

Indigenous Outreach Strategy

National Park Service - Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program



Photo by Lance Tubinaghtewa

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Native/Indigenous Outreach Internship



Environment
for the Americas



NPS RTCA

RIVERS, TRAILS & CONSERVATION
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS-RTCA) helps community groups, nonprofits, state and local governments, and tribes plan parks and trails, conserve and improve access to rivers and natural areas, and create recreation opportunities through locally-led partnerships. The NPS-RTCA office in Texas has focused specifically on addressing the outreach conservation and outdoor recreation (COR) gaps with Native and Indigenous communities across the local and regional levels.

The RTCA office in Texas hosted interns Lance Tubinaghtewa and B. Nieves I. Vázquez to create an Indigenous Outreach Strategy by exploring the COR opportunities and challenges for sustaining partnerships with Native and Indigenous peoples in Colorado, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas. The strategic plan will provide initiative and growing recommendations for RTCA staff and beyond on how to respectfully commit to outreach and engagement with Native and Indigenous communities.

This document outlines specific and actionable goals to inspire regional action.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Acknowledging the Gap

According to the 2020 Census, Indigenous peoples are a collectively estimated population percentage of 1.76%, or 718,841(±), across the states of Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Colorado. The aforementioned internships were created out of a desire to strengthen the partnership efforts with Indigenous/Native/tribal/pueblo communities - hereafter referred to as Indigenous communities.

The gap in strengthening these efforts is addressed through drafting an Indigenous Outreach Plan, created through research in ethnography, Indigenous literature, and oral histories to identify best practices and necessary steps for NPS-RTCA outreach. The Indigenous Outreach Strategy will serve as a method of appropriate, respectful, and informed cooperation for projects in partnership with Indigenous/Native communities and the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS-RTCA). This strategy will then be implemented into RTCA's existing outreach strategies and drafted for potential policy changes at various agency and department levels. Furthermore, like all procedures, the strategy will be edited as needed by RTCA staff.

Strategic Plan

The strategic plan is built on the deep exploration of the needs that exist in the intersections of conservation, outdoor recreation, and land access in Indigenous communities. With an intensive examination of the RTCA program, the plan will teach on the significance of “context” needed to be considered for judgments on tribal wants and needs. By utilizing topics such as politics, society, economics, religion, and intellectual life while incorporating the effectiveness or lack thereof for RTCA’s past outreach in welcoming differences and diversity of tribal communities.

Through clear and effective instruction, the premiere outreach strategy plan will present the investigations of the states: Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Colorado, and include a case study for Arizona. The hope regarding this strategy is to garner experience surrounding Indigenous communities to inform the content of the plan.

Author Biographies

B. Nieves I. Vázquez served as the individual placement Native/Indigenous Outreach Coordinator Intern under the Texas Conservation Corps with American YouthWorks, a program under AmeriCorps. They are from Houston, Texas, and are a member of the Coahuiltecan community in Central Texas. Her passion for conservation work comes from her heritage, familial and personal experience in farming, and love for the land and its caretakers. They graduated with their Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Ethnic Studies and a certificate in Conflict Resolution & Peace Studies from The University of Texas at Austin.

Lance Tubinaghtewa served through the Latino Heritage Internship program. Their title was the Indigenous Outreach Coordinator intern along with Nieves. Lance is from the village of Sitsomovi on First Mesa within the Hopi Reservation. Tradition is the basis of heart Lance keeps for the outdoors, however, their extensive experience with federal land-based agencies has inspired him to seek, and create, spaces for Indigenous people as the original stewards of their ancestral lands. Currently, Lance studies Anthropology at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona.

Acknowledgments

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Thank you to Ericka Pilcher and Marcy DeMillion for helping make the internship a reality under the National Park Service and RTCA respective regions. Thank you to Dalia Dorta of the Environment For the Americas for managing the Latino Heritage Internship Program experience.

Thank you to the Indigenous community members who participated in the interview process to better inform the strategic plan.

Thank you to the National Park Service and the NPS-Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program staff that helped inform the need for the strategic plan.

DEFINITIONS AND SENTIMENTS

Definitions

Accountability - According to the Racial Equity Tools page, this refers to how “individuals and communities hold themselves to their goals and actions, and acknowledge the values and groups to which they are responsible.” This can be applied from the organizational level to the individual level and is not always about doing what’s right but responding appropriately when something has gone wrong. By taking accountability, progressive steps forward can be made to address any harm that may have been caused.

Allyship - Embodiment, practice, and action that a person takes to disrupt oppressive spaces, for example, by educating others on the realities and histories of marginalized people. Allyship is a “commitment to reducing their own complicity or collusion in the oppression of those groups and investing in strengthening their own knowledge and awareness of oppression,” according to the Racial Equity Tools page.

Autonomy - A person's ability to act on his or her own values and interests. In regards to Indigenous people, centering their autonomy grants them their personhood and ability to make decisions based on self-determination and sovereignty.

Colonization - A normalized and ongoing practice that occurs when a new group of people migrates into a territory and then takes over and controls the Indigenous groups. The settlers impose their cultural values, religions, and laws, seizing land and controlling access to resources and trade. As a result, the Indigenous people become involuntarily dependent on the settlers.

Community - For Indigenous peoples, this is another term to refer to their people or nation. This term can also refer to solidarity with Indigenous peoples who they are in close proximity to, work alongside, etc. even if they do not share cultural customs.

Consent - Approval of what is done or proposed by another. It is crucial to have the full consent of the proposed projects and ideas in order for trust to be built between parties.

