historic preservation laws also affect how tribes interact with government. Become familiar with how your state consults with tribes in its implementation of [Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act](#).

On top of the complicated legal issues affecting all artists, Native artists are also constantly contending with the IACA, cultural appropriation and counterfeit art.



Dancers compete at the annual Piscataway Powwow, held in Charles County, Maryland. Photo courtesy of the Maryland State Arts Council

## Action Realm #2: Respectful and Reciprocal Relationships

### 2A. Cultivate connections.

Slow down and make space for introductions. Who are you? Where are you from? That's Indigenous knowledge. Place is important. We identify our tribes and place ties. There should be equal offerings from government people in the room.

- Learn who's who in your state's Native creative networks. What nonprofit or tribal entities are important focal points for Native culture? What contemporary Native artists and traditional culture bearers are active in your state? Where do Native artists go to secure information and resources?
- Relationships require time to develop. Prioritize and legitimize that time as part of SAA staff responsibilities.
- Remain flexible. Be willing to travel and to speak to people at times and in places that work for them, even if that means shifting your schedule to work in the evening or on a weekend.

In the past (recent as well as distant), government has enacted many policies that have injured Native individuals, families and tribes. Even if state arts agencies did not take those actions, they must still contend with their lingering effects on Native people.

Intentional relationship building can help state arts agencies shape a positive future and develop mutually respectful and rewarding relationships with Native constituents.

The [Partnering with Native Nations in a Good Way Guide](#) from the [Native Governance Center](#) provides tips for developing collaborations.



Wood bison and black-billed magpie each benefit from their relationship.  
Photo by Jennifer Powell

### 2B. Earn trust.

- Native people have experienced broken promises from government. You may need to repeatedly demonstrate credibility before you are accepted.
- Be candid about what authority or resources you possess and what you can and can't do.

Indian Country is small. We all know everyone, so how you behave matters.

- Don't presume that you know how to direct the development of relationships. Let culture bearers direct your course and follow their lead, even if the anticipated outcomes are not immediately apparent.
- Accept skepticism and don't take criticism personally.
- Be patient.

## 2C. Secure Native expertise on your team.

- "Hire Native people" and "Hire people with competencies in Native culture" were recurring action recommendations offered by many interviewees. This advice was given along with the caveat that employers must adhere to civil rights laws that preclude hiring on the basis of ethnicity.
- Key qualifications to seek or cultivate for staff leading collaborations with Native communities include:
  - knowledge of tribes and their distinctive cultural differences
  - knowledge of Native histories and governance structures
  - intercultural competency (cultural humility and fluency in navigating multiple worldviews)
  - experience communicating effectively with both Native and government groups
  - experience in structuring and implementing successful tribal consultations
  - familiarity with local and regional networks of Native organizations and individuals
  - familiarity with state and federal policies relevant to Native life and the production and sale of Native arts and crafts
  - political acumen
- In cases where hiring full-time staff is not an option, contractors with comparable competencies may be helpful.
- Support (through stipends or other means) the participation of Native individuals in professional development opportunities, leadership development cohorts, internships and other mechanisms to grow future Native leadership for the arts sector.

Tribal leaders want to talk with people who are competent and knowledgeable. Too often, state and federal staff have no clue about cultural norms, social norms and common courtesy with Native communities. Governments, with all their resources, should be able to hire people who know what the heck they are talking about in terms of policy and Native governance. That's the underlying drive to want to talk with another Native person. It's about not wanting to waste time on "cultural competency 101."

- Native representation on boards, commissions and panels is perceived as an important signal of commitment to inclusion. In regions where the Native population is small, a few individuals receive numerous requests to serve and quickly can become overtaxed. To grow a pool of people in a good position to serve:
  - Cultivate a wide network of Native contacts inside and beyond the arts sector.
  - Communicate often about the programs your agency offers, especially opportunities to access free services.
  - Use professional development programs and panel service to familiarize Native networks with your SAA.
  - If someone you have asked to serve says no, respect that answer, but ask if there are other individuals with whom you should seek to develop relationships.

