



# TOOLKIT FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CONSERVATION

First Edition, June 2023



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# ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

As fellow practitioners, scholars, and students, we thank you for including this Toolkit as part of your journey toward meaningful engagement with Indigenous Peoples in conservation. We know these practices take time and experience to hone, and that no Toolkit will be able to provide a step-by-step instruction manual. Our intention is to offer some core context, values, and considerations, all of which we hope will support you wherever you are in your journey.



## INTENDED AUDIENCE

This toolkit is intended to support students, faculty, and conservation practitioners who desire to work towards meaningful and sustained engagement with Indigenous Peoples in conservation. We hope that this Toolkit provides an entry point for engaging in this process and creating positive change within each person's sphere of influence.

The audience that will most benefit from this Toolkit are those that desire to maximize their impact through a truly collaborative approach that includes shared learning, reciprocity, accountability, and a commitment to relationships.

As you read through each section, you will find **Guiding Questions** for learning and action. We recommend you use these to reflect on your practice, things that might be holding you back, topics that might be uncomfortable, and how you might move through discomfort toward a more collaborative future. We also provide a Glossary for understanding the nuances in talking about Indigenous Peoples respectfully. Words bolded in **green** are discussed in this section.

**The four sections of this Toolkit are designed to help guide your thinking, actions, and the ways in which you might approach your engagement strategy:**

1

We first help you acknowledge and prepare for cultural differences by presenting **Guiding Values and Principles** we all need to understand for effective engagement across different worldviews and contexts.

2

We then outline some **Legal Context and Background** as an initial framework for your engagement strategy; this section emphasizes how **Indigenous Peoples** and communities are **rights holders** that are fundamentally different from other **stakeholders**.

3

Next, we outline some of the **Barriers and Pitfalls** that stand in the way of doing this work, and provide ideas and considerations for addressing, avoiding, and/or overcoming these.

4

These all lead us to recommend an engagement model of Listen, Let Go, and Reciprocate, rooted in shared learning, reciprocity, accountability, and a commitment to relationships described in the 5 Foundations for Meaningful Engagement in Conservation.

# AUTHOR'S STATEMENT & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Toolkit was collaboratively written by Gemara Gifford, Special Projects Coordinator, and Allison Brody, Associate Director of Learning from the Center of Collaborative Conservation between November 2022–July 2023 with funding support from Colorado State University's Equity and Inclusion Network (EIN).

Significant contributions to the toolkit conceptualization and content, tone, and language were made by several individuals including Arielle Quintana, John Sanderson, as well as CCC Fellows from cohorts 11, 12, and 13 who participated in virtual and in-person workshops on meaningful engagement with Indigenous Peoples and communities in conservation. To learn more about the CCC Fellows program and see a full list of CCC Fellows, please visit our website: [collaborativeconservation.org/learn/fellows-program/](https://collaborativeconservation.org/learn/fellows-program/).

The authors also sought feedback from University faculty, conservation practitioners, and graduate students with significant lived experience and professional application of meaningful engagement strategies with American Indian and Alaska Native Nations as well as Indigenous Peoples of the U.S. territories and internationally. These reviewers included Dr. Sara Bombaci, James Calabaza, Dr. Dominique David-Chavez, Tamara Layden, Dr. Aireona Bonnie Raschke, and Dr. Caridad Souza. We also want to thank Monica McQuail and Roxie Stricker for their work on graphic design and formatting.

We would like to thank all of these contributors to the Toolkit for their time, attention, passion, and interest in strengthening meaningful engagement in conservation. We acknowledge that the development of this Toolkit is a continual process, and not an end goal, and plan to revisit and revise the Toolkit as we continue to receive feedback on its application. While our attempt was to include a wide array of Native and Indigenous voices from a transnational perspective, we acknowledge that there are many people and voices that were not able to be included in this version of the Toolkit.

For additional resources on this topic, we have listed recommended reading throughout the document as well as a references list in. For any questions, please contact: [conserve@colostate.edu](mailto:conserve@colostate.edu).