Conservation - In the broader sense, means to preserve, protect, or restore the natural environment and wildlife. To many Indigenous and Native communities, the term can vary from this definition, in that conservation is not something you do to or for nature. As part of nature, Indigenous communities and their relationship to the environment is a practice that has extended beyond millennia.

Cultural Appropriation - The stealing of customs, practices, ideas, fashion, etc. of an oppressed people by anyone, though usually a dominant culture onto an oppressed one. This stealing is done for personal use, commodification, profit, etc. without respect or knowledge for its origins or value to the people it belongs to. This should not be confused with cultural appreciation, which involves the consent, autonomy, and permission of the oppressed people to share their culture with members outside of it.

Decolonization - A term that cannot be universally defined, however, some elements can be applicable across different contexts. For some Indigenous peoples, it is a means of achieving self-determination over their lands and social, political, cultural, and economic institutions. It can vary from getting their traditional lands back, to reclaiming themselves on an individual level.

Diaspora - Referring to the variety of Indigenous communities. Emphasizing differences of the individual as well as the community. As an example: perspective is expressed throughout this document.

Dispossession - Directly translated, this means to put a person or peoples out of “possession” for land, property, and other possessions. The history of dispossession in the United States crosses multiple communities, and for Indigenous peoples of the Americas, the definition can be inaccurate to represent the ideas of ownership and possession in these cultures. To be dispossessed in Indigenous history is to be violently removed from the lands you are responsible to care for and call your home. Many cultures do not see ownership over land, but rather a relationship and responsibility. Many Natives and Indigenous people in the US live away from their original homelands due to the forced dispossession seen throughout colonial history.

Environmental Justice - According to the federal government, this means “... the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.” For Indigenous communities, and other Black and people of color communities, this term can intersect with Environmental Racism, for justice in the environment is a fight against racism due to the unequal impact of climate change on these communities.

Environmental racism - Term coined and defined in “The Legacy of American

Apartheid and Environmental Racism” by Dr. Benjamin F Chavis, Jr. that came about in the time of the Civil Rights Movement, which states that environmental racism is: any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (intended or not) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color. This racism positions predominantly non-White communities to the brunt of climate disasters and health issues from environmental injustices, such as close proximity to poisoned air from power plants and undrinkable water due to oil spills, etc.

Environmentalism - A movement understood to center concern and action aimed at protecting the environment. For Indigenous peoples globally, this alone does not encompass the relationship and responsibility with their respective environments and homelands. Their care for the land existed before the term was coined due to climate change and colonialism. See Traditional Ecological Knowledge definition for a broader understanding of the care and relationship Indigenous people have with the environment.

Ethnocentrism - This is a view that centers the standards and customs of one’s own culture in formulating preconceptions of other cultures.

Eurocentrism - This is a view of the world that centers on Western Europe or “the West” as the epitome for comparison and understanding of the world. The cultural phenomenon relies on imitation of “Western values” - such as human rights, equality, democracy, and free markets - to view non-Western and non-European societies.

Federally Recognized - “A federally recognized tribe is a sovereign nation and has a government-to-government relationship with the federal government as stated in Article I, Section 8 of the US Constitution. Tribal governments and federal governments have a complicated relationship built on years of treaty-making and breaking, and Supreme Court decisions. Most significant to tribal governments is the Marshall Trilogy, a collection of three Supreme Court cases that set the standard for tribes as “domestically dependent nations” within the United States.” See also: non-federally recognized

Food Sovereignty - Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.

Cultural Genocide - The systematic erasure of the various aspects of culture including traditions, language, and sentiments. This is done in an effort to assimilate groups into the colonizing society.

Historical Trauma - The manifestation of negative emotional and physical responses from the past, and ongoing, violence perpetrated by colonialism.

Inclusion - The intentional and authentic practice of welcoming and inviting historically excluded individuals, peoples, and groups in a way that shares power.

Indian Country - The legal definition for land within “Indian” reservations.

Indigenous (vs Native American) - Both of these terms can be umbrella terms to include the original inhabitants of North America, though there are differences. “Native American” is a term used by non-Natives to identify Native communities living in North America, specifically the United States. “Indigenous” can be used internationally to define original inhabitants of colonized countries globally, generally being the most favored term. It is always respectful to be specific about the people you are referring to; use the term they use to self-identify. It is always more respectful to just ask.

Indigenous Outreach - Respectable, thoughtful, and consensual approach to Indigenous communities. This can manifest in a precise, step-by-step, conversation of a project with emphasis on clarity and transparency.

Land Acknowledgment - This is a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as the original stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. This can look like a statement acknowledging whose land you’re on and your commitment to allyship with these nations. Foremost, land acknowledgments are not enough and sometimes offensive if done incorrectly or if no value comes from them.

Land Back - The term can be described as a political and activist movement led by Indigenous and Native peoples across the world, from youth to elders. Although no singular definition can be attached to the term, it is critical to understand that the term generally refers to giving Indigenous people back their autonomy and stewardship over their land and are the prime decision-making pupils for the conservation, recreation, and stewardship of those lands. Rarely does “Land Back” ever mean mass deportation of any and all non-Natives.

Nation - “A group of Indigenous peoples who share a common language, culture, and traditional lands. Often used interchangeably with band in Canada and tribe in the US, the term nation is sometimes preferred because of the sovereign rights and independence that its meaning asserts.”

National Parks Movement - The beginning of an era where the establishment of federally held lands was put into place in the name of Western “conservation”. This historically has involved the displacement of Indigenous communities from their homelands and furthermore, perpetuates issues of access voiced by community members.

