

TRIBAL RESEARCH

WHAT IS TRIBAL RESEARCH?

Researchers will find that working within a tribal community for the first time is a very unique and intricate experience. This is because the scientific rigor includes the adaption or application of methods that are culturally meaningful. Hence, an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the cultural and political dynamics of a particular tribe is needed. Without this, a researcher can inadvertently impose mainstream beliefs or behavior upon the Native American participants/communities. There by damaging the trusting relationship between the tribe and the scientific research community, as well as invalidating the projects scientific discoveries.

The development of meaningful methodologies for a Native American community should never be a pan-Indian design or a checklist approach of cultural adaptations. The process of developing community-based and culturally relevant research should directly include the tribe from the studies inception and supports a tribal agenda (plus whenever possible include local Native American investigators). Indeed, one of the tribe's greatest resources is its extensive and vast "tribal knowledge".

HOW IS TRIBAL RESEARCH CONDUCTED?

Each tribe is their own sovereign nations - with their own unique governments, traditional practices and culture; therefore, a set practice for working within American Indian communities is not possible. However, below are some general ideas for researchers that are new to tribal research.

1. Developing meaningful and ethical research with Native communities requires that investigators commit to a sustained process of relationship building, cross-cultural learning and respect, and reciprocity.
2. Learn the historical context of research in Native communities and the role of research in the specific tribe before beginning any research endeavors. Each tribe's views on research and the structure of their research regulation processes is different.
3. Remember, a tribal governments is sovereign and has legal authority to regulate and control all activities conducted on their lands or towards their citizens, which includes research.

TRIBAL RESEARCH

4. Always avoid taking a pan-Indian approach. Remember, working with one tribe is not (and will not be) the same as working with another.

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT TRIBAL RESEARCH IN THE CHEROKEE NATION

- The tribe will only support community engaged research practices, which requires a high level of collaboration with Cherokee Nation (integrating the ideas of the tribal into the study) and must address Cherokee needs to benefit the citizens. The Cherokee Nation encourages researchers to creating a Community Advisory Board (CAB) for their project.
- The Cherokee Nation is a large tribe with a diverse population consisting of both urban and rural citizens. It is strongly recommended that you visit the location(s) where your research will take place; and that you understand the distinct practices, organization, and policies of the specific department(s) you will be working with before you consider developing any research activities.
- The tribe will only support research that had benefits to its people or communities. Please make sure that your research aligns with the agendas of the tribe or contributes to an under-researched need for its people.
- If you have never collaborated with the Cherokee Nation before on a research study it is recommended that you review all the IRB requirements and the Frequently Asked Questions before you submit your research. A tribal IRB is quite different in its review process from an academic institution.
- The Cherokee Nation will require you to have a tribal sponsor who will support your scientific activities before you can conduct any research. Please see guidance on “Tribal Sponsor” for more details.
- Please make sure that you understand that the tribe will have data ownership over any data collected; therefore, if there is a need for any contracts or agreements with the tribe, make sure they are in place before you finalize your research plan.