

*Twenty Things You Can Do To Help Environmental  
Stakeholder Groups Talk More Effectively About Science,  
Culture, Professional Knowledge, and Community Wisdom*

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# BUILDING TRUST

## When Knowledge From “Here” Meets Knowledge From “Away”

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“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

— Albert Einstein

“Culture is the way we do things...around here.”

— Steve Haberfeld

“Science is a way of not fooling yourself.”

— Richard Feynema



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## I. HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Across the United States, hundreds of community leaders, business professionals, and government representatives are sitting down around the table with each other to discuss potentially far reaching solutions to persistently stubborn natural resource, energy, and public health issues. Driven by the high costs of litigation and the need to find smarter, fairer, and more durable outcomes, consensus-seeking and collaborative problem solving are now accepted and complementary approaches to formal environmental decision-making. Unfortunately, many of the stakeholder processes now getting under way will fail for the wrong reasons.

This pamphlet is about the art and craft of consensus-building. Some people call it “dialogue by design.” Others call it “constructive information exchange” or “mutual gains problem solving.” Regardless of how it is framed, many stakeholder groups flounder and collapse because participants could not sustain a disciplined conversation that uses both heart and mind to work out differences of opinion. We hope this small publication helps change that.

Our focus is on building better bridges between scientists and native peoples, government officials and ranchers, and planners and community leaders. We believe that environmental stakeholder groups can have more meaningful, eloquent, and productive discussions. Even more pointedly, we assert that well organized discussions held between people of integrity and good will and inclusive of high quality technical and cultural information sets the stage for good solutions.

One specific use of the publication is as a design tool. We encourage agency heads, community leaders, advocates and other conveners and moderators to read this document and use it to help decide who should participate, the kinds of information that need to be brought to the table, and how to structure conversations productively.

A second use for this document is as a preparation tool. We hope organizers of collaborative groups will make the document available to all participants before meetings actually begin. It can help anticipate and avoid some of the traps that environmental problem solving groups typically fall into.

Finally, this publication can be useful after people have been brought together but at the first sign that participants may not be talking effectively across professional or cultural barriers. This document can be a course correcting device that allows conversations to get on track.



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## II. SNAPSHOTS FROM THE STATES

**Wyoming.** Members of the Shoshone tribe are negotiating for stewardship rights in a national forest. Their starting point of reference is the historical obligation they feel to take care of the forest. Federal representatives explain their views in terms of “acres” and “management areas.” The tribe does not want to talk about numbers. When pushed, they say they want hundreds of thousands of acres. The Feds offer 40. The talks break down.

**Maine.** State and federal agencies initiate a conservation measure to protect small vernal pools. Local environmental groups applaud the proposed measures and lobby for it. Local property owners oppose it and insist it will hurt their development rights and family businesses. Environmental scientists talk in terms of national ecological protection for wetlands. Property owners talk about their local communities.

**Island of Hawaii.** A consortium of science institutions led by an outstanding group of astronomers proposes to add several new telescopes to a complex of observatories on the summit of Mauna Kea. The summit is one of the best viewing spots in the world. Native Hawaiians oppose any more facilities. They argue that the mountain is sacred – the navel of the world – and the structures are offensive. A Japanese astronomer is unsympathetic until a Hawaiian asks him how he would feel if telescopes were placed on top of Mt. Fuji.

**New Mexico.** Under pressure from environmentalists, officials propose to withdraw long term grazing leases because of environmental damage from cattle ranching. The ranching community strenuously objects and, in a series of angry meetings with state officials and environmental organizations, argues that their “way of life” is at stake. Over time, a series of well-designed public meetings and smaller working groups allow for a dialogue process which, for the first time, brings environmental advocates and ranchers into a productive dialogue.

**Washington State.** Officials from the US Forest Service are worried about forest gathering practices of new immigrant groups from Southeast Asia. In particular, they are concerned about mushroom gathering practices at the foot trees which may disrupt natural forest cycles. Their initial attempt to talk with Hmong, Vietnamese, and Cambodian mushroom gatherers fails because USFS has brought the Immigration and Naturalization Service to help gather information on the actual practice of repeated raking under trees. After a series of angry exchanges and miscommunications, the situation improves when the Southeast Asian communities are asked for their advice and native speakers and cultural interpreters are brought in.