Non-federally Recognized - Describes a tribe or nation’s federal relation status, which means being only state-recognized or neither federal nor state recognized. Some tribes were affected by the Indian Termination policy, intended to eradicate and assimilate Indigenous people by terminating recognition of sovereignty.

Prejudice - According to the Racial Equity Tools page, this is a “...pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or groups toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics.”

Preservation - This is a practice that seeks to maintain the environment in pristine condition, which can be interpreted as to keep from harmful human activities. Most if not all National Parks are founded on this principle - to keep the environment free from human development other than for recreational purposes. Preservation can sometimes pose harm to Indigenous communities who hold a reciprocal relationship with the land, meaning that human interaction is absolutely dire and necessary for the health of the people and the flourishing of the environment.

Private Land - Refers to land that is not owned by the state or federal governments. Privately “owned” lands come with barriers of their own for Indigenous community access to medicines, foods, and ancestral sites.

Public Land - Refers to land that is owned by the county, state, or federal government and with the intent to have access by the public.

Pueblo - A cultural group within the Southwest region of the United States and even the Northern region of Mexico. Though this group contains similarities each tribe varies, immensely in tradition. Furthermore, traditions vary from village to village.

Repatriation - The process of returning human remains and cultural artifacts to the descendants, tribe, or nation to which it belongs.

Respectful recreation - The thoughtful appreciation of the landscape by recreationists. This can manifest in a multitude of ways but particularly involves the sentiments of Indigenous communities on that particular landscape.

Sacred Springs - This term refers to the four major springs of Central Texas in cities now called San Antonio, San Marcos, New Braunfels, and Austin. To the Coahuiltecan, these springs are called Yana Wana and hold sacred and cultural importance. Commonly, the Indigenous and Native people of present-day Texas refer to these rivers as the Sacred Springs.

Sacredness - For Indigenous peoples, can refer to a place, item, or practice holding strong sentiment beyond the language and understanding of the settler structure. Lands are a form of sacredness.

Self-Determination - According to Indian Country Today (journalism outlet), this is a term commonly expressed in discussion of Indigenous goals. This term “suggests that people with a common political and cultural organization have the right to self-government and territory.” *See also: Autonomy, Indian Country*

Sovereignty - Comes from a right of self-determination, and as a stance of autonomy within the state to be recognized as such.

Stewardship - Before the term was coined, Indigenous people across the world had a relationship with the land that centered on reciprocity, knowledge, and gratitude. To this day, Indigenous peoples are stewards of lands and take this responsibility into their day-to-day interactions.

Term (its role in Indigenous partnerships) - Due to National Park Service staff turn-over and occasional Tribal government turnover, this can interfere with the historical memory and partnership continuation between NPS/NPS-RTCA and Indigenous communities. The term refers to the amount of time in that position. When terms end, sometimes so do the promises and relationships that were made when those people were in their roles. It is important for there to be active plans of continuous engagement where promises are followed through.

Tribe - “A term most commonly used in the United States to refer to a Native American group or community that shares “a common language and culture and is recognized by the federal government.”

Turtle Island - This is the name the Lenape, Iroquois, Anishnaabe, and other Woodland

Nations gave to North America. The name comes from a story about Sky Woman. Many Indigenous people, Indigenous rights activists, and environmental activists now use the term for North America.

Western (culture) - A term that does not describe a specific group, belief, or place but rather a social and cultural norm. These social and cultural norms do not always include groups of people living in the “west” that has been colonized.

Westernized Knowledge vs Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) - Traditional Ecological Knowledge refers to the “evolving knowledge acquired by Indigenous people over millennia through direct contact with the environment.” These ways of knowing are experiences adapted into knowledge, informed by the culture and environment, as is passed from generation to generation through oral history. Westernized knowledge may downplay TEK due to it not following the “scientific method” of discovery. In reality, most westernized knowledge is barely catching up with TEK, which is the foundation for sustainable conservation and knowing when it comes to the environment.

Sentiments

The following points are meant in an attempt to explain the various attitudes surrounding subjects common with Indigenous community partnership. These ideals are understood to be built up from history and culture.

- In regards to land “ownership”: it’s Indigenous land, however, most communities will see the land as under their stewardship or responsibility. This sentiment should not be used as a point to diminish the legal title of land ownership.
 - In addition, an attitude of caretaking for the land is strong and absolutely valid in Indigenous communities. It is preferred by these communities that the proposing partner carry this same understanding.
- Indigenous communities have strongly reserved feelings for the concept of self-determination/sovereignty. This is primarily in consideration of past relationships with the federal government and private entities.
- Partnership and or collaboration with any entity can harbor feelings of apprehension. This is most prominently rooted in occurrences of tokenization, ill-intent, and insincere will to collaborate and provide Indigenous communities with what they want.
 - Furthermore, to the last point, communities have and continue to experience entities who instead of asking Indigenous communities what they want, tell them what they want. This completely sidelines the ideas of respectful outreach, consent, and self-determination.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Learning about the history of colonization in North America is commonly done from the perspective of the Doctrine of Discovery - a legal document used by colonizing nations to impose their sovereignty on Indigenous inhabitants. The Doctrine of Discovery “ensured”, from their perspective, that newly found land would come under the colonizer’s “ownership” so others could not claim it. Historically, and contemporarily, this glosses over the violent reality that exists for Indigenous peoples. Colonization continues to happen and is happening where you are reading this document. Whether the colonization was done through forced removal and displacement, deadly assimilation tactics, poisoning of land and water, or even the creation and breaking of treaties... they continue to harm Indigenous peoples across the United States and beyond.

