



Tribal Relations Training: Key Concepts

Wednesday, August 6, 2025

Akomawt Educational Initiative

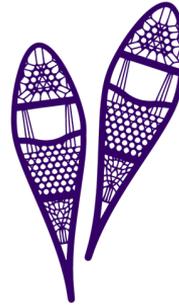
Chris Newell (Passamaquoddy), Director,
Native American Cultural Programs,
University of Connecticut

endawnis Spears (Diné/ Ojibwe/
Choctaw/ Chickasaw), Practitioner in
Residence for Tribal Engagement, Brown
University

Dr. Jason Mancini, Executive Director,

Akomawt is the Passamaquoddy word for “snowshoe path”, the symbol driving our mission. The snowshoe path forges ahead leaving behind a trail others can follow. As the path is used, it becomes easier to traverse. Akomawt Educational Initiative is dedicated to furthering knowledge of Native America through innovative learning approaches designed to impact how we teach history and contemporary social issues. Our goal is to leave this world better than when we found it; our tool is education. Collaborating with educators in schools, institutions of higher learning, and public history sites, we will help generate new learning paths that create awareness and informed dialogue about American Indian history, contemporary Native lifeways and Indigenous futures.

Our vision is to effect a lasting positive and informed change to the dominant narrative of how Native histories and cultures are taught in America. Through our work we hope to foster greater understanding of Indigenous North America with an emphasis on social change. Our educational resources will cultivate better, more complete understandings of the history and contemporary issues of Native American peoples. Akomawt, the snowshoe path, changes and renews with the seasons just as we work to bring change and renewal to the way we educate our world about Native America. You can find us by the tracks we leave behind.



Akomawt
Educational Initiative

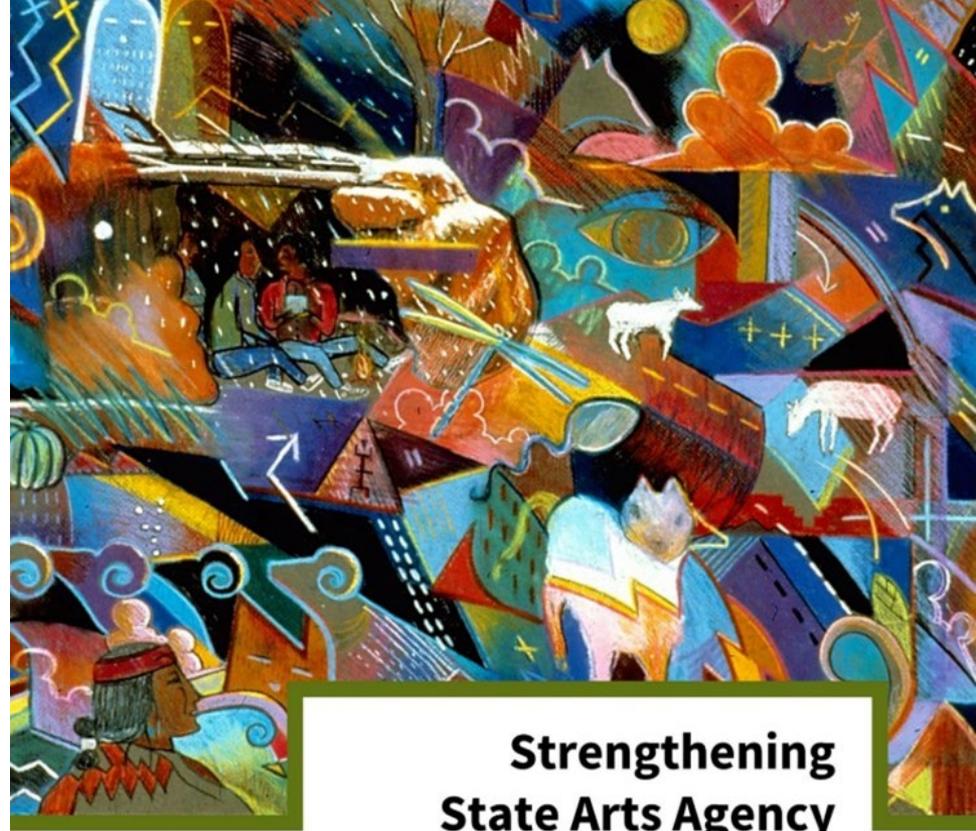
Tribal Relations Training Sessions

Circle of Advisors 2023-2024
8 Advisors; meeting for facilitated conversations to lend insight and guidance.