**California.** A large, long term State/Federal initiative aimed at protecting the remaining waterways of the San Francisco delta region begins. The effort requires the participation of environmental advocates, water districts, state, county and federal agency representatives, and various private water users. Similar attempts at comprehensive landscape-level planning discussions have not succeeded. In this new round, a Native American project director is hired to steer the collaborative project. Part of the outreach effort is aimed at creating new cross-cultural dialogues with communities, fishermen, farmers, and neighborhood representatives. As a result of hearing from these diverse groups, the focus shifts to achieving mutually advantageous outcomes that can be tracked through ongoing indicators.



### III. WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

All of us are challenged to make meaning out of the vast amount of sensory data that we encounter each day. Growing up, we learn what to pay attention to, what to ignore, what to react to, and what to file away for future reference. We learn who is similar to us and who is different, who is threatening, and who is friendly. We do this by developing frameworks, patterns of thinking, and distinct “ways of knowing.”

Because they are intimately tied to culture, many aspects of how we “know” the truth of things are invisible to us. Metaphorically, they are the sea we swim in and the air we breathe. Behaviorally, they are the unwritten categories we use to sort data and construct coherent models of the world. Corporations, communities, and professions have these models, as do countries, tribes, and ethnic groups. We are accepted as full and functioning members of our group when we have learned them.

When people disagree over environmental issues, as they inevitably will, we forget this most fundamental principle: *different people and different groups think in different ways*. Some people value knowledge that is experiential and others know intuitively. Others treasure expert knowledge or knowledge revealed from spiritual sources. Some people prize stories and aphorisms that are passed down from grandma and grandpa face-to-face. Still others give priority to data and scientific principles.

How we think directly and powerfully affects what happens in consensus-building. Engineers, lawyers, economists, and politicians, for example, tend to formulate and solve problems from the vantage point of their own way of knowing. For example:

INDICES	ENGINEERS	LAWYERS	ECONOMISTS	POLITICIANS
<b>Cultural Values</b>				
<u>Believe in:</u>	The laws of physics	Statutory laws	The laws of economics	The law of survival
<u>Have respect for:</u>	Technology, computations, materials, designs	Authority, precedent, the sanctity of contract; rules in general	Theories and statistical data	Patrons, parties, and partisan loyalty
<b>Cultural Perspective</b>				
<u>See themselves as:</u>	Builders and problem solvers	Defenders of justice, partisan advocates	Planners and policy advisers	Defenders of the public interest; mediators, ultimate decision-makers
<u>Express themselves through:</u>	Numbers and works	Technical words and documents	Money	Approvals and directives
<u>Suspicious of:</u>	Timely project simple-mentation and worker performance	Parties' good intentions and pledges	Socio-political variables	Rival bureaucrats and ambitious subordinates

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<b>Negotiating Style</b>				
<u>Team role(s):</u>	Leader or technical specialist	Leaders, spokesperson, technical adviser, or excluded	Leader or financial adviser	Leader
<u>Negotiating focus:</u>	Technical specifications	Parties' rights and duties	Costs, prices, payments	Satisfying superiors, avoiding criticism
<u>Future concern:</u>	Project implementation	Conflict resolutions	Cash-flow risks	Project completion
<u>Communication style:</u>	Precise and quantitative	Precise and logical, but perhaps argumentative	Technical and conservative	Cautious and self-protective

From Winifred Lang in "A Professional's View," *Culture and Negotiations*, Guy O. Faure and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, editors, Sage Publications, 1993.

While engineers, lawyers, economists and politicians bring different perspectives to the mix, not every difference inherently leads to conflict. In many circumstances, they function together comfortably and produce excellent results. In other circumstances, however, they don't. They fail to create the good working relationships and thoughtful across-the-table interactions that can lead to solid substantive conclusions. Whether the different ways of knowing are disciplinary, professional, local or cultural, misunderstood and un-integrated differences can harm discussions. When discussions break down, good solutions are missed, conflict protracts, and litigation often follows.