The creation of the National Park Service and most national parks is not shy of this reality. The idea of preserving land and “wilderness” landscapes for recreation, and “conservation”, stemmed from anti-Indigenous rhetoric - that being that land must be untouched by people. In reality, Indigenous people have had sustainable relationships with the environment for over a number of millennia. The removal of Indigenous peoples caused a rippling displacement across North America in order to make way for industry such as railroads, settler communities, and the idea of a National Park. By removing the relationship Indigenous people had to the land - foraging, hunting, and other ceremonial practices - the preserved landscape could be retained for non-Indigenous people to recreate... which is all a product of seeing the land as “wild” and not as a system in which relationships existed. Although there are steps being taken to address this reality by hosting teach-ins and hiring Indigenous people to have leadership roles within the federal government and even the National Park Service, communities are still facing the violence of the aftermath.

Due to its contemporary reality, topics concerning land and natural resources are a product of colonization. The global economy spawned from colonization is based on resource extraction for profit and does not always align with Indigenous ways of living. Although there are Indigenous and Native people that do not oppose capital development, it is important to remember that communities as a whole have a right to determine engagement with such activities. Overall, there is opposition to resource and land extraction for profit from Indigenous communities due to it not aligning with cultural and spiritual tradition. The history of displacement and ethnic cleansing stemming from colonization informs the sentiments towards land and resources in the

present for Indigenous peoples.

Although the historical context will vary by tribe, nation, Pueblo, and people... it is important to go through this document with the understanding that learning about history informs the protocols in place for meaningful partnerships. It is vital to address, in some way, the impact that violence and history have had on these communities (instead of ignoring it) in order for a trusting relationship to happen.

For true progress, it is important to remember and currently realize Indigenous people for their existence despite and beyond colonization. We are more than our violent histories. We have an abundant history of culture, art, food, science, and politics - both in the past, in the present, and in the future. Recognizing Indigenous people for their existence outside of colonization is a great step in working against erasure and working towards inclusion.

METHODS & TECHNIQUE

Interviews with Native/Indigenous community members

Overview

In order to provide a holistic outreach plan, interviews were scheduled with Indigenous community members in the respective states. Because Indigenous people are not a monolith, it was inadequate for two interns of different peoples to be able to provide input representing four large and diverse states. Gathering participants was the most accessible way to access different Indigenous peoples and their diverse perspectives, especially concerning topics of conservation, stewardship, and recreation.

Strategy

Interview participants were gathered from Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Colorado through digital outreach. Mediums used to gather participants were: email, digital flyer distribution, social media, online messaging, and phone calls.

Participants expressing voluntary interest in participating in the interview were prepared with an RTCA info flyer, the interview questions, the intern biographies, and the 'call for participants' flyer prior to the interview. Interviews were scheduled through email or a scheduling website and later conducted over video and phone calls on Zoom and GoogleHangout. During the interviews, notes were taken on a GoogleForm corresponding to the questions asked. The interview was conducted in a conversational manner with the interviewers introducing themselves and setting a tone of community and welcome.

During the interview, a break or check-in was offered in between every two sections. In the RTCA Familiarity section, links to the RTCA resource page and past community projects were offered, such as Africa Town in Alabama, Indian Creek in Washington, and Little Walnut Creek in Texas.

In the last section, participants were able to offer their own questions, comments, or expectations to the interviewers. This is a vital section, as it allows the opportunity for reciprocal engagement and gathering of any feedback from Indigenous community members.

Participants were compensated with a \$50 Visa GiftCard provided through the American YouthWorks and Texas Conservation Corps offices.

Participants are kept anonymous to the public. Only Texas office RTCA staff members have access to this list and are the only ones allowed to do follow-up communications for the progress of this strategy plan.

Objectives for the interviews

The main objective for conducting interviews with Native and Indigenous community members is to gather input for the Premiere Outreach Strategy, which will serve as a method of appropriate, respectful, and informed cooperation for projects in partnership with Indigenous peoples and the RTCA program.

Further objectives

1. Make the interviewee comfortable talking to an agency and people associated with the National Park Service.
2. Get perspective from Native/Indigenous community members in varying states and cultures on topics concerning conservation, stewardship, and recreation.
3. Inform our understanding of outreach towards Native/Indigenous communities from the perspective of said communities.
4. Identify conservation, stewardship, and recreation challenges and goals in the respective Native/Indigenous communities to better commit to outreach practices.
5. Understand the complexity and varying nature from tribe to tribe, pueblo to pueblo, people to people in order to avoid the homogenization of Native/Indigenous peoples in the outreach strategy.

Interview Questions

Introductory & Grounding Questions

1. What is your name, pronouns, and the name of your community?
 - [Tribe, nation, band, pueblo, or village]
2. If applicable: Are you representing or are a part of an organization?
3. What is the role you currently have within your community?
 - Roles can be traditional (if comfortable) or otherwise

4. Do you define yourself as a member of a Federally or Non-Federally Recognized community by the US Government?

Introduction to RTCA

- NPS-RTCA is a unique federal program that supports community-led projects by leveraging resources through diverse partnerships. Though we are not a funding program or a “traditional consultant,” we align the planning, design and technical expertise of NPS staff with the skills and abilities of our project partners. Depending on the scale of the project, NPS-RTCA can invest up to four years on developing a clear direction and evolving community synergy for their project.
1. Does your community have experience with the National Park Service and/or the RTCA program? (yes/no)
 - Which one? What was it like?

