Working with Tribal Entities: Lessons Learned

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Proximity of American Indian Reservations to NIEHS Centers
Unique Role of Tribes

- Tribal Sovereignty
  - They expect collaboration with federal agencies to be respectful
  - Must have larger community buy in before work commences
- Under Funded
  - Interested in pragmatic research that will lead to improvements in health services

American Indian struggle

- More than for physical survival
  - land has been appropriated
- For intellectual and cultural survival
  - to keep mind and soul together
- We must be in the project for the long haul
- We must be fulfill our promises
- Figure out sustainability up front
Tribes now insist that research findings benefit Native people

• Past problems
  – Non-inclusive research
  – Abuse of the “Peoples” good will & humility

• Shadow of each period’s policies remain long after the period has passed

Native Ways of Knowing Science

• Culturally Appropriate Research
  – Acknowledges that traditional cultures embody knowledge that can be valued by scientists of all cultures

• Bi-directional learning
  – Resist the temptation to always be the “experts”
  – Ask partners about their understanding of science and the environment
    • Which most likely will be stories
Suggestions to Researchers

1. Fund a Native Research Committee appointed by the local community to assess and monitor the research project
2. Hire and train Native people to assist in the study
3. Include Native viewpoints in the final study design
4. Give credit to Native resource people
5. Report the major findings of the study to the Native Research Committee in a non-technical summary.

Resources

Principles Discussed

• Give First
  – Sovereignty
  – Poverty
  – Social Injustice
• Internal Review
  – Especially Important
    • Respect
    • Patience
• Bi-Directional Learning
  – Seek first to understand
  – Then to be understood

• Recognition
  – Win / Win
    • Publications
    • Grants
  – Acknowledge in ways that are culturally significant
• Students
  – Assign Your Best
  – Educate Their Best