## IV. HOW DOES THIS PLAY OUT IN CONSENSUS-BUILDING?

Environmental problems inevitably precipitate complex discussions about impacts, risks, and benefits. They involve complex judgments about risks to human health and the environment. Woven into and throughout are the sometimes profoundly different ways people think about the beauties and practicalities of landscapes. Power, justice, and the continuity of valued lifestyles may be issues. Present also are the histories of previous struggles, contrasting visions of the future, and the heavy inheritance of previous struggles that have a way of popping up when the subject turns to land, water, health, and lifestyle.

In these kinds of cross-cutting conversations, people with the best of intentions can easily talk past each other. Scientists, planners, and other technical experts usually try to bring forward their best knowledge consistent with their professional standards. Citizen groups and local people, on the other hand, bring their direct and immediate experience to the table. They invoke local insights, tribal wisdom, neighborhood intelligence, and the memories of previous generations. Sometimes the conversations work perfectly. Too often, they collide.

In the broadest sense, we think of these as confrontations between knowledge that comes from “away” and knowledge that comes from “here.” The problem presents itself in various dichotomous ways:

KNOWLEDGE FROM “HERE”		KNOWLEDGE FROM “AWAY”
Slow Knowledge	↔	Fast Knowledge
Cultural Information	↔	Scientific Information
Lay People	↔	Experts
Observations of Particular Locales	↔	Broad Statistical Patterns
Holistic Thinking	↔	Disciplinary Thinking
Information That Starts With Certain Values In Mind	↔	Information That Seeks To Be Value Neutral
Oral Traditions	↔	Written Histories
Informal Insights	↔	Formal Studies
Single Situations	↔	Universal Patterns
Lore, Stories, Narratives, and Anecdotes	↔	Data, Figures, Measurements, and Statistics

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The differences between “away” and “here” knowledge can be profound. When talk turns to forests, rivers, mountains, and coastlines, knowledge from “here” tends to be location specific. It is detailed, often cannot be generalized to other places, and much of it is nested in a web of implicit, unspoken relationships. Moreover, knowledge of this type is based on the observations and experiences of people over generations and, in the case of some cultural groups, it is socially restricted. This makes it appear closed and mysterious because people will not readily share family, tribal, and community intimacies with strangers.<sup>1</sup>

Professional understandings, on the other hand – knowledge from “away” – places value on information and insight that does not change depending on the context and that is transferable across time, space, and specific social settings. Information gathered in one place should be available for review and cross-examination and replicable elsewhere if the circumstances are the same. Knowledge of this type is based on explicit assumptions and evidence and on bodies of codified learnings built up using scientific logic.

When epistemological confrontations of these types occur, issues of aesthetics, risk, history, power, and moral behavior are also close to the surface. The challenge, then, is to anticipate these “teachable moments,” manage them so that good solutions are not defeated, and ultimately weave them together in the creation of the best environmental solutions available.

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<sup>1</sup> Meninick, J. and Winthrop, R. (1995), “Talking With Anglos: Cultural Barriers to Communicating An Indian Perspective on Environmental Rights.” Draft chapter for *Water, Culture, and Power* edited by John M. Donahue and Barbara R. Johnson.

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## V. BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGING KNOWLEDGE FROM “HERE” AND KNOWLEDGE FROM “AWAY”

1. The best stakeholder processes do not privilege one way of knowing above others. They welcome all modes of inquiry and analysis to the table and integrate information that makes sense culturally, scientifically, economically, and politically.
2. The best stakeholder processes ensure that both kinds of information -- technical and local, scientific and cultural, lay and expert – are accessible to everyone involved.
3. The best stakeholder processes are built on mutually framed questions by the stakeholders. The stakeholder group, rather than scientists or “culture experts”, drive the gathering of information, its analysis and meaning-making, and its application to decision-making.
4. In the best stakeholder processes, all information (regardless of whether it is scientific, technical, traditional, cultural, local, or remembered) is subject to respectful questioning about validity, accuracy, authenticity, and reliability. Every type of knowledge has standards of quality that can be examined, debated or shaped.
5. The best stakeholder processes improve the capacity of all participants to learn from different kinds of knowledge.