Conservation and Stewardship — disclaimer: answers and details are optional to preserve sacred knowledge of communities

1. What does conservation mean to you?
2. Does this overlap or differ from your tribe/village/band/Pueblo/people? (yes/no/maybe)
3. What conservation efforts exist for your lands?
4. What does stewardship mean to you?
5. Does this overlap or differ from your tribe/village/band/Pueblo/people? (yes/no/maybe)
6. What stewardship opportunities exist for your lands?
7. Would you like to have more opportunities for conservation and stewardship for your tribe/village/band/Pueblo/people?
8. What do you think about outdoor recreation?
9. Can recreation efforts be improved upon in your

tribe/village/band/Pueblo/community?

Partnership & Project Questions

1. What would you say are the cultural and critical considerations RTCA must take before contacting your community... or in general for Indigenous communities?
2. How do you feel about outreach efforts towards Indigenous communities?
3. In what ways has outreach to your community ever had a positive impact on you or your people?
4. In what ways has outreach missed the mark, or failed to work for you or your people?
5. In reference to RTCA collaboration, can you see a favoring of projects that surround conservation, recreation, or preservation within your community?

RTCA Familiarity

1. Do you know what assistance programs RTCA offers? (yes/no/maybe)
2. Are you familiar with successful projects done in collaboration with RTCA and Indigenous communities? (yes/no/maybe)
3. Do you see yourself or your community reaching out to RTCA for support on a community project in the future? (yes/no/maybe)

Closing & End Notes

1. Do you have any comments, questions, or expectations for the interns?
2. What is your address?

Outcomes

Overall, Indigenous peoples leaned towards certain outcomes they hoped to see. There were also shared sentiments on potential collaboration with federal agencies, where there is hesitancy but hope.

Some common sentiments:

- Indigenous-led projects
- Indigenous employment
- Elders and youth should be involved in every step
- Considering traditions such as gifts, receiving, and giving
- A lot has to be addressed before outreach can successfully begin

Limitations

Due to the time availability and resources available, not every Indigenous tribe, Pueblo, nation, or peoples were reached in the respective states. The timing of the outreach could have interfered with other priorities such as COVID, summer camps, ceremonies, and resource distribution. Another limitation could be a history with the federal government that was less than positive.

Due to the timing of the interviews, not many tribal council members or community leaders and Chiefs were accessible. This resulted in more community members rather than “traditional leaders” to have been reached.

Interviews with RTCA & NPS Staff

Overview

Conducting interviews with NPS-RTCA staff allowed for a direct approach in creating the strategic plan. By gaining insight on the aspirations, goals, and missteps in partnership with Indigenous communities helped gauge experience level and what content could be provided.

Strategy

Interview participants were gathered through a “call for participants” email with connections from RTCA supervisors. The call asked for any experience level with Indigenous communities and a want to share insight on RTCA history and aspirations. Through this call, there were participants solely working with the NPS and not just NPS-RTCA staff.

Participants expressing voluntary interest in participating in the interview were prepared with an RTCA info flyer, the interview questions, the intern biographies, and the ‘call for participants’ flyer prior to the interview. Interviews were scheduled through

email or a scheduling website and later conducted over video and phone calls on Zoom and GoogleHangout. During the interviews, notes were taken on a GoogleForm corresponding to the questions asked. The interview was conducted in a conversational manner with the interviewers introducing themselves and setting a tone of community and welcome.

This strategy also allowed for staff to get to know the interns by having a virtual face-to-face with them and discuss expectations for the interns as they ventured into the strategic plan.

Interview Questions

Introductory Questions:

1. What is your title and relationship to NPS/RTCA?
2. What is your experience level involving Indigenous communities in your work?

Indigenous Partnerships:

1. How do you center dignity and respect when approaching Indigenous communities?
2. In your experience, what are general tribal perceptions of NPS (or RTCA)?
3. Based on your experience, what is NPS's history like with Indigenous people and their communities?
 - Can you provide any examples?
4. In what ways do you think Indigenous outreach can improve?
5. What are your Do's and Don'ts when doing outreach for Indigenous communities?
 - What are your Do's and Don'ts for outreach in general?
6. What do you wish you had known before interacting with Indigenous communities?

Projects:

7. Do partnership projects fall under conservation, recreation, education, or preservation?
8. What does a success story look like between NPS and Indigenous people? (examples, dates, type of project, etc)
9. Follow up: Would you change anything from this project, and why?

Interview Notes:

10. Do you have any comments, questions, or expectations for the interns?

Outcomes

Generally, RTCA staff was hopeful for the future of partnerships with Indigenous community members. Whether they had little to no experience or had worked with Indigenous community members for most of their term, they expressed having a lot to learn and a willingness to do so.

There were instances when staff that had been with RTCA or the NPS for decades had no experience or direct relation with Indigenous communities, which was alarming considering some of them lived in states with dense populations of Indigenous peoples. This showed the true need for outreach to be implemented with Indigenous communities.

All of the interviews helped inform the content provided in the strategic plan.

