



Tribal Relations Training: Key Learning: Honoring the Complexity of Native Cultures and Identities

Wednesday, August 13, 2025

Akomawt Educational Initiative

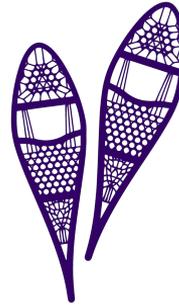
Chris Newell (Passamaquoddy), Director,
Native American Cultural Programs,
University of Connecticut

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

Dr. Jason Mancini, Executive Director,
Connecticut Humanities

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.



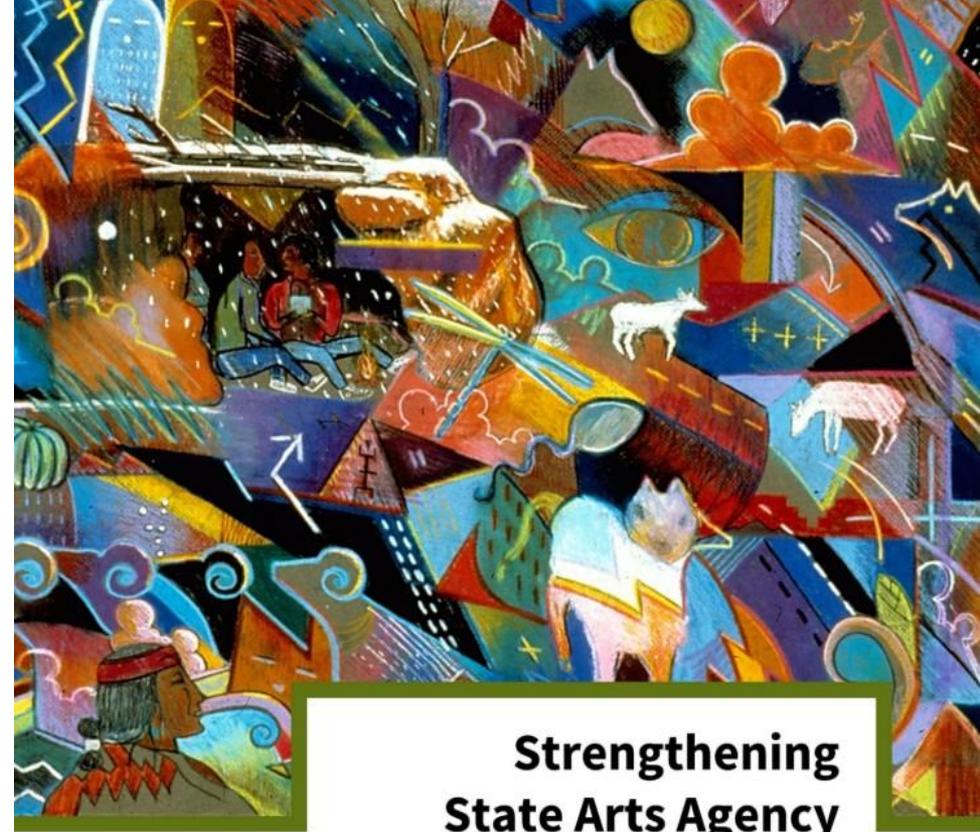
Akomawt

Educational Initiative

Tribal Relations Training Sessions

Session 1 Review:

- Terminology
 - History/Power/Relationships
 - Understanding how state governments may be perceived:
 - Tribes are sovereign nations with the legal right to govern themselves.
 - 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.
- Government agencies and tribes may experience disconnects around how long things take.
- Allow the initial steps of showing up and listening to influence structural power inequality.



Strengthening State Arts Agency Relationships with Native Communities

Oaksprings Sheepcamp, Conrad
Housen (Navajo/Oneida)

Honoring the Complexity of Native Cultures and Identities

- Encountering stereotypes and monolithic thinking (assumptions that all Native cultures are the same).
 - Not all Native individuals live in rural communities or on reservations.
 - 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.
- Importance of learning and unlearning.

Honoring the Complexity of Native Cultures and Identities

- The frameworks of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and Black, Indigenous and/or people of color (BIPOC) were rejected by multiple Native interviewees.
- Work with tribes is not about singling out one ethnic group.



Mixed media on deerskin by Colleen Friday (Northern Arapaho),
Photo courtesy of Wyoming Arts Council



Honoring the Complexity of Native Cultures and Identities

- Political differences are present within all communities.
- In many Native cultures, concepts of art, health, work, education and spirituality are deeply interconnected.
- Understanding how Native/ Indigenous art does not always fit in western conceptualizations/ categories.



Groundwork for next session about practicing fraud prevention:

How citizenship is constructed

Descendancy & blood quantum

Tribal citizenship is not about race- however, race is a factor in the lived experience of Indigenous peoples and tribal citizens

Traditional governance vs. “playing the game of nationhood”, roles and rites of women and 2S people

Thank You

Resources: (Training Programs)

Building Relationships with Native Nations: Native Know-How (Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy)

Working with Tribal Nations (National Indian Health Board)

Welcome to Indian Country 101 (The Whitener Group)

Session 3:

Key Learnings: Practice Fraud Prevention and Additional Insights, Friday, September 19, 2025, 2-3:30PM EST

Session 4:

Action Recommendations: Education, Respectful and Reciprocal Relationships, Access to Resources, Communications, Friday, October 10, 2025, 1-2:30PM EST

Post Session Recordings:

Forthcoming