Developing a Community-Based Research Orientation:
Resources for Investigators Desiring to Work with American Indian & Alaska Native Communities

Developing meaningful and ethical research with American Indian and Alaska Native communities requires that investigators commit to a sustained process of relationship building, cross-cultural learning and respect, and reciprocity. This is especially important given both the historical context of research in Native[1] communities and the role of research and information in geopolitical and economic decision-making. Tribal governments are sovereign nations[2] and therefore have the legal authority to regulate all activities conducted on their lands and with their citizens, including research. Tribes are also diverse in their views on research and the structure of their research regulation processes. As such, guidance for investigators intent on designing and implementing meaningful research with American Indian and Alaska Native communities should not take the form of a simple checklist or how-to approach; rather it must reflect the process of developing a research orientation that is community-based, culturally relevant, and supports a tribal agenda. Toward that end, we have amassed a set of resources that may be useful for investigators to begin the process of understanding the nature and role of research in Native contexts and of developing a research stance that is meaningful and appropriate. We encourage investigators to use these resources to identify aspects of the research process that may be unique to Native communities; concepts of power, knowledge, and culture that may be important for research inquiry in these contexts; and elements of research objectives, methodology, analysis, outcome, and data ownership that may differ in Native communities. Resources for Indigenous researchers working with their own Native communities are limited, reflecting a critical gap in the literature; however, we have included some sources throughout that explore this perspective.

Indigenous Knowledge, Ethics, and Research Methods

These resources feature the work of scholars on the nature of Indigenous knowledge and how it matters in the context of research and the design of research methods. They can inform key foundational elements of the paradigm and ethic of conducting research in Native contexts.

- Battiste, M., & Henderson, J. Y. (2000). *Protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage: A global challenge*. Saskatoon, SK: Purich Publishing.
  This book discusses the impact on Indigenous peoples by colonizing powers, including the assault of modern society on Indigenous society, the commercialization of Indigenous language, culture, art, knowledge, and the lack of consent, acknowledgment or benefit of

knowledge and enterprises taken. This book illustrates why current legal protections are inadequate to protect Indigenous knowledge and puts forward ideas for reform. It also examines issues from an international perspective and explores developments in various countries including Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

- Bishop, R. (1999). Kaupapa M?ori Research: An Indigenous Approach to Creating Knowledge. In Robertson, N. (Ed.), *M?ori and psychology: research and practice - The proceedings of a symposium sponsored by the Maori and Psychology Research Unit.* Hamilton, NZ: M?ori & Psychology Research Unit.
This paper explores an Aotearoa/New Zealand model for Indigenous self-determination research. The Kaupapa M?ori research approach draws authority from M?ori cultural practices regarding what is acceptable and what is not acceptable research in reference to the people and the cultural context within which it operates. Central to this approach is that cultural aspirations, understandings, and practices of Maori people anchor the research process. The article also explores issues of power, legitimacy, and accountability by politicizing the research process and asserting that it is based in a different world- view from that of the dominant discourse. It acknowledges the need to recognize and address the ongoing effects of racism and colonialism in the wider society.

- Burkhart, B. Y. (2004). What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology. In A. Waters (Ed.), *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays* (pp. 15-26). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
This essay speaks about basic principles upon which to discuss and understand Native knowledge. This understanding, according to the author, should be based fundamentally on observed and first-hand knowledge and not on a Western standard that prioritizes factual or causal knowledge.

- Cajete, G. (1999). *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence.* Santa Fe: NM: Clear Light Publishers.
The book discusses multiple levels of meaning and relationships that inform Native astronomy, cosmology, psychology, agriculture, and the healing arts.

- Carjuzaa, J. & Fenimore-Smith, K. (2010). The give away spirit: Reaching a shared vision of ethical Indigenous research relationships. *Journal of Educational Controversy, 5* (2), Summer 2010, ISSN 1935-7699.
This paper discusses the dilemma that emerges when protocols taken from Western research paradigms are applied to research in Indigenous communities. The authors raise a number of ethical issues related to voice and privilege that should be resolved in order to be inclusive of multiple perspectives.

- Castellano, M. B. (2004). Ethics of Aboriginal research. *Journal of Aboriginal Health, 1*(1), 98-114.
This article discusses ethical codes of conduct in research with Aboriginal peoples or with external partners. It speaks to the rights of Aboriginal peoples to participate as principals and partners in research that affects their identity and culture.