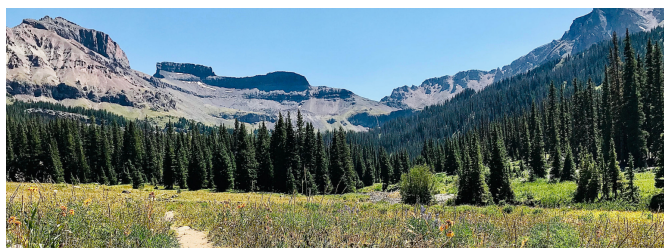
Limitations

Staff that volunteered to be interviewed were either new staff or staff who have had more experience with Indigenous partnerships and wanted to share their experience. By not having a more diverse pool of RTCA staff to learn from, we were unable to see the full extent of sentiment and experience from staff. This resulted in having mostly staff that was supportive of this project, which could affect the outcomes.

COMMUNITIES

Tasked with interviewing community members from states within the Intermountain Region and creating an outreach strategy - knowing the great variety of Indigenous communities in those states - was challenging. Indigenous communities are not a monolith. One of the fears was homogenizing a plethora of ideals, lands, and people within those communities. Caution needed to be exercised to a high degree.

We inquired with our networks, established contacts from our supervisors in the RTCA program, and social media. Networks were a result of our individual histories spent in the conservation field and community aide work. Organizations like the Conservation Legacy and Indigenous Cultures Institute were our initial steps in contacting persons within our networks. The heavy inquiry was provided by both groups. Specifically, a person at the Indigenous Cultures Institute was curious what sort of benefits a participant might receive from their interview with us. This impacted us deeply and influenced our inquiry and actions for subsequent interviews. Whilst we as interns consulted our personal contacts, we were also aided by the networks of our supervisors. Contacts from communities like the Penateka Comanche and the Alabama Coushatta were shared. Lastly, we used social media to reach out to individuals. We posted our flyers to three social media sites: Facebook; Twitter; and Instagram.



CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS:

interview on Indigenous communities,
conservation, recreation, and the RTCA program

ARE YOU INDIGENOUS AND HAVE AN OPINION ON RESPECTFUL OUTREACH STRATEGIES IN THE STATES OF NM, TX, CO, OR OK?	The Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program is seeking the input from Indigenous individuals for a proper outreach strategy. Ideas to be centered for this interview will be conservation and recreation on your lands. Any input will aid in representing the priorities and commitments in Native and Indigenous communities for the Indigenous Outreach Strategy Plan. Your participation is incredibly valuable.
Interview Details 30min-1hr of your time - Topics: respectful outreach, conservation and recreation projects - Compensation for your time and input	Contact us to participate or to learn more! LANCE TUBINAGHTEWA LTUBINAGHTEWA@GMAIL.COM NIEVES VAZQUEZ BVAZQUEZ@NPS.GOV



On RTCA: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/whatwedo.htm>

After having consulted our networks, our supervisors, and our social media accounts we were able to have a tremendous inquiry. Instagram was the platform where we had the most shares and interactions with followers of our separate profiles. On one profile, shares of the post on a person's stories stayed within the single-digit number, while 30 separate persons saved the flyer, potentially for later inquiry. The results were similar regarding our Facebook accounts. The post was shared, likes were given, praise as young Indigenous folks taking up this responsibility was had. On both platforms, there was even information sharing from prominent organizations like the Indigenous Cultures Institute here in central Texas.

As previously mentioned, we took advantage of the contacts of our superiors and ourselves for potential interviewees. This preliminary course of action seemed most fruitful to our endeavor. Eight Indigenous persons, which was more than half of the final interview pool, were found throughout the networks available to us. The other half comes from social media inquiries. The Indigenous communities spanned throughout the states desired. Those being Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and New Mexico. The following are the names of communities where members were from or in community with:

- Irritilas
- Laguneros
- Coahuiltecan
- Zacatecas
- Tohono O'odtham
- Tepehuan
- Guachichil - Chichimeca
- Diné
- Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo
- Alabama Coushatta
- Zuni
- Cheyenne
- Arapaho

Their homelands either continue to be in or span through the aforementioned states. It also should be mentioned that there are numerous tribes who were removed, or moved to areas as a form of extermination by the U.S. Government. Contemporarily, Indigenous individuals are not regulated to their reservations or lands. We interviewed a Tohono O'odtham person (a tribe of the southern region in Arizona) who lived in Oklahoma. Some individuals came from communities not federally recognized but were actually state recognized. Others were simply from the lands their people had inhabited for millennia.

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

DO

- Do approach Indigenous communities with respect
 - listen, step back, take criticism, be open to making mistakes,
- Do encourage the protection of land and habitats
 - centering Indigenous and Native people over economic benefit
- Do say “thank you” if you are corrected on terminology, etc
- Do recognize the diversity and complexity across different nations, tribes, pueblos, and community (NOT A MONOLITH)
- Do approach Indigenous communities with honesty and full detail of what you wish to accomplish with their blessings
- Do ensure the sovereignty of a nation is kept and respected
- Do invite elders and community members to events and meetings while respecting any hesitancy that may arise

DON'T

- Don't generalize Indigenous worldviews
- Don't assume worldviews follow a similar trajectory, some may be entirely different
- Don't call Indigenous and Native peoples “Indian,” “Savage,” “Red skins,” “Eskimo,” “Squaw”
- Don't refer to a meeting or gathering as a “Powwow” if it is not explicitly so
- Don't refer to animals, people, or things as your “spirit animal”
- Do not lightly claim that you have Native American heritage
- Don't call regalia or dancewear a “costume”
- Don't refer to Indigenous communities in the possessive, such as “America's Native Peoples, etc”

Who and how to contact

Before approaching Indigenous communities it should be made sure that all objectives of a successful communication strategy are clear to the approaching individual. A complete and understood project objective for the approaching team should be presented to the community, with room to grow or change when the host community provides their input.