# I. INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE

There is an increasing need for recognizing **Indigenous sovereignty** when defining successful conservation outcomes. Even when conservation focuses on a “do no harm” approach towards Indigenous Peoples and communities, the contributions, perspectives, and resulting benefits are often not taken into consideration, thereby increasing social and environmental inequities (e.g., Abede et al., 2020, Halpern et al., 2013). When those affected by environmental decisions are excluded from the decision-making process, opportunities to collaboratively solve problems in new, innovative, and empowering ways are limited. To help fill this gap, in this Toolkit we seek to build a roadmap where conservation practitioners can support solutions which are driven by community expertise and needs.

Universities, government agencies, industry, and non-profit institutions have often played a role in perpetuating top-down conservation designed to benefit dominant perspectives and economic structures. In September 2019, the Center for Collaborative Conservation organized a workshop on *Unsettling Collaborative Conservation Through a Decolonizing Lens: Engagement and Collaboration With Indigenous Peoples And Communities* (Fernández-Giménez et al. 2019). The discussions at this workshop pointed to “the need for a transformative paradigm shift within academic institutions like Colorado State University that touches all aspects of the Land Grant mission.” An important aspect of this paradigm shift includes participatory decision-making approaches to conservation, such as collaborative conservation. Such approaches utilize practices that center human well-being, promote equitable participation, and acknowledge existing power dynamics within conservation efforts.





For collaborative approaches to be successful, they require a specialized suite of skills and strategies to accomplish. This was exemplified during the 2022 Western Collaborative Conservation Network's Confluence, which convened 120 people interested in building the skills and practices required for successful collaborative conservation. Confluence 2022 featured speakers and stories of **cross-cultural engagement** and collaboration. During the sessions led by Dr. Shane Doyle (Apsáalooke), Kristen Kipp (Amskapi Piikani), Lailani Upham (Amskapi Piikani), Marsha Small (Tsistsis'tas Setna), Aaron Brien (Apsáalooke), and Michael Black Wolf (A'aninin and Néhinaw), insights and lessons learned from years of collaborative work were shared, including the speakers' experiences and perspectives on successful collaborations.

Many Confluence participants reported that these conversations were a key takeaway that stood out to them, with one person remarking that **“the difficult but critical conversations about engaging with Indigenous [Peoples] were at times raw and uncomfortable, sometimes moving, and sometimes genuinely funny. Big takeaways were building trust takes time; don't check the box; aim for authentic change; and always bring your good heart to collaborative engagement, not just your good mind.”** Overall, participants noted the need for Indigenous engagement that focused on creative and innovative approaches for making change, consider logistical challenges for agency collaborations between **Native Nations** and Federal, State, or nonprofit agencies, and highlight the role of Indigenous leadership in enhancing social and environmental outcomes.



In 2021, the White House Office of Science and Technological Policy issued a Memorandum to U.S. Federal Departments and Agencies on the inclusion of **Indigenous Knowledges** in Federal decision making (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OSTP-CEQ-IK-Guidance.pdf>). The Memo acknowledges “the valuable contributions of the Indigenous Knowledge that **Tribal Nations** and Indigenous Peoples have gained and passed down from generation to generation” and reaffirms the United States’ commitment to growing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples. By the end of 2023, Federal agencies will be required to show how they have appropriately included Indigenous Knowledge[s] in Federal research, policies, and decision making. Doing so will have positive impacts for all communities engaged through collaborative conservation.

By creating the Toolkit to present these learnings in an organized and applicable way, we seek to improve engagement and shared decision-making with **American Indian and Alaska Natives** (USA), **Native Hawaiians** (USA), **First Nations** (Canada), and **Indigenous Peoples** and communities worldwide. Leadership by the original stewards of the land will continue to provide significant contributions to conservation (past, current & future) and improve our collective impact.

Please visit the Glossary (on page 40) for a starting point in understanding the nuances of Indigenous identity, inherent sovereignty, legal, and political status.



## ABOUT THE CCC

The Center for Collaborative Conservation (CCC) was established in CSU's Warner College of Natural Resources in 2008 to support and promote collaborative conservation efforts led by CSU students and faculty, as well as practitioners throughout Colorado, the American West, and the world. We do this through training, coordinating and facilitating networks and collaborations, and providing a variety of services and resources.