## **2D. Ensure continuity of effort.**

- Learn who tribal leaders are in your state and how they are elected or appointed. Stay up to date on leadership turnover among tribal councils and Native organizations.
- Equip multiple SAA staffers with the knowledge, skills and connections to work with Native communities. Make sure that turnover in one position does not send the agency back to ground zero.



Students from Standing Rock Middle School perform at a North Dakota Council on the Arts convening. Photo courtesy of the North Dakota Council on the Arts

Is being a tribal liaison in someone's job description? Is there a tribal liaison or advisor? Are people educated about tribes? What's the protocol? Do you have current lists of tribal contacts? Without these structures in place, everything falls onto the backs of someone who cares. But people who care come and go, they don't stay in the same position forever. And when they leave, the work falls apart if there are not formal policies and practices in place.

- Be intentional about relationship handoffs when SAA staff changes occur. Facilitate formal introductions and reinforce the SAA's commitment to sustaining collaboration.
- Infuse knowledge of Native communities into all aspects of SAA work—program design, technical assistance, professional development, grant making and planning—so that efforts are not siloed.

## 2E. Cultivate relationships in three spheres: Indigenous artists/creators, Native organizations and tribal governments.

- Forge multigenerational connections. In some Native cultures, elders are opinion leaders whose support (tacit or explicit) is essential. In other settings, younger generations provide important impetus for new endeavors.
- Seek input from multiple Native communities. Do not use input from one group as a proxy for all Native peoples in a state.
- Native individuals hold a spectrum of opinions that may fall outside the official stance expressed by tribal representatives. While policy consultation is best conducted with tribal governing bodies, it also can be useful for SAAs to seek informal feedback and ideas from Native artists and intended beneficiaries in the community.
- In states where federally recognized tribes exist, state arts agencies can consider developing a tribal consultation policy, to serve as a formal guide to government-to-government relations in the arts. Related protocols can be used when state arts agencies are engaging in planning or policy development. State government has a tendency to standardize systems, but a single consultation procedure may not be appropriate in all cultural contexts. Be sure to adapt the protocol to the preferences of individual tribes.
- Develop contacts with Native organizations: tribal colleges, Native nonprofits, cultural institutions, schools/universities, alliances and networks (formal and informal, incorporated and unincorporated). In addition to being helpful sources for information, these groups may become useful programming partners. They may be able to introduce

Formal government-to-government consultations can leave out a lot of people you are trying to serve. While respecting tribal authority, state arts agencies should be open to a whole continuum of community engagement practices.

you to members of the Native community, amplify your communications, serve as intermediaries for regranting, act as knowledgeable technical assistance providers, and connect you to resources that can strengthen your outreach and programming plans.

- In states where no recognized tribes exist (or where current state politics make formal consultation unrealistic to pursue), connections with Native organizations and Native artists take on extra importance, to ensure that Native constituents are included in the work of SAAs.



Roen Hufford, a kapa (bark cloth) maker from Waimea, Hawai'i, was a 2023 National Heritage Fellow award winner. Photo by Lynn Martin Graton, courtesy of the Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts and Roen Hufford

### Action Realm #3: Access to Resources

#### 3A. Take stock of funds your agency has provided to tribes, Native-serving organizations and Native artists.

- What is the volume of grant requests from Native applicants? What is their success rate?
- Are there organizations or individuals known to be eligible who are not applying for or receiving funds? Why not?