- Deer, F. (2006). Research Perspectives in Indigenous Education: The legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge. *World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium Journal.*
The article examines how Indigenous knowledge can be used to understand student behavior and school climate in Indigenous school settings, particularly within the Canadian Indigenous context.

- Fisher, P. A., & Ball, T. J. (2003). Tribal Participatory Research: Mechanisms of a collaborative model. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *32*(3/4), 207-216. This article describes a unique research approach that places American Indian and Alaska Native communities at the center of every phase of the research process; from the research design to collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data and reporting findings. It asserts that in order to produce lasting change, researchers must work within a historical framework that considers the impact of oppression, discrimination, and disempowerment on American Indian and Alaska Native communities. It also addresses the need for tribal oversight, building community research capability, and utilizing culturally specific methods. The Tribal Participatory Research approach advocates a strong, collaborative relationship between tribes and researchers and offers mechanisms for building these types of partnerships.

- Grenier, L. (1998). *Working with Indigenous Knowledge: A Guide for Researchers.* Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre. This book illustrates how historically Western researchers have failed to consult properly with or include Indigenous populations in research studies, but that this trend is slowly changing. Through a comprehensive review of examples, the book highlights how Indigenous knowledge can contribute to improved research design and delivery and has tremendous impact on Indigenous peoples as well as the researcher.

- Harding, A., Harper, B., Stone, D., O'Neill, C., Berger, P., Harris, S., & Donatuto, J. (2011). Conducting research with tribal communities: Sovereignty, ethics and data-sharing issues. Environmental Health Perspectives. This article discusses how only tribal nations themselves can identify potential adverse outcomes to proposed research projects in their communities and how it is the responsibility of researchers to ensure all parties understand the assumptions and methods of the research. The authors assert that sovereignty, ethics and data sharing are critical areas for investigators to address when conducting Community-Based Participatory Research, particularly in a health or natural resource related field. Further, the article presents a model material and data-sharing agreement for use.

- Kirkness, V. J. & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First Nations and higher education: The four Rs—respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education, 30*(3), 1-10. Native people historically have been under-represented as college graduates in Canada and the United States. The reasons for under-representation differ between the university perspective and the Native student perspective. This paper looks at the implications of these differences in perspective and identifies ways in which initiatives within and outside of existing institutions are transforming higher education for Native people in both Canada and the United States.

- LaVeaux, D. & Christopher, S. (2009). Contextualizing CBPR: Key principles of CBPR meet the Indigenous research context. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health, 7*(1), 1-25. This article examines traditional Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approaches and identifies what works and what does not when applied to Native American communities. Further, not only does it contextualize existing CBPR principles with tribal populations, it also suggests nine new principles specific to American Indians and Alaska Native peoples. These include: acknowledge historical experience with research, recognize tribal sovereignty, prepare for leadership turnover, interpret data within the cultural context, and utilize indigenous ways of knowing, to name a few. The article confirms the importance of using CBPR approaches in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

- Lomawaima, K. T. (2000). Tribal sovereigns: Reframing research in American Indian education. *Harvard Educational Review, 70*(1), 1-23.
  This article discusses the power dynamics and historical relationship between academic researchers and American Indians and the shift in power that has occurred in these relationships over the past four decades. The author discusses how access to subjects, data ownership, analysis and interpretation, and control over dissemination of findings all reflect struggles for power and tribal sovereignty. The article asserts that an understanding of new tribal research protocols and policies are necessary for responsible and respectful scholarship.

- Piquemal, N. 2001. Free and informed consent in research involving Native American communities. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 25*(1): 65-79.
  This article looks at how conducting research among other cultures must use what is learned without betraying the confidence of those with whom they interact. The author offers recommendations including negotiating responsibilities before seeking consent, obtaining consent from relevant authorities, reconfirming consent as work proceeds, and providing the community with data.

- Richmond, L. S., Peterson, D. J., & Betts, S. C. (2008). The evolution of an evaluation: A case study using the tribal participatory research model. *Health Promotion Practice*, 9(4), 368-377.
  This article presents an evaluation case study of tribal youth development guided by the tribal participatory research model. It focuses on best practices in developing partnerships with tribal communities and organizations engaged in this type of work. Key learnings include the need for flexibility in the evaluation approach and for investigators to remain attuned to feedback from community stakeholders and experiences that are unique to American Indian communities.

- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: research and Indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books.
  Research has historically been utilized as a tool of Indigenous colonization and it remains a powerful reminder of the continued marginalization of Indigenous peoples. This book looks at the historical and philosophical history of Western research and the different ways colonialism and imperialism are imbedded in research methodology and knowledge seeking. It also examines how Indigenous researchers are starting to reclaim control of Indigenous ways of knowing; yet, many still grapple with frustrations with Western research paradigms and the persistent "othering" of Indigenous populations.