There are opportunities for success in contacting tribal council members, but recognize and prioritize the potential for successful collaborations with a community member as a point of contact. Not relying on tribal council allows for more community involvement and trust, as well as the potential for partnerships with non-federally recognized tribes that do not have government council in the federal sense.

Start locally and branch out by doing research and looking on social media for Indigenous tribes, Pueblos, nations, and peoples to contact.

How to approach with good intention¹

Step 1: Be critical of any motivations when coming into contact

- Q: Does my interest derive from the fact that an issue is currently “buzzing” or trending?
- Q: Does my interest stem from the fact that the issue or collaboration will meet quotas or increase chances of funding or economic revenue?
- Q: Does my involvement take away the agency for the movement or project for Indigenous peoples?
- Q: Am I doing this to feed my ego?

Step 2: Start learning

- Learn about the land you are on, how long you have been there, and what that means for Native and Indigenous peoples who it belongs to
- Study the DO's and DONT's provided before contacting Indigenous peoples
 - Ensure that the consulted resource is trusted
- Study the list of definitions provided

¹ Swiftwolfe, Dakota. “Indigenous Ally Toolkit.”

https://reseau.mtnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Ally_March.pdf, March 2019.

Step 3: Act accordingly to allyship and true collaboration

- Acknowledge that you are seen as a guest on this land, and may be seen as a “settler” but that does not diminish any opportunity for collaboration and restoration. Do not be afraid to make mistakes. It is better to start the collaboration process than to leave Indigenous communities out of the project.
- Recognize that multiple nations exist and they have their differences that should be respected. Ask what that pueblo or community would like from you instead of assuming what they want.
- Respect any cultural protocols and traditions. A direct line of communication should be established with Indigenous leaders, elders, organizations, and even youth. This will ensure trust and familiarity.

How to: Introductions

Regarding Projects:

1. Present the project itself in full detail
 - What is the proposed idea and in what way can Indigenous communities be involved?
 - Project timeline
 - What is the project’s objective and/or final outcome?

Questions we could ask:

1. How does the Indigenous community expect to participate?
2. How can the Indigenous community’s participation/input be better facilitated?
3. What are the Indigenous community’s wishes for the project?

Introductory Email:

The introductory email should first include who the project partner is. Indigenous communities will be incredibly wary of any “outsider” organizations, so clearly stating who you are exactly is the first step to a successful partnership.

- Ex: Hello, My name is Jane from the AZBT. The AZBT is a collaborative effort between X, Y, and Z. These partners wish to extend an invitation to participate in the AZBT to your community.

Secondly, the intro email will cover the project goals first. We believe that goals should be laid out in a simple fashion. In this email, it should also be stated that a 15 minute phone call can be given at no commitment if they wish to learn more and hear from a person directly. This will give room for goals to be further explained in the follow-up email, as well as provide elaboration on the specific step-by-step objectives.

Follow-Up Email:

Explain the steps in involvement, especially after the initial phone call.

Explain the details of the goals and objectives of the partnership. Once done, questions of how involvement from these communities can be done will arise. Explaining what that can look like will be important for the next steps of involvement. However, it should not be forgotten that the end product will be the Indigenous community's wishes for a project on their lands.

Successful Partnership

Communities, in general, are going to be wary of “outsiders” coming in and proposing projects. Questions of benefits to the community and potential hazards will arise. Clearly explain ALL of the aforementioned and follow up with inquiries posed at all levels. Successful partnerships have an opportunity to be showcased but not tokenized. Indigenous communities are not all the same, so it may prove useful to create a personalized strategy for each community as well as provide examples.

RECOMMENDATIONS + STRATEGIC DIRECTION

In order to make the first step in partnerships with Indigenous communities, it is important to center the commitment of moving beyond being well-intentioned. There are many actions of well-intentioned individuals and organizations that have caused more harm than good when conducting outreach to Indigenous communities.

A successful partnership can be a slow process, but one with good outcomes if done correctly. Below are some recommended first steps.

1. Learn

- a. Whose land are you on?
 - b. What Indigenous people live and gather near you?
 - c. Have you read works by Indigenous authors?
 - d. Have you reviewed the best practices guidelines and the glossary in this strategic plan?
- 2. Build relationship
 - a. Attend events hosted by Indigenous neighbors that welcome outsiders
 - b. Invite Indigenous communities to events without expecting unpaid labor in return
 - c. Provide paid opportunities for Indigenous people to get involved or familiarize themselves with the services
 - d. Listen and learn outside of work capacity - especially with Indigenous people
- 3. Build trust
 - a. Provide honest and transparent information in first encounters
 - b. Avoid hollow promises at all costs
 - c. Take active meeting notes that are shared and accessible by everyone
 - d. Compensate and thank for labor provided when applicable
- 4. Act
 - a. Walk the talk - embody the commitment to Indigenous partnership by taking action outside of the workplace or work responsibilities
 - b. Create employable opportunities for Indigenous people
 - c. Support Indigenous projects and movements existing outside of partnerships
 - d. Advocate for and sustain Indigenous leadership in partnerships
 - e. Commit to showing up when promised and being held accountable when shown to be wrong - these commitments are a practice
 - f. Take your learning and action into your own hands - do not expect Indigenous people to walk you through every step

Strategic Direction

- Learn whose land you're on.
 - If you do not know where to start, go to <https://native-land.ca/>
- Diversify your contacts.
 - At first instinct, one goes to leadership titles and tribal government officials to establish a point of contact. You can start there, and be open to redirecting your contact if there is no response. Even if there is a response,

openly ask if there is someone in the community willing to step in as a point of contact, especially if the person with the title has many commitments.