### **3B. Provide resources to organizations and programs that Native communities themselves have created for the purpose of cultural development, including:**

- cultural programs or arts councils run by tribes
- tribal museums, libraries or archives
- cultural programs offered by urban Indian associations, arts centers or intertribal associations
- galleries, collectives or cooperatives led by Native artists
- arts programs of tribal colleges and universities
- powwows, Native arts markets and festivals

### **3C. Simplify grant application, reporting and matching requirements.**

- Navigating prequalification, application and reporting requirements takes time that may be beyond the capacity of small organizations that tend to rely on volunteer labor.
- Some Native individuals—especially those who have held tribal government roles—are highly adept at navigating federal and state government systems. However, some Native elders, independent artists and nonprofit organizations may not have this experience. These groups may face hurdles navigating a state arts agency's technology systems, vocabulary and procedures.
- Prohibiting the use of federal funds to meet matching requirements can be challenging for tribes that extensively utilize federal dollars for community development, education and language preservation programs.
- Uncertain grant outcomes and small SAA grant award sizes offer minimal incentive to work through bureaucratic barriers.

State funding is too much aggravation and bureaucracy for not enough money.

Native people have been left out of government for so long. We can't throw them into the ocean and expect them to swim in the system. Levels of government are complex, and people need facilitated experiences to navigate that. A lot of this work is about slowing down. Government is used to rattling off terms and acronyms. But when we work with Native communities, we need to make sure a baseline understanding is in place.

**3D. Center Native voices and Native assets in program planning.** This means engaging with Native individuals, organizations and tribes to learn what resources they already have, what they want and what approaches they would prefer.

- Include feedback loops with Native experts in the design of programs intended to serve Native constituencies.
- Make tribal entities eligible for support in grant guidelines.
- Consider your agency's discipline categories. Policies that force applicants to classify themselves within one discipline may not be relevant to all Native artists.
- In some Native cultures, seeking personal recognition may be seen as arrogant. Individuals from these cultures may not seek grant awards for artistic achievement.

There is a huge disconnect between the values that Native people hold and SAA structures and organizational environments. Neither government bureaucratic structures nor philanthropic grant making aligns at all with Native worldviews.

- Resource flexibility is crucial. Restrict allowable activities as little as possible. For instance, limitations on using funds for food and drink make it difficult to use state grants for many kinds of projects, since food plays important roles in rituals and community gatherings. Government restrictions on food purchases are perceived as especially ironic, given that many tribes were historically forced onto barren lands and suffered hunger and malnutrition as a result.
- How are public performance/exhibition requirements phrased? This is a complex issue for some Native communities, who may wonder if an SAA expects them to defy tribal rules around access to sacred lands or ceremonies. Use flexible definitions.
- Requirements to acknowledge state support may be difficult in states where there are legal or political conflicts occurring between tribes and the governor or state legislature.
- Include Native arts and culture experts on grant adjudication panels.
- Native communities have endured abuse from outside researchers deploying harmful methods. Learn about appropriate [research protocols](#) if conducting a formal evaluation.

### **3E. Provide technical assistance to support applications from Native artists and organizations.**

- Don't assume that Native artists, organizations or tribes know that they're eligible for grants. In states where dollars/allocations are not earmarked for tribes or Native arts, the SAA may need to develop communications or materials that help Native artists see how grant categories are relevant to them.
- Hire guides or "navigators" with the knowledge and skills to help Native applicants use state systems and prepare grant applications and documentation.

- Online tutorials and videos are great for reaching tech-savvy artists and urban groups but may be of limited utility for applicants who live in remote areas with spotty Internet service.
- Generic or prerecorded sessions may feel impersonal and may not be able to accurately predict the questions that may arise for Native artists. Customized technical assistance—developed with input from Native advisors—may be more successful.
- Apply an asset based mentality to program design and grant making. Encourage proposals from Native applicants to amplify existing community assets.

There is too much of a scarcity mindset attached to funding Native projects. How can we change that? Tribes have been taught to write for need. Too few of us are writing about positive stories, about our assets or capacity. Too few are writing about our passion for the projects. Amazing assets are present, but grant applications are not telling me about that. Applications emphasize a lack of resources and lack of expertise. It's "poverty porn." I don't want to hear it anymore. If we write about scarcity, all we will see is scarcity. But if we take stock of what's working, then we will see more possibilities.