The CCC envisions a resilient world where diverse people work together to conserve nature and build healthy communities. The CCC's mission is to build the capacity of organizations, communities, and future leaders to achieve conservation impact, while applying Colorado State University's world-class research and education. One of the CCC's foundational values is honoring and embracing natural and human diversity, including Indigenous perspectives. The CCC aspires to take actions that reflect that individuals and communities matter.

## CSU LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CSU recognizes the history of land-grant universities and the costs to Native Americans, acknowledging that reconciliation with Native people is a critical part of our future. Our land acknowledgement can be found at:

<https://landacknowledgment.colostate.edu/>.

Based on the recommendations of the Native American Advisory Council, CSU is also taking steps to move beyond the land acknowledgement to improve the retention and recruitment of Native American students and to strengthen its relationships with Tribal communities and Indigenous and Native Peoples. In 2023, CSU hired its first Assistant Vice President for Indigenous and Native American Affairs, a position dedicated to advancing university initiatives and programs that are responsive to the needs of Tribal and Indigenous communities. Faculty members and Extension specialists are working actively with Tribes, for example to co-produce research and lead educational programs for Tribal Youth.

# GUIDING VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

There are norms and values that are critical to understand and acknowledge for engaging across cultures, worldviews, and contexts. We at the CCC recognize the immense diversity across the thousands of distinct **Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples** worldwide, and in doing so we offer a few guiding values that can support conservation practitioners in building an understanding of Tribal and Indigenous worldviews (adapted from Tsosie et. al 2022):

- **Relationality** | The ways in which individuals relate to each other and with the environment. An important component of relationality is an understanding of Indigenous value systems which have been passed down for generations, and are reinforced through time, attention, balance, and reciprocity.
- **Interconnectedness** | Everything in the universe is connected, and each decision impacts others. In this way, humans are not separate from or above—but rather interdependent with—others and the natural world. Relationships are affected by human action as well as in-action.
- **Reciprocity** | Giving back is a core principle of living life in a good way. In healthy, reciprocal relationships, actions are made with the expectation that there is both giving and receiving. In **Indigenous land stewardship**, humans are not separate from or inherently harmful to the environment, but instead have a deep responsibility to the land.
- **Relevance** | Especially in research activities, Indigenous Peoples assert and endorse efforts which result in positive, tangible impacts on people’s lives, and which support current priorities and initiatives of Indigenous ways of living and knowing. Moreover, the measures of success of any effort must stem from the voices and lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

Which Guiding Values and Principles stand out for you? Reflect on your own cultural values and the roles they play in cross-cultural collaboration. What are some strengths that your cultural frame brings to the table? What are some challenges? How might you use these Guiding Values and Principles to help build a relationship?



## II. LEGAL CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

When engaging with any new partner, it is hard to underestimate the importance of history and context. Explicitly recognizing a partners' history—including their cultural background, relationships, and prior experiences—is a form of engagement. It helps to establish relationships that can authentically align with the partners' needs and values. It sets the stage for honest and open communication while creating a foundation of understanding, respect, and growth.

As inherent **rights holders**, many Indigenous communities have legal statuses that are different from other stakeholders or partners. For example, Native Nations in the U.S. have a government-to-government relationship with the United States; a political status which makes it legally incorrect to lump Indigenous Peoples and Native Nations in with the general public or as another stakeholder. Two examples of this legal reality are the United States Federal Trust Responsibility to Tribes, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (**UNDRIP**) (United Nations 2007) — both which ascertain the unique and long-held relationships that Indigenous Peoples have with their lands, and which reinforces Indigenous sovereignty. Understanding how political and legal contexts will affect your engagement strategy is an important aspect of this Toolkit. Thus, we begin by exploring different aspects of Indigenous engagement and some implications for how we define community.



## WHAT IS INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT IN COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION?