Interviewees
As of May 2024, NASAA completed interviews with more than 70 individuals.

Methods
Intentional regional representation
Convening numerous and diverse voices
Compensation and acknowledgment of time and expertise
Following cultural norms and protocols in facilitated spaces
More on p.3 of report

Oaksprings Sheepcamp, Conrad Housen (Navajo/Oneida)



**Strengthening
State Arts Agency
Relationships with
Native Communities**

Terminology for Native Peoples

- Native American: Catch all term for the descendants of the original inhabitants of what is now called the United States, can include federally recognized tribal nations and non federally recognized groups. Term most commonly used in the United States.
- Native People(s), Indigenous People(s): Terms in English that are not tied to the concept of the United States.
- American Indian/Indian: Term for the inhabitants of Turtle Island by colonists. Also, the terminology used in the writing of the Constitution. Federal laws about and for the 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States is known as Federal Indian Law. Legal terminology of Native peoples as one large group in use to this day.

These are all generalized terms. Whenever possible identify tribes by their own name

Other Common Terminology

- Tribe: Anthropology term for a culturally distinct society.
- Nation: Term forced on tribes through the Indian Reorganization Act (1934). Gaining popularity after the AIM era in the 1970s amongst Native governments as they reassert sovereignty and self-sufficiency.
- Tribal Nation: Sometimes used by tribal governments as a way to include both.
- Community: social term for all Native People and their families) within an immediate geographic area.

Which Generalized Term is the Right One?

None of them. They are all equally wrong. But when discussing issues of policy, law, social governance they are necessary. The popular terminology in the younger demographic “Native” or “Indigenous” and in the older demographic the use of “Indian” or “American Indian” is still common.

When speaking about a specific tribe or region, use the names of the tribes you are speaking about. Another step further is to learn how to say those names in their own languages.

A close-up photograph of a mosaic artwork. The mosaic is composed of small, rectangular tiles. A prominent feature is a large, curved arch made of white and light beige tiles, resembling a rainbow. The rest of the mosaic is made of dark purple and black tiles with a marbled or wavy pattern. The tiles are arranged in a dense, overlapping pattern.

**Recognizing and articulating the
importance and influence of:**

History

Power

Relationships

Understand How State Governments May Be Perceived

- Tribes are sovereign nations with the legal right to govern themselves.
- Government has harmed Native people, and those traumas continue to reverberate.
- Efforts to cultivate trust and establish new relationships can be very fruitful.
- Formal tribal consultation policies, such as those required for federal agencies, can be a mixed bag.



Rohsennase Dalton LaBarge, M.D. (Akwesasne Kanienkehaka, Bear Clan)
Photo courtesy of New York State Council on the Arts

Understand How State Governments May Be Perceived

- Perfunctory consultation diminishes trust.
- Informal connections can be very meaningful.
- Bureaucracy and red tape can impede the development of meaningful relationships.
 - “Key Learnings”: Successful tribal relations work requires a substantial commitment of time and considerable adaptation.



Understand How State Governments May Be Perceived

- State government does not hold a monopoly on bureaucracy.
- Government agencies and tribes may experience disconnects around how long things take.
- Don't presume that all Native artists, organizations or tribes desire state assistance.

Thank You

Resources:

Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction, NCAI

Video Shorts, Native Governance Center

Consider reviewing tribally sourced materials/official website for federally and state recognized tribes in your state.

Session 2:

Honoring the Complexity of Native Cultures and Identities, Wednesday, August 13, 2025, 2-3:30PM EST

Post Session Recordings:

Forthcoming