**3F. Think outside the direct grant-making box.** Seek other ways to be of service to Native constituencies.

- Is there a role that Native intermediary organizations can play as service providers or regranters? Can the state arts agency invest in their capacity or amplify their work?
- Could SAAs collaborate with Native Community Development Financial Institutions to support Native-owned creative entrepreneurs?
- Are Native artists prominent in the agency's teaching artist or performing artist rosters?
- Have Native works of art been purchased for the state art collection?
- Could the state arts agency curate [exhibitions](#) of native artists' work?
- Could the state arts agency support arts markets, [pop-up shops](#) or other income opportunities for Native artists?



Artist and story collector Rohsennase Dalton LaBarge, M.D., Akwesasne Kanienkehaka, Bear Clan, creates contemporary Kaión:ni (wampum belts) as tools for collective reflection and action. Photo courtesy of the New York State Council on the Arts

## Action Realm #4: Communications

### 4A. Highlight Native contributions to the state's arts and culture.

- Use the SAA's communications assets to elevate the importance of Native arts and culture year-round.
- With their advice and consent, include Native destinations and activities in tourism materials, event calendars, etc.

We are Native any time of year! Don't just book us for Native Heritage Month.

### 4B. Establish regular communications.

- Build a mailing list of Native organizations, Native artists and tribal liaisons. Make sure those individuals hear relevant news from the SAA on a regular basis.

- Designate a staff member to receive inquiries about Native arts services. Make that function obvious on the SAA website, to provide a clear and welcoming point of entry for Native constituents approaching the agency for the first time.
- If your state has an Indian Affairs Commission or intertribal association, ask if there is an appropriate opportunity to meet tribal leaders and brief them on resources available from the SAA.

Tribes need to understand the money and the structure and who makes what decisions, so that they can advocate effectively and not feel like they are getting the runaround when they contact someone [in government] who can't help them. Basic knowledge needs to be established from the outset.

#### 4C. Be transparent about your agency's actions.

- Set specific action goals related to communications, professional development, consultations, policy changes, etc. Report on progress made toward those goals.
- Report (through both data and stories) on SAA investments in Native arts.
- Report on Native representation on SAA boards, panels and staff.
- Seek regular feedback from Native constituents to inform continual improvement.



*Roaming* was created by artist Wade Patton of Rapid City, South Dakota and was purchased for the South Dakota State Art Collection in 2021. Patton is enrolled in the Oglala Lakota tribe. Photo courtesy of the South Dakota Arts Council

## Program Profiles

State arts agencies (and other state government departments) have developed a wide array of strategies for connecting with and supporting Native communities. Links to some brief examples are offered below. There is no single recipe to follow or formula for success. Each situation is unique, and represents a confluence of different cultural, geographic and capacity factors. For this reason, NASAA does not recommend simple replication of any approaches profiled here. Instead, we offer these stories to illustrate the myriad ways in which programs and partnerships can be attuned to different settings through thoughtful listening and engagement.

### *Alaska*

#### **Native Arts and Culture Programs**

The Alaska State Council on the Arts offers an array of services to support Alaska Native artists, including a Native art authentication system, artist training and partnerships to promote culturally responsive education. Unique policies affect how the agency engages with Native communities.

[Learn more](#)



### *Arizona*

#### **Tribal Consultation Policy**

The Arizona Commission on the Arts enacted a formal tribal consultation policy to guide its services to federally recognized tribes. The agency has used the policy as a catalyst to repair, rebuild and renew connections with tribes and Native arts practitioners statewide.

[Learn more](#)



### *Hawai'i*

#### **Supporting Native Hawaiians in Public Art**

The Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts took a series of steps to increase the visibility and acquisition of works by Native Hawaiians through its extensive Art in Public Places program.

[Learn more](#)



### *Kansas*

#### **Indigenous Arts Initiative**

The Kansas Arts Commission serves as a convener and sponsor of mentor based workshops that help emerging Native artists to connect with established Native artists as teachers and mentors.