Numerous bodies of evidence demonstrate how Indigenous Peoples “have pioneered sustainable land management and climate adaptation for thousands of years” (United Nations 2023). While known to Indigenous conservation practitioners, only recently have conservation nonprofits, federal and state natural resource agencies, and academics begun to acknowledge the relationships and **Knowledges** that Indigenous Peoples have with the land.

As well, the field of conservation has a legacy of harm towards Indigenous communities in the U.S. and worldwide. In the case of the so-called American West, the U.S. justified westward expansion in the name of “progress” and environmental preservation through the notion of Manifest Destiny, a policy that resulted in the attempted genocide of Indigenous Peoples, the dispossession of their lands, and in many cases, the severing of long-held relationships to place (David-Chavez, D.M. and Layden, 2022).

Collaborative conservation should result in partners working together in a culturally respectful manner to co-create actionable solutions to complex issues. In the case of Indigenous engagement, this happens within the context of this history of harm, mistrust, and denial, and taking the lead from Indigenous practitioners, **Elders**, and **Knowledge Holders**. Bringing awareness to this history and making progress towards meaningful engagement requires understanding current contexts and legal parameters, as well as time and resources committed to building trust and authentic relationships.



# FEDERAL RECOGNITION OF AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES

There are legal considerations that are key to understanding the history, context, and dimensions of possible engagement with Indigenous Peoples in conservation. For example, there are currently 574 federally recognized **American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Nations** in the United States (<https://www.usa.gov/indian-tribes-alaska-native>). For these Nations, there are constitutional and legal mandates that require federal and state agencies to comply with sustained and meaningful **tribal consultation** processes in natural resource management.

Many organizations and agencies are unaware of the basic legal and community protocols in place, while others go above and beyond minimal consultation requirements. Non-Indigenous practitioners should actively seek to learn about the AIAN Nations in their region, as well as current and prior collaborations their agency or organization has developed before starting a new collaboration from scratch.



Photo by Jose Chalit and Treston Chee, Trees, Water & People



# INHERENT SOVEREIGNTY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE UNITED STATES WITHOUT FEDERAL RECOGNITION

In addition to the 574 current Federally-recognized Tribes in the United States, there are 63 current **State-recognized Tribes** (<https://narf.org/nill/triballaw/directories.html>). While recognized by a state government, the U.S. Federal Trust responsibility is not honored, which is also true for the many other Nations and Peoples that are unrecognized by the U.S., including **Native Hawaiians** and the **Indigenous Peoples of Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and American Samoa**. Conservation agencies, organizations, and academic institutions should always seek to understand the holistic picture of the Indigenous Peoples present in their area, and delve into their histories and long-held relationships with the land.



“INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE THE RIGHT TO MAINTAIN AND STRENGTHEN THEIR DISTINCTIVE SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR TRADITIONALLY OWNED OR OTHERWISE OCCUPIED AND USED LANDS, TERRITORIES, WATERS AND COASTAL SEAS AND OTHER RESOURCES AND TO UPHOLD THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES TO FUTURE GENERATIONS IN THIS REGARD.”  
(UNDRIP, ARTICLE 25).

# INHERENT SOVEREIGNTY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES WORLDWIDE

When considering the legal context of Indigenous Peoples globally, it is important to know whether they are formally recognized by the state, and if so, how. For example, Guatemala is home to 24 distinct Indigenous groups representing over 50% of Guatemala's population of 15 million people—making Guatemala the 2nd highest Indigenous population in Latin America. However, the State of Guatemala does not formally recognize Indigenous communities as sovereign Nations or Peoples. Therefore, Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala must constantly fight for their inherent rights, sovereignty, recognition, and existence. This is important context for any potential partner to recognize and acknowledge.

When working with any Indigenous community, one of the best strategies is to first ask them how they identify themselves. It is also important to learn about land tenure, ownership, and the ways they assert their sovereignty, especially in cases where they are unrecognized by their governments, have faced a history of displacement, and where there are regular instances of land dispossession.



“INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION. BY VIRTUE OF THAT RIGHT THEY FREELY DETERMINE THEIR POLITICAL STATUS AND FREELY PURSUE THEIR ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT.”  
(UNDRIP, ARTICLE 3).



