



TRIBAL CULTURAL AFFAIRS

TRIBAL CULTURAL AFFAIRS supports Washington Tribal communities as they expand, enhance, or create space for art and culture in ways that are respectful and responsive to each community's needs.

WORKING WITH WASHINGTON TRIBES AND NATIONS

This is a partial list and is not all-inclusive of Cultural, Tribal, and Indigenous community standards.

Tribal and Indigenous Basics

Each Tribe and Nation has its own history and culture. To know the history and culture of a Tribe or Nation, it is appropriate to do some research by exploring their website, attending events open to the public, asking respectful questions, and keeping a positive learning attitude.

Expect that each Tribe or Nation will be different than others you may know. Assume you will need to learn about each Tribe or Nation.

Relationships

Building relationships is important and takes time. You will need to make a commitment to be in relationship with a community. Here are some activities to consider when building a relationship:

- Volunteer at a community event.
- Attend a community event that is open to the public.
- Help with a community project.
- Offer to work alongside and in support of the community.

Tribal and Indigenous Governments

Tribal and Indigenous elected officials always outrank you. They are leaders of a Nation and government, much like the President or Governor. Keep the following guidance in mind when meeting with Tribal and Indigenous elected officials:

- It is appropriate to use their title (check the website for their title: some may use Chair, Chairman, Chairwoman, President, Councilman, Senator, or other titles).
- Tribal and Indigenous elected officials should always be allowed to speak first.
- Always address the highest ranked official with any questions or comments unless they have given someone else the authority for the meeting.



New paddles made for the Makah Cultural and Research Center. Artists: Brian Parker (paddles), Ross Jimmicum and Elizabeth Bain (design and painting) Photo by Mary Jane Ides. August 2024.



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Events

- At events, only shake the hand of a person who initiates the hand shake (a hard hand shake may be seen as a display of power or dominance).
- Always ask before taking photos.
- Follow the lead of others:
 - If they stand back, do the same.
 - If they bow their head when a leader approaches, do the same.
 - Clap only if others clap.

Communicating with Tribes

- Building rapport and trust is critical. This process takes time.
- Learn how to properly pronounce the Tribe or Nation's name.
- Language matters. Be aware of offensive terminology (such as "pow wow" to mean a meeting, and casual use of terms like "spirit animal" or "war paint" and phrases like *low man on the totem pole*).
- Ask how each person prefers to communicate (Teams, Zoom, phone, email—only offer in person if you are committed to travel).
- When leaving a voicemail: keep it short, enunciate, and provide your phone number at the beginning of your message.

In-person Meetings

- Always be on time or a little early.
- Be prepared to wait.
- Be flexible.
- If you are at a Tribal meeting, wait to be introduced before speaking.
- Never request to be moved up on the meeting agenda to accommodate your schedule.

Respecting Spirituality and Ceremonies

It is best to not make assumptions about belief systems. Specific practices such as ceremonies, prayers, and protocols vary among Indigenous peoples and communities. Many Indigenous beliefs and practices are considered sacred and are not to be shared publicly or with others outside of the community.

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