- Taylor, J., Doran, B., Parriman, M., & Yu, E. (2012). Statistics for community governance: The Yawuru Indigenous population survey of Broome (pp. 1-30, Working paper No. 82/2012). Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research.
  This paper presents a case study of self-determination research amongst the Yawuru Indigenous population of Australia. In response to a need for information on its people, the Yawuru Native Title Holders Aboriginal Corporation sought to build internal capacity for governance and community planning by conducting a census-like survey of its population. The Yawuru people of Broome are one of the first in Australia to conduct this type of information gathering on their own terms as an exercise of self-determination. The article describes the research process from beginning to end, which was undertaken as a joint venture between the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at Australian National University and the Yawuru people.

- Thomas, L. R., Donovan, D. M., & Sigo, R. W. (2010). Identifying community needs and

resources in a Native community: A research partnership in the pacific northwest. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 8(2), 362-373.
This article presents a model for using Community Based Participatory Research and Tribal Participatory Research methods to conduct a community needs assessment in a Native context. The approach embraces both traditional research methods and community-driven assets to identify community strengths and concerns in Native communities with the ultimate goal of designing relevant health interventions. Using a case study in the Pacific Northwest it shows how meaningful research partnerships can yield success in identifying community needs and resources.

- Walling, J., Small-Rodriguez, D., & Kukutai, T. (2009). Tallying tribes: Waikato-Tainui in the census and Iwi register. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, (36), 2-15.
  Utilizing a case study of the Waikato-Tainui iwi (tribe) in Aotearoa/New Zealand, this article highlights a critical gap in Indigenous research, the development of tribal data collected by tribes for tribes to drive development and policy. The case study examines inconsistencies between the New Zealand Census and the tribe's enrollment register and signals the need for tribes to depart from solely relying on existing official sources (i.e. Census, national surveys, etc.) for information on their own people.

- Weijer, J. & Emanuel, E.J. (2000.) [Protecting Communities in Biomedical Research](#). *Science*, 289(5482): 1142-1144.
  This paper discusses the ethical issues in biomedical research among indigenous, geographic, religious, disease, ethnic and virtual communities.

- Wilson, S. (2008). *[Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods](#)*. Black Point, Nova Scotia,Canada: Fernwood Publishing.
  This book describes how Indigenous researchers in Canada and Australia work within a research context of Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Through their partnerships, these researchers seek to make careful choices in the selection of topics, methods of data collection, analysis, and presentation of information in order to be accountable to indigenous communities.

Key Research Policies, Protocols, and Ethics Guidelines

These resources include research policies, protocols, and ethics guidelines that have been developed by Indigenous peoples around the world. These resources may help researchers to develop their own frameworks and approaches to building effective research partnerships with American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

- Alaska Native Knowledge Network Resources – The Alaska Native Knowledge Network (ANKN) at the University of Alaska Fairbanks provides a number of resources related to Alaska Native knowledge and ways of knowing.

    o [Principles for the Conduct of Research in the Arctic](#)
    o [Principles & Guidelines for the Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous People](#)
    o [Alaska Federation of Natives Guidelines for Research](#)

- [American Indian Law Center, Model Tribal Research Code](#) explores the general role of research and Institutional Review Boards in the federal regulatory process for American Indian Tribes. It presents a model code to assist Tribes in developing law regarding their research regulations and needs.

- **Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies** include principles of ethical research in Indigenous studies and practical applications of these points. Main categories are: consultation, negotiation, and mutual understanding; respect, recognition, and involvement; and benefits, outcomes, and agreement.

- **Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Guidelines for Health Research Involving Aboriginal People** lays out a comprehensive ethical framework for conducting research with Indigenous peoples in Canada, including the need for community informed consent, research agreements, and protection of communities' cultural and sacred knowledge. The guidelines also discuss intellectual property and secondary use of biological specimens and data.

- **Convention on Biological Diversity** provides information on the protection of biological diversity and ecological life through policy. Article 12 of the declaration specifically speaks to principles around research and training.

- **First Nations Centre, Considerations and Templates for Ethical Research Practices** provides three participatory research templates grounded in the principles of ownership, control, access, and possession. The three templates are: a model Code of Research Ethics; a model for a Collaborative Research Agreement; and a model for a Data Sharing Protocol.