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## VI. HOW DO COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES WORK?

Although all collaborative processes have a beginning, a middle, and an end, no two are exactly the same. Some have short life-spans. A group meets a few times, conducts its business, comes to conclusions, and disbands. Others go on for years. Some are high in complexity and conflict. Others are easy going and relaxed.

Some stakeholder groups are composed of parties who have established standing in a lawsuit or who are on a trajectory towards administrative rule-making, standard-setting proceedings, or contested administrative hearings. Others, like appointed or nominated advisory boards, are convened to exchange ideas or provide feedback on a proposed policy, project, or program.

Some groups – watershed councils, forest management groups, and re-vegetation committees for example – work collaboratively over years to manage and improve a resource. Sometimes a facilitator or mediator is involved. More often than not, collaborative leadership comes from the group, often with government officials acting as conveners or moderators.

Typical collaborative processes involve a variety of functions and activities organized into three broad phases:

<b>START-UP</b>	<b>INFORMATION EXCHANGE</b>	<b>PROBLEM SOLVING AND CONSENSUS BUILDING</b>
Appraising the situation for possibilities.	Organizing productive and respectful exchanges of different viewpoints.	Making informed choices.
Organizing leadership, sponsorship, and the capacity to convene.	Bringing the best technical, cultural, legal, and economic information to the table.	Working with parties not at the table to ensure acceptability of proposed project or solutions.
Gaining the participation of all affected stakeholders.	Discerning the underlying interests of all stakeholders.	Ratifying, memorializing, and preparing for implementation.
Designing the forum, establishing protocols, and forging working agreement on the issues to be considered.	Discovering, clarifying, or creating the greatest joint gains possible.	Developing implementation plans and ways to insure compliance with plans or agreements.



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## VII. WHAT KINDS OF OUTCOMES ARE PRODUCED?

Every stakeholder group aspires to what is popularly known as the “win-win” solution. This term is attractive but misleading. It suggests that collaborative processes can perfectly and comfortably integrate different ways of knowing and produce results which give everybody everything they want in terms of their values and interests. Unfortunately, it also implies that anything less than a full “win” is somehow a loss. We don’t like this term very much and try not to use it because it obscures more than it reveals.

In reality, stakeholder groups come to many different kinds of closure, many of which are not win-win but which are nonetheless durable, effective, and well-reasoned. They also produce powerful and graceful reconciliations and accommodations that honor different forms of knowing. Consider the following two cases, both involving Native Americans.

In the first, the Rose Center for Earth and Sky in New York’s American Museum of Natural History acquired a geologically unique 15.8-ton meteorite from the rain forests near Willamette, Oregon in 1906. In 1999, the new center was literally constructed around the meteor. Following the museum’s opening, members of the Clackamas Tribe stepped forward and demanded that the meteor called “Tomanoas” and revered by their tribe, be returned. After arduous negotiations, the tribe and the museum reached an agreement in which the meteor is retained by the museum, the scientific and cultural explanations of Tomanoas sit side-by-side and tribe’s rights to perform ceremonies in New York is preserved in perpetuity.<sup>2</sup>

In the second case, a drumming ceremony conducted by the Spokane Tribe served as a solemn goodbye to a site where generations of the Spokane had fished. The ceremony, in honor of Coyote Rocks, was a stately close to a controversy that had arisen from a road-widening project. The Spokane had wanted the area left untouched. After negotiations, the county agreed to bypass certain boulders even though some of the sacred rocks had to be destroyed. “We didn’t win, but we didn’t lose,” said Brian Flett, the tribe’s cultural director. The final agreements included \$114,000 for archeological digs, monitoring by the tribe, and a closure honored by tribal protocol.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Between A Rock And A Hard Place,” *The Bulletin*, March 28, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Special Rocks Drummed Out,” *AP, Journal North*, p. 4, December 14, 2001.