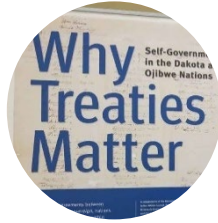
[Learn more](#)



**Minnesota****Tribal-State Relations Training Program**

The Minnesota Department of Transportation offers a nationally recognized tribal relations training program. The curriculum is designed and delivered in partnership with the state's 11 federally recognized tribes. It covers Native sovereignty, history and culture as well as key court cases, policy decisions that affect tribal life and culturally responsive strategies for resolving differences.

[Learn more](#)

**New Mexico****Bosque Redondo Memorial**

The state of New Mexico adopted an extensive process of community collaboration to come to terms with the scorched-earth policies used to forcibly remove the Diné and Ndé people from their homelands. Elders, tribal leaders and tribal historians joined with site managers and interpretive designers to develop a memorial that became a significant place of education, reckoning and healing.

[Learn more](#)

**North Dakota****Indigenous Artist Growth & Development Fellowship**

The Sacred Pipe Resource Center—an intertribal community engagement group—and the North Dakota Council on the Arts collaborate on a fellowship program to support Native artists. The initiative provides flexible funding to foster creative experimentation, networking support and customized technical assistance over an 18-month period.

[Learn more](#)

**Northern Mariana Islands****Flame Tree Arts Festival**

Led by the Commonwealth Council for Arts and Culture, the Flame Tree Arts Festival is the longest running festival in the western Pacific. The event is designed to preserve CHamoru and Carolinian heritage and engage youth in community based cultural traditions. The festival also serves as a prominent arts market and networking opportunity that generates income for Indigenous artists.

[Learn More](#)



**Oklahoma**  
**Strategic Planning  
 and Native Cultural  
 Practitioners and  
 Artists Survey**



Listening sessions, a field scan and convenings are helping the Oklahoma Arts Council to ensure that its services and funding address the needs of Native artists. The agency also employs collaborative strategies to honor the state's Native cultures through all of its programs, from rosters and grants to professional development, public art and activities that promote the arts in Oklahoma.

[Learn more](#)

**Utah**  
**Native American  
 Curriculum Initiative**



The Utah Division of Arts & Museums is part of a long-term partnership with tribes and Brigham Young University to improve education about the living history of Utah's Native peoples. Curriculum designers work with tribal representatives, Native educators and cultural specialists. The initiative has produced 33 tribally approved lesson plans, multimedia resources and a Native teaching artist roster.

[Learn more](#)

**Washington**  
**Tribal Cultural Affairs  
 Program**



Through a designated legislative appropriation, ArtsWA is building a Tribal Cultural Affairs program to expand creative economic opportunities for tribal communities and Indigenous artists. Grant funds are available to support cultural participation and creative economic development projects led by the state's 29 federally recognized tribes.

[Learn more](#)

**Wisconsin**  
**Woodland Indian Arts**



The Wisconsin Arts Board implements a state statute that guarantees grant funds directly for Native artists and communities. The funds originate from the state's gaming compacts with 11 federally recognized tribal nations. Tribal entities and nonprofits providing direct services to the Native community may apply for funding in writing or via video submission.

[Learn more](#)



## State Arts Agency Innovations

### More Examples

Over time, as further information about state arts agency collaborations with Native communities emerges, NASAA will add new examples to our [State Arts Agency Innovations](#) catalog—a continually growing collection of state arts agency policies and programs. If you have a Native arts or tribal relations example to contribute, please [let NASAA know](#).

Explore [more Native arts program profiles](#).



Northern Arapaho artist Colleen Friday experiments with mixed media including beadwork, rawhide, photography, canvas and wood. She also is interested in land use, maps and geographic imagery. Photo courtesy of the Wyoming Arts Council

## Recommended Resources

As NASAA was conducting interviews and collaborating with our Circle of Advisors, we engaged in a rigorous practice of self-education. Our goals were to:

- assume responsibility for some of our own learning, rather than placing the entire burden on our Native advisors and colleagues;
- educate ourselves about fundamentals to help us better understand feedback from our Circle of Advisors and interviewees; and
- improve our knowledge about Indigenous issues to benefit all of NASAA's programmatic work.

