OFFICE OF THE TRIBAL ADVISOR

CULTURAL HUMILITY

Basics for Working with California Native Americans

PRESENTATION GOAL

The goal of this presentation is to give State professionals working with California Native Americans a better understanding of the issues and backgrounds of Native American populations in California in support of the ongoing process of cultural awareness and understanding.

PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- Definition of "Cultural Humility"
- Terminology
- Myths and Facts
- Tribal Sovereignty
- Regional and Cultural Differences
- Spirituality
- Cultural Identity
- Elders
- Veterans
- Elected Officials
- Tribal Groups
- Health and Wellness Challenges
- Self-Awareness and Etiquette

DEFINTION OF CULTURAL HUMILITY

Cultural Humility is an attitude of humility and respect toward other cultures that pushes one to challenge their own cultural biases, realize they cannot possibly know everything about other cultures and approach learning about other cultures as a lifelong goal and process.

Not to be confused with the concept of *cultural competency*, which may implicitly place non-Western cultures as "other" cultures that can possibly be mastered with enough effort.

TERMINOLOGY

American Indian or ***Native American*** is generally acceptable, though Native American is more typically used in California.

Indigenous Peoples typically is used in the context of international affairs, and connotes Native peoples from anywhere (not US-specific).

First Nations is the term Canada has opted to use for tribes located in Canada.

MYTHS & FACTS

Myth: Native people are spiritual and live in harmony with nature.

Fact: This idea is an overbroad generalization—this type of romanticization can be just as damaging as more harmful stereotypes and can lead to co-opting Native peoples for environmental or other causes and disregarding other issues important to Native communities when those issues do not fit within this framing.

MYTHS & FACTS

Myth: Casinos have made Native Americans rich.

Fact: In California, there are 109 federally recognized tribes and 62 listed non-federally recognized tribes. Of those 109 that have the ability to conduct gaming on their lands, roughly half have gaming facilities.

Only a handful of tribal casinos have larger revenues, and these revenues go primarily to government operations and services, community and economic development, local mitigation, charitable giving and tribal revenue sharing.

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

There are currently 109 federally recognized tribes in California, and 62 non-federally recognized tribes on the list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) for the purpose of cultural resource and sacred site protection. In addition, there are tribes that are not on the NAHC list. Placement on the list is not "state recognition," but it does confer rights under State law for the purpose of cultural resource protection and is sometimes used as a proxy to identify and include non-federally recognized tribes.

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

There is a unique legal and political relationship between the federal government and federally recognized tribes, based in the US Constitution, treaties, Supreme Court decisions, federal laws and Executive Orders.

As sovereign nations, tribal governments have the inherent right to hold elections, determine their own citizenship and consult directly with the US on policy, regulations, legislation and funding.

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

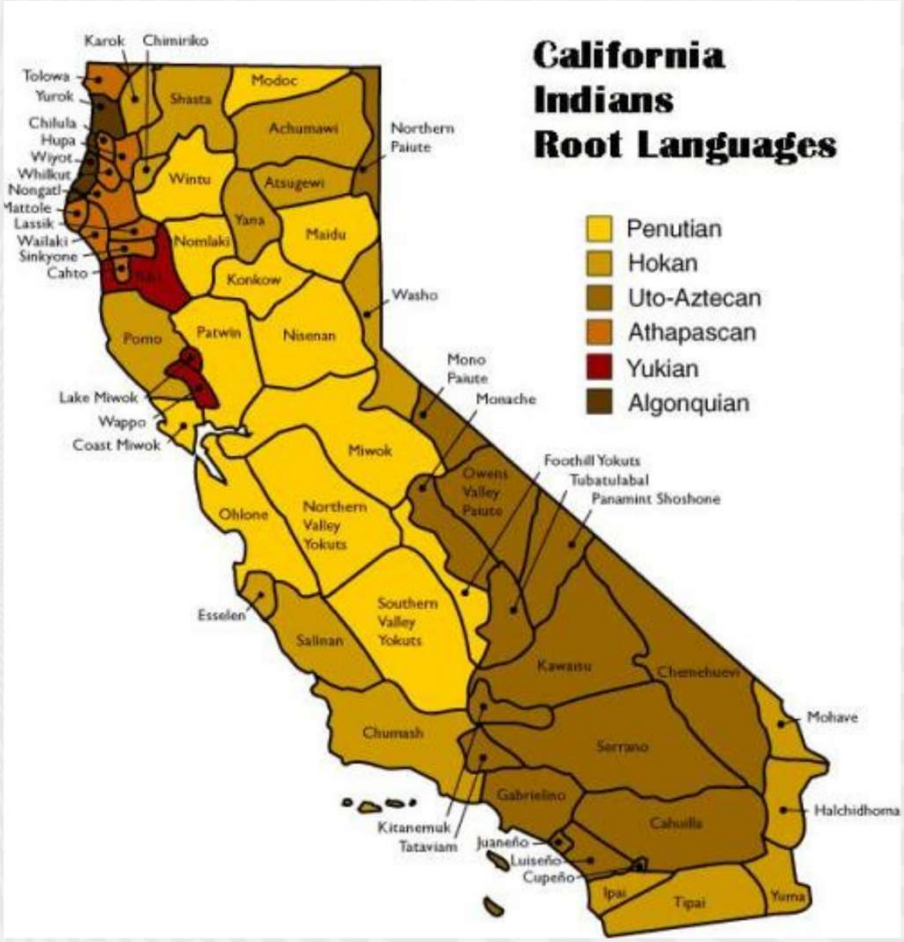
Tribal governments can create and enforce laws that are more strict or lenient than State laws, but they are not subservient to state law.