While an infinite number of outcomes (including no outcomes) are possible, skillful and well-executed stakeholder processes can braid different ways of knowing together in unusual and creative ways:

<b>TYPES</b>	<b>CHARACTERISTIC</b>
Co-Existent Knowledges	Different strands of knowledge are acknowledged. Like the Rose Space Center, neither explanation of how the world works is privileged over the other.
Complimentary Knowledges	Different strands of knowledge stand on their own. For example, one group decides to work on developing economic options for local forest practitioners while another group forecasts lower timber yields for future forest management plans.
Integrated Knowledges	Different strands of knowledge fully complement each other. Tribal wisdom and scientific analysis come to the same conclusions.
Adaptive Knowledges	Different kinds of knowledge are treated as “tentative” and processes are set up to continually collect information that might in turn change the project itself.
Knowledge Compromises	Different kinds of knowledge are used in part. No one source of knowledge is predominant. Stakeholders agree to trade off or give up an issue, place or idea that is important to them in exchange for significant concessions, the larger good of the community or environment, or as a bargaining tactic to affect future interactions.

No matter what kind of process or ending, there are many tools and techniques that groups can use to improve the ways that different ways of knowing are integrated into the processes.

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## VIII. TWENTY TIPS, TOOLS, AND TRUST- BUILDING STRATEGIES

1. **Begin With Co-Hosting.** When two or more groups are potentially or actually at odds with each other over environmental matters, it is always better to co-convene, co-host, or co-**manage** a stakeholder process. A respected farmer working side-by-side with a respected environmentalist (or Native American, or government representative) sets a tone from the beginning that all points of view and all ways of knowing will be welcome.
2. **Create a Game Plan and Group Covenants.** Games have beginnings, middles, and ends, but not everyone will know the plan or agree to it, so make game plans negotiable and transparent. Groups come with expectations that a collaboration will be made up of diverse interests, they also may have expectations about how long it will take to accomplish the work. Stakeholder groups require flexibility for work to go faster or slower but “time” is a key element of culture and handled differently by different people. Engage the group in some gentle discussions about how much time people can devote to meetings and how they will handle attendance, alternates, and “logistics.”
3. **Concentrate on Relationships First.** People need to know each other as individuals, not just as scientists, community members, or representatives of organizations. Learn each other’s histories. Share a meal together. If people do not know each other, they will not trust each other and will revert to fear-based interactions. As a collateral procedure, it is often useful to have stakeholders create interpersonal “contexts” by having each participant identify what the impacts of a decision or agreement might mean in their own lives versus for their community or group.
4. **Be Transparent About Decision Making.** Clarify the “rules of the road” before you start trying to build agreements – who will make final decisions, how representation will be established, how the group will decide things. Craft opening moves that will help the parties manage complex technical discussions. Set the stage also for informal versus formal across-the-table discussions by asking stakeholders to identify when they are speaking officially or unofficially.
5. **Pay Attention to Power.** Community groups, scientists, indigenous people, government professionals and environmental advocates come to the table with different standing, control over resources, and access to decision-making. Although power relationships are rarely as fixed as people think, most groups have a “predominant” way of knowing things, a shared prism through which group members take in and give out information. This way of knowing may be

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institutionalized in laws, rules, protocols or it may simply be “the way we do things around here.” Ask group members: “What is the dominant way of knowing in this group?” “Who has power to control what information gets considered and what information is not salient?” “How can we give opportunity, credence, and value to the ways of knowing that are not predominant?”

6. **Create Rituals.** Stakeholder groups often find small conventions or habits that give members a sense of identity, though as individuals they represent different organizations and interests. Small routines – starting with a traditional song or chant, bringing homemade food, celebrating birthdays, ending with a story, buying everyone a hat with the name of the group – can become a small reference point that helps a group develop good working relationships.
7. **Balance Linear Processes With Iterative Strategies.** Overly structured processes and agendas with detailed times are off-putting to people who come from story-telling traditions. Resist the temptation to bear down directly on “problems” and “solutions” and “getting to work”. Instead, make sure the process has enough forward momentum to satisfy some people and enough story-telling and circling back to values and history to satisfy others.
8. **Talk About “Values.”** Explicitly talk about the values participants bring to the table before you talk about problems, data, or potential solutions. As for the issues at hand, discuss what they cherish most, what “truths” they hold dearest, what they hope to leave behind as a legacy for their children, how the past informs the future, and what values they believe are “absolute and unconditional.” Most people hold multiple values, few of which are actually unequivocal or categorical.
9. **Acknowledge Different Kinds of Knowledge.** From the beginning, explicitly legitimize that there are different ways of “knowing” and different modes of communicating important facts and ideas. No one – scientists, Native Americans, planners, farmers, ranchers, people from the neighborhood – wants to see their kind of knowledge trivialized and most people have specific “ways” they want to be engaged.
10. **Generate Multiple Problem Definitions.** Do not assume that problem solving proceeds from a single definition of the issues. No definition is wrong or “off the table.” Scientists will see the problem one way. Community people will define it their way. Business professionals will bring yet another approach. All problem definitions are helpful starting points because they reveal issues and aspirations.