Offered below is a harvest of some of the resources that we reviewed, curated for relevance to SAAs that have limited experience in working with Native communities. To center Native perspectives in this learning, a majority of the resources NASAA recommends were prepared by Indigenous authors.



Janie Luster, a master palmetto basket weaver and cultural preservationist of the United Houma Nation, participates in the [Bayou Culture Collaborative](#). Photo courtesy Louisiana Division of the Arts

## Tribes and Native History

### [Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction](#)

Developed by the [National Congress of American Indians](#), this guide offers introductory information about tribal governments and American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian people. The guide helps local, state and federal policymakers understand their relationship to tribal governments as part of the American family of governments.

### [History through a Native Lens](#)

This time line of historically traumatic events was authored by Karina L. Walters, Ph.D., Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Indigenous Wellness Research Institute, University of Washington, with assistance from Danica Brown, Ph.D., Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. It offers a chronology of historically significant events, government policies and Native resistance movements.

### [Culture Card: A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness](#)

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is the federal agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to improve the lives of individuals living with mental and substance use disorders. SAMHSA runs a number of funding, technical assistance and training initiatives focused on Native American communities. The agency also runs a [Tribal Training and Technical Assistance Center](#) that leads culturally responsive [suicide](#) and [substance abuse](#) prevention programs as well as [informed care](#). SAMHSA's Culture Card is an introductory tool developed to offer practical tips for mental and behavioral health practitioners and program administrators.

### [Native Knowledge 360° Essential Understandings](#)

The National Museum of the American Indian's [Native Knowledge 360° initiative](#) equips educators with key concepts about the diverse cultures, histories and contemporary lives of Native peoples. A [video series](#) accompanies the web resources. This professional development curriculum challenges common assumptions about Native peoples and addresses a variety of topics, including tribal sovereignty, food traditions, environmental stewardship, Indigenous artists and more.

### [Video Shorts](#)

The [Native Governance Center](#) produced this series of brief "explainer" reels in collaboration with Indigenous designers and voice actors.

[What Is Tribal Sovereignty?](#)

[What Do Tribal Governments Do?](#)

[Why Do Treaties Matter?](#)

[Language Matters: How to Talk about Native Nations](#)  
[What Is Blood Quantum?](#)  
[Beyond Land Acknowledgement](#)  
[Appreciating Not Appropriating Indigenous Culture](#)

## Native Arts & Culture

### **[Native Arts and Culture: Resilience, Reclamation and Relevance](#)**

Native Arts & Culture: Resilience, Reclamation and Relevance was a first-of-its-kind national summit hosted in 2020 by the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Native Arts & Cultures Foundation. It convened discussion around many issues affecting Native creatives, such as the role of arts and culture in Native community vitality, the role of Indigenous artists in leading social change, and reimagining Native visibility and identity in urban areas. Members from more than 40 tribal nations participated in the convening. The NEA maintains [additional resources on Native arts and culture](#) as well as the [Federal Resources for Native Arts & Cultural Activities](#) guide.

### **[Brightening the Spotlight](#)**

Produced by [First Peoples Fund](#) in partnership with researchers from the University of Chicago, Brightening the Spotlight shares key findings and lessons from extensive interviews with a diverse set of Native performing artists. It is based on interviews with 46 Native creators and experts across a variety of creative art forms, geographic locations, tribal affiliations and years of experience.

### **[Establishing a Creative Economy: Art as an Economic Engine in Native Communities](#)**

Another First Peoples Fund study, Establishing a Creative Economy mines market data from Washington, Oregon, Montana and South Dakota to make the case for Native arts as a strong economic force in Indian Country.