In general, State law cannot be applied on tribal lands where California tribes are exerting civil regulatory authority; however, because California is a PL 280 state, State criminal authority extends onto tribal lands (with some exceptions).

Bottom line: jurisdiction in California is incredibly complex.

REGIONAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Prior to displacement, removal and genocide in California, several diverse Native communities existed up and down the state.



REGIONAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

With the establishment of the reservation system, and later of rancherias for homeless Native Americans in California, some bands and tribes were forced to live together.

Sometimes, these groups were related linguistically or culturally or by marriage, but sometimes they were not closely related and may have historically been at odds.

Where multiple groups were forced to coexist, those rivalries did not always disappear and may present challenges to outsiders who are unaware of local dynamics.

REGIONAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

While there is great diversity across the State and within tribes, there are regional similarities based on adaptation to ecology, climate and geography (including traditional foods); linguistic and cultural affiliations; and sharing of information and trade.

Cultures developed in adaptation to their natural environments and the influence of trade and interaction with non-Natives and other Native groups.

REGIONAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Urban Indian communities can be found in most major metropolitan areas (Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Sacramento / Riverside due to Sherman Indian School).

These populations are represented by members of a large number of different tribes and cultures that have different degrees of traditional culture and adaptation to Western culture norms.

They form a sense of community through social interaction and activities, but have often felt "invisible."

SPIRITUALITY

Many California Native American communities have a strong spiritual community, whether traditional, Christian (due to European contact) or a combination of both.

Specific practices such as ceremonies, prayers and religious protocols vary among Native peoples and communities.

It is best not to make assumptions about belief systems, but be aware that many Native beliefs and practices are considered sacred and are not to be shared publicly or with outsiders.

SPIRITUALITY

It is common practice to open meetings with a prayer/blessing and sometimes a short ceremony.

Elders or cultural practitioners are often asked to offer such opening and/or closing words and are given a small gift as a sign of respect (honoraria are common).

When asking this of Native elders or cultural practitioners, please be sure to ask what they are comfortable with, confirm how participants should act and defer to their direction. (Especially relevant in videoconference era).

SPIRITUALITY

Remember that many elders and cultural practitioners are taking time away from their jobs, families or communities to offer prayers or blessings at State events—please be sure to accommodate their needs, provide lodging/meals if applicable and offer an honorarium where possible.

When seeking someone to offer a prayer or blessing (or land acknowledgement) at a State event, be sure to confirm with the NAHC or Tribal Advisor which tribes are affiliated with the geographical location of your event—it is disrespectful to ask Native peoples or tribes not affiliated with the area unless they first obtain permission from the local tribe.

COMMUNICATION STYLES

Native people communicate a great deal through non-verbal gestures—please be aware of body language when communicating to avoid misinterpretation.

Native people may convey truth or difficult messages through humor.

The use of humor and teasing to show affection or offer corrective advice is also common and can sometimes be misconstrued by outsiders.

Communication through storytelling or narrative is common—it is more important to listen than to express frustration or urgency.

HISTORICAL DISTRUST

Establishing trust with members of the Native community may be difficult.