- Social media is an avenue to reach community members doing work locally. Look for youth organizations or centers. These are spaces filled with people who may have more time to commit as points of contact for partnership building.
- Update your progress.
 - Have a reliable online presence outlining and addressing the progress of Indigenous outreach in order to see improvement and keep track of partnerships being created.
 - Have a private map and document outlining outreach progress to better set goals and track the areas being reached.
- Be mindful of language and colonial expectations.
 - Do not start outreach by introducing your goals or what you want to get out of this partnership. Let the relationship grow naturally by introducing yourself and the successful work that has been done. Acknowledge the community for their own projects and successes and ask to have a casual conversation to build that partnership.
 - Many staff members are working at full capacity - be honest about your time so Indigenous communities can be honest about theirs.
 - Address the community by their name - avoid general terms.
 - Use accessible language and avoid stigma.
- Follow up.
 - Constantly communicate with the contacts before, during, and after a project.
 - Avoid one-time contacts, especially if you have received what you asked for from the Indigenous community.
- Develop a custom strategy and agreement with the community to best fit the goals and needs of each party.
 - Write a formal commitment plan establishing a mutual understanding of what the capacity of the RTCA is and what the goals of the Indigenous community are before venturing into a project.
 - Create a schedule for meetings, timelines for goals to be met, and when the commitment plan needs to be revisited by both parties.
 - Incorporate successful project planning into this custom strategy to ensure practices that have already worked for the organization.

- Invest in the community.
 - Hire staff from Indigenous communities to work on these partnerships.
 - Continue to build on the strategic plan through trial and error and hiring Indigenous staff to commit to its growth.
- Trust in the process.
 - Lean into the uncomfortable process of learning something new or venturing on a new path.
 - Embrace being wrong by thanking those who correct you and teach you. Implement what you learned into moving forward and continuing the process.
 - Allow for timelines to fluctuate in order for the foundation of genuine trust and relationship to form.
 - Trust and relationships can be slow and confusing, but greatly rewarding.
 - Don't give up!

IMPLEMENTATION + ACCOUNTABILITY

A Living Document

In order for implementation to be successful and accountability to be held, this document must exist as a living one. It is subject to change and grows with the needs of staff and Indigenous communities. Strategy plans can alter depending on tribe, Pueblo, nation, or community being spoken to. Not every guideline will fit. Not every recommendation will succeed. By keeping note of these processes, we can move towards a comprehensive strategy plan that adapts to the changing social climate and needs for collaboration.

Implementation

Having a dedicated person or team that solely focuses on executing intentional, respectful outreach is a key to successful implementation. Having a short-staffed, non-Indigenous team do both the learning, the implementation, and the execution is a sure way to making mistakes that could be avoided and have a lasting negative impact on the Indigenous community.

Properly credit and acknowledge the Indigenous people for their knowledge and time. When presenting or implementing the strategy plan, give honor and thanks to the work the Indigenous people put into making it possible. Do not claim work as your own, especially when it was vital to your learning stage. This ensures that the work is done in

a transparent and respectful way, which builds trust.

Actively find opportunities to “pass the mic” to Indigenous people at events, meetings, and workshops by centering and hiring them to be present. Decisions cannot be made for Indigenous people without them being in the room.

When conducting outreach, prioritize that Indigenous people have control and access to their own information, knowledge, experiences, and stories. If any of that is missing, retract from the project and strategize to do so. Be transparent in your capacity to fulfill any goals - avoid hollow promises at all costs for the sake of yourself and the community.

Accountability

Establish a task force that can center on publicly updating the progress of Indigenous outreach holds all staff and participants accountable.

Routinely discuss amongst staff what goals need to be met and by when concerning outreach.

Have an open mode of communication for feedback to be received by Indigenous community members to RTCA staff in order for constant growth to be met.

Have internal workshops where staff can learn together and ask questions together for there to be an inter-accountability to each other.

Commit to the life-long learning process. We do not know everything and cannot be expected to do so. We can only start somewhere and continue the journey together.

SUMMARY

The histories, realities, and strategies for steps forward presented in this document serve as an accessible direction for Indigenous partnership with the RTCA and NPS. This document will help create meaningful relationships that challenge tradition in agencies and the status-quo for protocol.

Before rushing to take direction, sit with the information. For any questions, please contact the RTCA Texas office at RTCA_Apps_IMR@nps.gov. To contact the interns, please email ltubinaghtewa@gmail.com or biancaisabelivazquez@gmail.com.

RECOMMENDED READS

NONFICTION

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *"All the Real Indians Died Off": And 20 Other Myths About Native Americans*

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*

Nick Estes, *Our History Is The Future*

Dina Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long As Grass Grows*

J. Kehaulani Kauanui, *Speaking of Indigenous Politics: Conversations With Activists, Scholars, and Tribal Leaders*

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*

Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*

Winona LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming*

Lauren Redniss, *Oak Flat: A Fight for Sacred Land in the American West*

Sara Sinclair (edited by), *How We Go Home: Voices From Indigenous North America*

Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*

FICTION / POETRY / MEMOIR

Shonda Buchanan, *Black Indian*

Joy Harjo, *An American Sunrise*

Joy Harjo (edited by), *When The Light Of The World Was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*

Carole Lindstrom, *We Are Water Protectors*

Tommy Orange, *There There*

Terese Marie Mailhot, *Heart Berries*

David Heska Wanbli Weiden, *Winter Counts*

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