### **[Sustaining and Advancing Indigenous Cultures: Developing an Action Plan](#)**

The [Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums](#) (ATALM) is undertaking a long-term effort to develop a unified framework for strengthening Indigenous cultural institutions. Research on the needs of Native artists, arts centers, libraries, museums and archives is being rolled out in phases. ATALM also offers a [Native Craft Artists Resource Library](#), a toolkit for [Planning and Constructing Native Cultural Facilities](#), and guidelines for the creation of [Native Arts and Culture Councils](#).

## [Native American Creative Placemaking](#)

Published by the Housing Assistance Council, this monograph describes place based Native American community development efforts, noting their power to foster equity, preserve Native culture and promote economic independence.

## [Indian Arts Research Center](#)

The Indian Arts Research Center (IARC) is a division of the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The goal of IARC is to bridge the divide between creativity and scholarship in Native American studies, art history and creative expression. The center has published [Guidelines for Collaboration](#) between Native communities and museums as well as a set of [Standards for Museums with Native American Collections](#).

## Training Programs

See if your state office of tribal affairs or your state university offers training grounded in the specific tribal cultures of your region. If not, these online courses provide a place to begin.

## [Building Relationships with Native Nations: Native Know-How](#)

Hosted by the University of Arizona and the [Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy](#), this training session, recorded from a live event, is facilitated by Joan Timeche, the executive director of the [Native Nations Institute](#).

## [Working with Tribal Nations](#)

The [National Indian Health Board](#) offers this free interactive e-course to build the capacity of state and federal government officials and other non-Native stakeholders to work more collaboratively with American Indian and Alaska Native tribes.

## [Welcome to Indian Country 101](#)

This tribal engagement training series, developed by The Whitener Group (a Native-owned consulting firm) and The Nature Conservancy, lays out the history and context for tribal engagement efforts across the country. Supplementary materials include an extensive glossary and practical pointers on dos and don'ts for tribal consultations.

## Government Perspectives

## [Tribal Communities and State and Local Governments](#)

This memorandum, from the Virginia Coastal Policy Center, outlines the various types of policy relationships that can exist between tribes, states and localities.

## [Harvard Project on Indigenous Governance and Development](#)

Located within the Kennedy School of Government, the Harvard Project on Indigenous Governance and Development is a center for scholarship on sovereign governance practices. The center conducts extensive [research and case studies](#) on the intersections between state and county/municipal government and tribal governments. It also provides national recognition for innovative tribal governance practices.

## [Government to Government: Models of Cooperation between States and Tribes](#)

In this 2009 report, the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#) (NCSL) examines examples of state-tribal cooperation on a broad range of issues. It highlights some strategies that tribes and states have used to form government-to-government relationships based on communication and respect. NCSL also [tracks legislation](#) relevant to tribes and has compiled a [directory of state legislative committees](#) dedicated to Indian affairs.

## **State Guidebooks**

Various states have published guidelines for state agency consultation with tribal governments. While specific statutes and cultural references will be unique in each, these guides may provide useful process ideas for state arts agencies seeking to initiate their own government-to-government relationships with tribes.

- [State-Tribal Consultation Guide: An Introduction for Colorado State Agencies to Conducting Formal Consultations with Federally Recognized American Indian Tribes](#)
- [Montana Tribal Relations Handbook: A Guide for State Employees on Preserving the State-Tribal Relationship](#)
- [What Makes State-Tribal Consultation Meaningful?](#) (Minnesota)
- [A Toolkit for Tribal Consultation](#) (Oregon Department of Education)
- [Cultural Humility: Basics for Working with California Native Americans](#)

Also see [NASAA's profile](#) of the [tribal consultation policy](#) adopted by the Arizona Commission on the Arts.

## **Grant-making Perspectives**

### [Investing in Native Communities: A Joint Project of Native Americans in Philanthropy and Candid](#)

This resource hub contains information on Native history and advice on tailoring grant-making strategies to the distinctive assets and needs of Native communities. The partnership between Native Americans in Philanthropy and Candid also produced [Investing in Native Communities: Philanthropic Funding for Native American Communities and Causes](#).