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11. **Step Out of the Normal Conversation Mode.** Do not rely solely on meetings, conversation, and negotiating sessions. Too much talk can weigh a group down and actually confuse discussions about values, identity, issues, and options. Invite hand drawn (rather than slick) diagrams, maps, and pictures. Try to create joint maps and pictures with everyone contributing to a common picture. Take field trips. Go look at the landscapes or sites under consideration and allow people to educate each other in ways other than words.
  12. **Create “Jointly Owned” Knowledge.** If information really is power, then information that has been jointly brought to the table is especially powerful. To the greatest extent possible, create a “group inquiry” in which all stakeholders jointly frame the questions that need to be answered (who actually lived here before, what are the migratory paths of the elk, what is the interaction of ground and surface water, etc.) and actually bring it into the process. Stakeholder groups go through a “learning curve” which deepens over time and often matures into truly mutual understandings. Choreograph the learning curve so that scientific and technical information is not privileged over the information brought to the table by community groups, native peoples, and citizen advocates.
  13. **Explore Validity and Accuracy With Care.** All information – scientific, technical, traditional, cultural, local, or remembered in nature – is subject to questions about validity, accuracy, authenticity, and reliability. Create a climate in which, in the spirit of problem solving, it is acceptable to respectfully ask people to substantiate what they are saying. Every type of knowledge, cultural assertions no less than scientific models, can be reviewed. The issues of what is examined, how it is examined, who examines it, and when it is examined are all negotiable.
  14. **Talk ... But Do It Gracefully.** The higher the levels of inter-personal trust in a stakeholder group, the easier it is to speak candidly about internal and external political pressures. Environmental conflicts are inevitably embedded in political contexts where tough value choices are at play. While these value choices can be informed by cultural, professional, and scientific considerations, underlying values are the ultimate arbiters of political decision-making.
  15. **Be Patient Teachers to Others.** When professionals present their knowledge from “away”, it is important that they explicitly present and clarify the assumptions behind what they are saying. It is often useful that initial technical presentations not be done through power-point, overheads, or fancy models. Without “dumbing things down,” keep presentations as simple and clear as possible. Community groups, native peoples, and others also have a burden to present their knowledge from “here” in ways that make sense to outsiders or people who do not share in local ways of doing things. Without violating matters that are sacred, and without talking

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down to outsiders, it is critical that context, history, and background be explained in ways that do not leave things inexplicably mysterious.

16. **Organize “Sidebars”.** When matters of great technical or cultural complexity arise, establishing sidebar groups or working committees is usually useful. There are many different design strategies worth considering, among them a special committee of “cultural experts” or scientists. Sometimes, it is useful to create public sessions for the stakeholder group to meet other interested members of the public and to report progress, test out new ideas, or gather feedback. In all such meetings, balancing local knowledge with outside expert knowledge is important.
17. **Create a “Public Learning” Culture.** Build a group norm to support joint inquiry. This means that knowledge will be built slowly with contributions from each one of the participants. It also means that ground rules and agendas should take account of constantly evolving information. Additionally, it implies that the stakeholder process should allow for small meetings and group breakouts for those who are shy or don’t share the western norms of public meetings.
18. **Engage in Storytelling.** Stories are the single most accessible way for human beings to communicate in groups. Often local or cultural knowledge is located in stories. For scientists and technical experts, telling stories can provide important context and help people understand important assumptions and values embedded in models and findings.
19. **Create Respectful Endings That Match Outcomes.** No matter how we try, not all collaborative processes end up with integrated solutions. If the outcome leads to ongoing relationships, try to create structures that reinforce continuing relationships and trust building. If the outcome means loss or change for some, acknowledge the transition and grief and create rituals that memorialize changes and losses.
20. **Create Strong Endings.** Stakeholder groups often run out of steam toward the end of the process. Resist the temptation to leave things unsaid or undocumented. Besides developing well-crafted written agreements, make sure everyone is acknowledged. With or without agreement, close the process with dignity by inviting different cultural and professional voices to help summarize what they have learned. Then, find ways to celebrate.