- **Mataatua Declaration on Cultural & Intellectual Property Rights** resulted from a 1993 convening of the Nine Tribes of Mataatua in the Bay of Plenty Region of Aotearoa New Zealand.

- **Nibutani Declaration of the 2008 Indigenous Peoples Summit** resulted from a gathering of Indigenous people from Japan and around the world in advance of the G8 Summit in 2008.

- **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** is a declaration of the rights of all Indigenous peoples.

- **University of Arizona, Native Peoples Technical Assistance Office, Research Protocols** provides a database of U.S. Tribes' research ordinances, codes, and protocols. Other resources include template research codes, model research agreements, and a bibliography on academic research in Indian Country.

- University of Washington Native American Law Center, Model Tribal Health Research Code is a user-friendly, fill-in-the-blank template for tribes that seek to develop their own Tribal Health Research Code.

Negotiating Research Relationships with Native Communities

Negotiating research partnerships with American Indian and Alaska Native communities is often a long-term process of trust and relationship building. The resources below provide guidance on that process, including navigating tribal research regulations; content outlines and templates for research agreements and policies; and examples of mutually benefiting partnerships between Native communities and researchers.

- **Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, Principles of Research Collaboration** provides template research agreements covering ethical considerations; ownership, control, access, and

possession of data; and authorship of publications.

- Christopher, S., Saha, R., Lachapelle, P., Jennings, D., Cooper, C., Cummings, C., Webster, L. (2011). Applying Indigenous community-based participatory research principles to partnership development in health disparities research. *Family and Community Health*, 34(3), 246-255. This article explores how Native American communities in Montana and university researchers navigate the intricacies of building trust and sharing power while conducting community based participatory research. Sponsored by the National Institute of Health, the study embraces a mix of stakeholders in the partnership process including tribal members, health care professionals, and Native and non-Native researchers. It presents detailed application of Indigenous research principles (LaVeaux & Christopher, 2009), such as acknowledging historical experience, recognizing tribal sovereignty, and understanding tribal diversity, to name a few, in an effort to reduce health disparities.

- Hughes, P., & Grace, B. (2004). *Gracious Space: Working Better Together*. Seattle, WA: The Center for Ethical Leadership. This book provides approaches for diverse communities to work better together—in partnership and through collaborative public learning. The term "gracious space" creates an environment where diverse opinions are welcome, where people can listen and learn together, and come to deeper understandings to solve complex problems.

- Mariella, P., Brown, E., Carter, M., Verri, V. (2009). Tribally-driven participatory research: State of the practice and potential 41 strategies for the future. *Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice*, 3(2), 41-58.| This paper discusses the current practice of research with and by American Indian tribal governments in the United States. It begins with a brief overview of Community-Based Participatory Research and compares and contrasts its principles and methods with what this paper terms Tribally-Driven Participatory Research.

- Indigenous Wellness Research Institute, University of Washington, Research Policy Template**s** offers a template research protocol for tribes and template data sharing and ownership agreements developed in partnership by the University of Washington and Pacific Northwest tribes.

- Sample Genetic Policy Language for Research Conducted with Native Communities presents specific cultural issues related to genetics research in American Indian and Alaska Native communities, along with template language for policies or research contracts to address these issues.

- National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center, Tribal Research Regulation Toolkit includes a series of papers on research regulation in American Indian and Alaska Native communities, including white papers on review of research studies, data control options, and genetics research.

- National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center, Community-Based Participatory Research in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities offers exemplary cases of community-based participatory research conducted with American Indian and Alaska Native communities, with resulting lessons learned.

- Negotiating Research Relationships with Inuit Communities: A Guide for Researchers provides background on community perceptions of research and the spectrum of levels for

community involvement in research. It also covers key elements of a negotiated research relationship and strategies for communication of research results.

- [Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board, Guidelines and Information for Researchers](#) delineates researcher responsibilities and includes guidance documents on possible harms and benefits in genetics research, sample research protocols, and informed consent forms.

- [World Health Organization, Indigenous Peoples and Participatory Health Research](#) provides information on how research projects can be set up between Indigenous peoples and research institutions in a collaborative and ethically appropriate manner on the basis of good management practices. It outlines key principles for participatory research management, and steps in the communications process between Indigenous peoples and research institutions from the development of a research idea to negotiation of a mutually acceptable research agreement.

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[1]For the purposes of this report we use the term "Native" to refer to American Indian and Alaska Native populations.

[2]We use the term "sovereign" to refer to tribes' inherent right to self-governance as delineated by Chief Justice John Marshall in the Marshall Trilogy decisions: *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823), *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1832), and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832).