### [Tribal Nations Listening Session Report](#)

This report summarizes insights gleaned from tribal leaders, tribal government officers, Native nonprofits, Indigenous advocates and community elders. It explores the funding priorities of tribal nations and Native communities and offers a roadmap for philanthropic partnerships and investments. It was prepared by [Native Americans in Philanthropy](#), which offers an array of other tools for [collaborating with Native communities](#).

### [We Need to Change How We Think: Perspectives on Philanthropy's Underfunding of Native Communities and Causes](#)

Commissioned by the [First Nations Development Institute](#), this monograph explores funding barriers experienced by Native groups and foundations seeking to support them.



*Within His Storms*, by Diné artist Gilmore Scott. Scott's work was featured at the *Quiet Storm* exhibition at the Chase Home Museum in Utah. Image courtesy of the Utah Division of Arts & Museums

## Acknowledgments

NASAA thanks the numerous individuals who contributed expertise to this project. These people generously shared their knowledge, professional perspectives and life stories. All spoke from their own experiences. They were not asked to represent their tribal nations or their employers.

### Circle of Advisors 2023-2024

Alice Bioff, Inupiaq | Native Village of Koyuk (Alaska), Circle of Advisors Cochair  
Sean Falcon Chandler, Aaniiih (Montana), Circle of Advisors Cochair  
Tahnee Ahtone, Kiowa | Mvskoki | Seminole (Missouri)  
Mary Bordeaux, Sicangu Oglala Lakota (South Dakota/New Mexico)  
Anna Needham, Red Lake Ojibwe (Arizona)  
Gerard Rodriguez, Yaqui | Nahuatl (Oregon)  
endawnis Spears, Diné | Ojibwe | Chickasaw | Choctaw (Rhode Island)  
Jarica Walsh, Osage (Oklahoma)

### Interviewees

As of May 2024, NASAA completed interviews with more than 70 individuals. We are deeply grateful for their candor, time and wisdom. Because NASAA is committed to ongoing learning, this is a [dynamic list](#). It will continue to grow over time.

### Cover Art

*Oaksprings Sheepcamp*, by late Navajo-Oneida artist Conrad House, captures the artist's childhood memory of tending sheep on a mountainside in Arizona. It celebrates nature's beauty as well as our interdependence and connection with all life forms. Located at Ilalko Elementary School, Auburn, Washington, it is part of Washington's State Art Collection. Photo courtesy of ArtsWA

### Land Acknowledgment

It has become common practice for the arts sector to use acknowledgments that convey respect for Native people and honor the original residents of the lands that we occupy. Given centuries of dispossession, this is a complex issue. Some tribes and Indigenous individuals welcome acknowledgments, to raise awareness about the presence of Native peoples. Others experience acknowledgments as performative or "conscience clearing," highlighting disparities in how Native people are treated. Furthermore, because Indigenous history has been shaped by many forms of forced removal and migration (contemporary and historic), there is rarely one story to tell about any given place. NASAA acknowledges this complexity as we salute the Nacotchtank and Piscataway peoples—the first residents and stewards of the lands and waterways that would eventually become the District of Columbia, where NASAA is headquartered.



## About NASAA

The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. In collaboration with the nation's 56 state and jurisdictional arts councils, we advance the arts as a powerful path to economic prosperity, rural resilience, good health, education success and strong communities in which everyone thrives. NASAA serves as a clearinghouse for data and research about public funding for the arts as well as the policies and programs of state arts agencies. For more information about NASAA and the work of state arts agencies, visit [www.nasaa-arts.org](http://www.nasaa-arts.org).

NASAA Chief Program and Planning Officer Kelly Barsdate prepared this report in 2024, under the guidance of the Circle of Advisors and with significant contributions from Research Associate Declan Wicks.

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