As outlined in E.O. N-15-19, the State of California has historically been responsible for depredations and large-scale massacre of Native peoples.

That distrust continues today, so it is more important than ever that State actors engage with Native communities and peoples with integrity and honesty.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

When interacting with Native individuals, it is important to understand that each person has experienced their cultural connection in a unique way.

Many Native people are multicultural, and there is wide variation in how or if they integrate their traditional and cultural practices into their identities.

When identifying where they are from, many Native people will identify the name of their tribe and/or the location of their traditional homeland.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Some Native people choose to identify as citizens of specific tribes (indicating that they are part of a political body), others choose to identify with their cultural group generally (e.g., Pomo).

Some Native people will identify with the current names of their tribes as listed on the federal register (e.g., Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians), while others will identify the name of the traditional bands they come from (e.g., Mihilikawna and Makahmo).

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Some Native people will introduce themselves using their Native language—whether someone chooses to do this or not is their personal choice, and not doing so does not make them "less Native."

Some Native people will not tell you they are Native, while others will identify themselves as Native to combat invisibility and harmful stereotypes rampant in California.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Remember that until very recently, most Native people were persecuted for speaking their languages, practicing their cultures or merely existing.

The very act of self-identification is a huge risk for Native people, especially given the long history of mistreatment of Native peoples in California.

It is not up to you to decide how Native people should look or act—invalidating Native people who do not conform to your pre/misconceptions is incredibly harmful.

ELDERS

Elders play a significant role in Native communities and are considered valuable in decision-making processes.

It is customary in many communities to show respect by allowing elders to speak first, not interrupting, and allowing time for opinions and thoughts to be expressed.

In social settings where food is served, elders are generally served first.

VETERANS

Native communities historically have high rates of enlistment in military service.

Native veterans are given similar respect to that of elders for having accepted the role of protector and experienced personal sacrifice.

Veterans are typically given places of honor at ceremonies and events and are shown public acknowledgment often.

While individual service is respected, the US military in general does not always enjoy widespread approval.

TRIBAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

Tribal elected officials always outrank you. Always.

Except for minor introductory remarks, tribal elected officials should always be allowed to speak first, especially when you are meeting with such officials in their tribal territory.

When in a meeting with tribal elected officials, you should always address the highest ranked official with any questions or comments unless they have passed the meeting to someone else—it is disrespectful to direct conversation to staff when elected officials are present.

TRIBAL GROUPS

TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS

Governing bodies of tribal communities

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TRIBAL REPRESENTATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations with legally-delegated authority from tribal governments

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NATIVE AMERICAN ORGANIZATIONS

Lack governmental or representative authority, but serve Native populations

HEALTH AND WELLNESS CHALLENGES

Health disparities exist with limited access to culturally appropriate health care in most Native Communities.

Only 55 percent of Native people nationwide rely on federally funded IHS or tribally-operated clinics for care.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among Native people ages 10-34.

Heart disease, malignant neoplasm, unintentional injurie, and diabetes are leading causes of death.

SELF AWARENESS AND ETIQUETTE

Preferred body language, posture and concept of personal space depend on the community norms and nature of the personal relationship—observe others and allow them to initiate or ask for physical contact.

You may experience people expressing their mistrust, frustration or disappointment from situations outside your control. Learn not to take it personally.

If community members tease you, understand that this can indicate rapport-building.

SELF AWARENESS AND ETIQUETTE

If you are visiting a tribal community or space, understand that you are a guest—observe and ask questions humbly when necessary, but remember that you are not entitled to know everything about the community.

Listen and observe more than you speak—learn to be comfortable with long pauses in conversation and narrative-style communication.

Be honest and clear about what you are doing. Do not make promises you do not intend to or cannot keep.

SELF AWARENESS AND ETIQUETTE

Respect confidentiality and the right of the tribe to control information and data. Where confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, be explicit about such limitations.

Never use information gained without a tribe's expressed written consent and clarify whether the tribe has agreed to be identified.

Avoid intrusive questions (cultural, personal, etc.).

Be careful not to impose your personal values, morals or beliefs.

THANK YOU

This presentation was adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's American Indian and Alaska Native Culture Card, available for download or shipment at https://store.samhsa.gov/product/American-Indian-and-Alaska-Native-Culture-Card/sma08-4354.

For more information on the State's relationship with California Native Americans, please contact info.tribalaffairs@gov.ca.gov or visit tribalaffairs.ca.gov.