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## TALKING WITH NATIVE AMERICANS

Understand the unique relationship between American Indians and the United States government. It is a political relationship – not race based. The history of this unique relationship is relevant and important to working with a Tribe. There are more than 500 federally recognized Tribes – each with its own history, culture, and language. Being Indian and accessing services is complicated and complex.

Do not assume one Tribe or one leader speaks for all. Take the time to find the key players. Remember that American Indians may be suspicious of outsiders and outside ideas. American Indians object to being “consulted” or “studied” by people who have little intention of doing anything in response to their concerns. Be prepared to negotiate – to find ways to accommodate the Tribe’s concerns. Be prepared to respond with reasons why the advice may or may not be followed.

Meetings with Tribal Council officials and Tribal program staff should, if possible, be conducted between the same levels of officials. There may be fewer or a greater number of people at a meeting than you expected. Take the initiative in introducing yourself, especially with older people. It is a sign of respect to take the initiative. You may not get what you consider an enthusiastic response but you will probably get a slight nod.

Do not speak loudly. It is not necessary and it can be offensive. Although you may expect others to look you in the eye when they speak to you, the American Indian culture does not hold this to be important. In fact, when you think about the meaning of an oral culture the American Indian person may simply be listening very carefully to what you say. Remember that the lack of eye contact is not a sign the person is not being honest or truthful.

Most Tribal governments are not wealthy and it may be difficult for Tribal officials to attend meetings or to exchange correspondence. Also, tribal governments in general do not have large support staff to assign to meetings, follow-up, etc. Formal notices or invitations should be addressed to the Tribal Chairperson and/or the appropriate Council Representative or Committee, with the respective Tribal program Director copied on the letter.

Do not rely solely on written communication. Follow-up written correspondence with telephone calls, faxes, or in-person contacts. Traditional authorities may prefer face-to-face consultation to written communication. Remember the American Indian tradition is primarily an oral tradition so the preference for face-to-face communication is deeply imbedded in history and culture.

Understand that there are different ways of communication. Seemingly extraneous data may be reviewed and re-reviewed. During negotiations, prepare to discuss all aspects of an issue at hand simultaneously rather than sequentially. Respect tribal Council representatives as elected officials of a government. Tribal Councils expect to be treated in the highest professional manner when conducting business.

Like all business relationships, honesty and integrity are highly valued. A sense of humor is appreciated but generally, serious, businesslike behavior is appropriate. Dress in a businesslike way for meetings. Always shake hands when introduced to someone or when departing. It is customary to shake hands with everyone in the room. Normally, light shaking of hands is the preferred way. Some American Indians may follow your custom and shake with a strong grip—they are accommodating your culture when they do this.

If possible, arrange meetings with refreshments and/or a meal. This is a cultural characteristic that is still strong. Those you consult with might not be able to answer questions immediately. They may need to think about it and consult with others.

Understand that 'Indian time' does not mean being late. It means that things get done when they are meant to get done, and those who should be there are present. Often, the person to whom you send written communication or of whom you have a question will want to consult with others and this takes time. Even more important, the American Indian concept of time is based in a fundamental world view that considers the "long term" instead of the short term.

Do not promise what you can't deliver. This is a key to building trust.

*These protocols were disseminated by the North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission and were passed along to us by Joe Quetone, Executive Director of the Governor's Council on Indian Affairs, Inc.*



# BUILDING TRUST

## When Knowledge From “Here” Meets Knowledge From “Away”

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