# DEFINING “COMMUNITY” IN YOUR CONSERVATION PROJECT

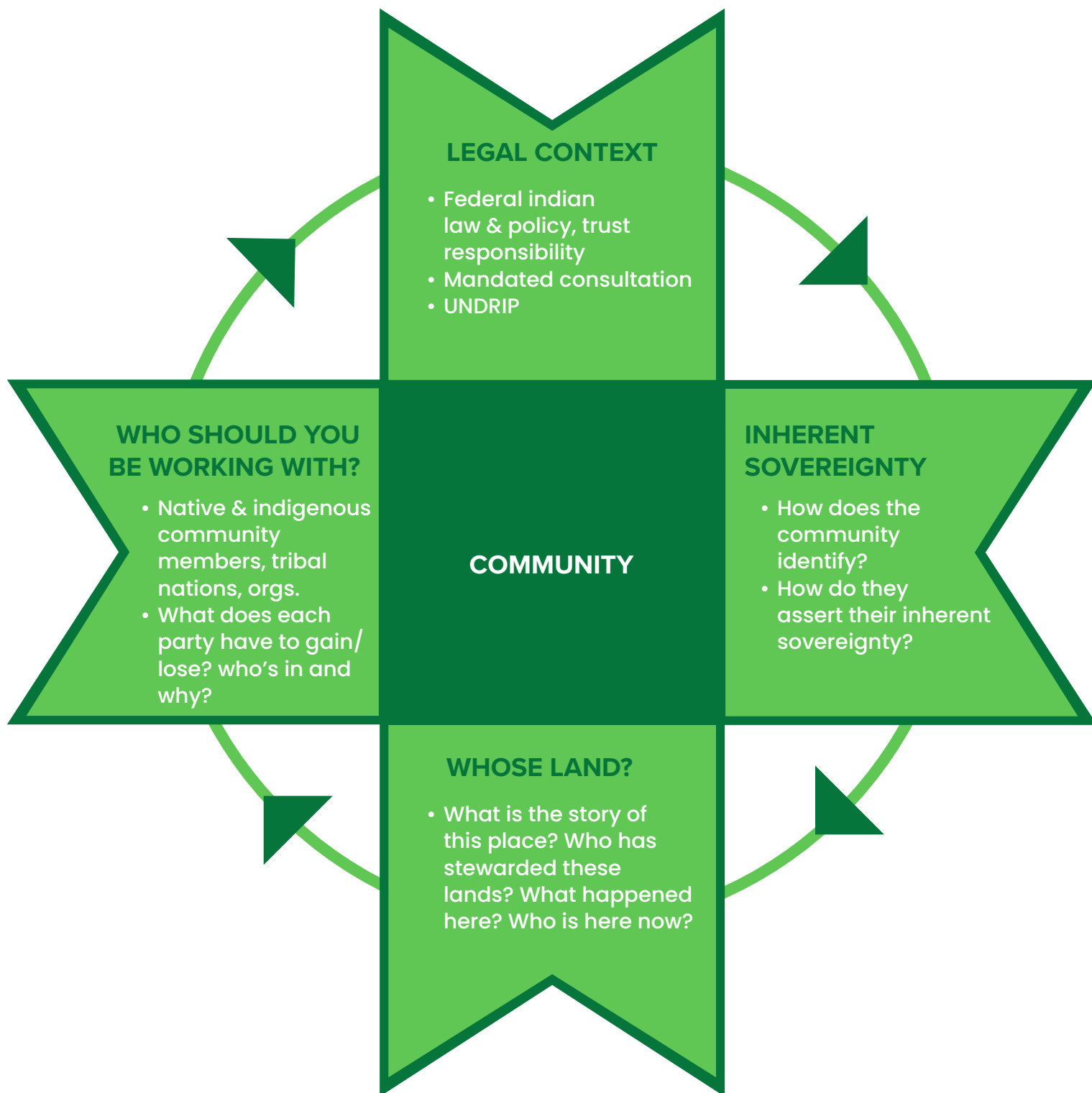
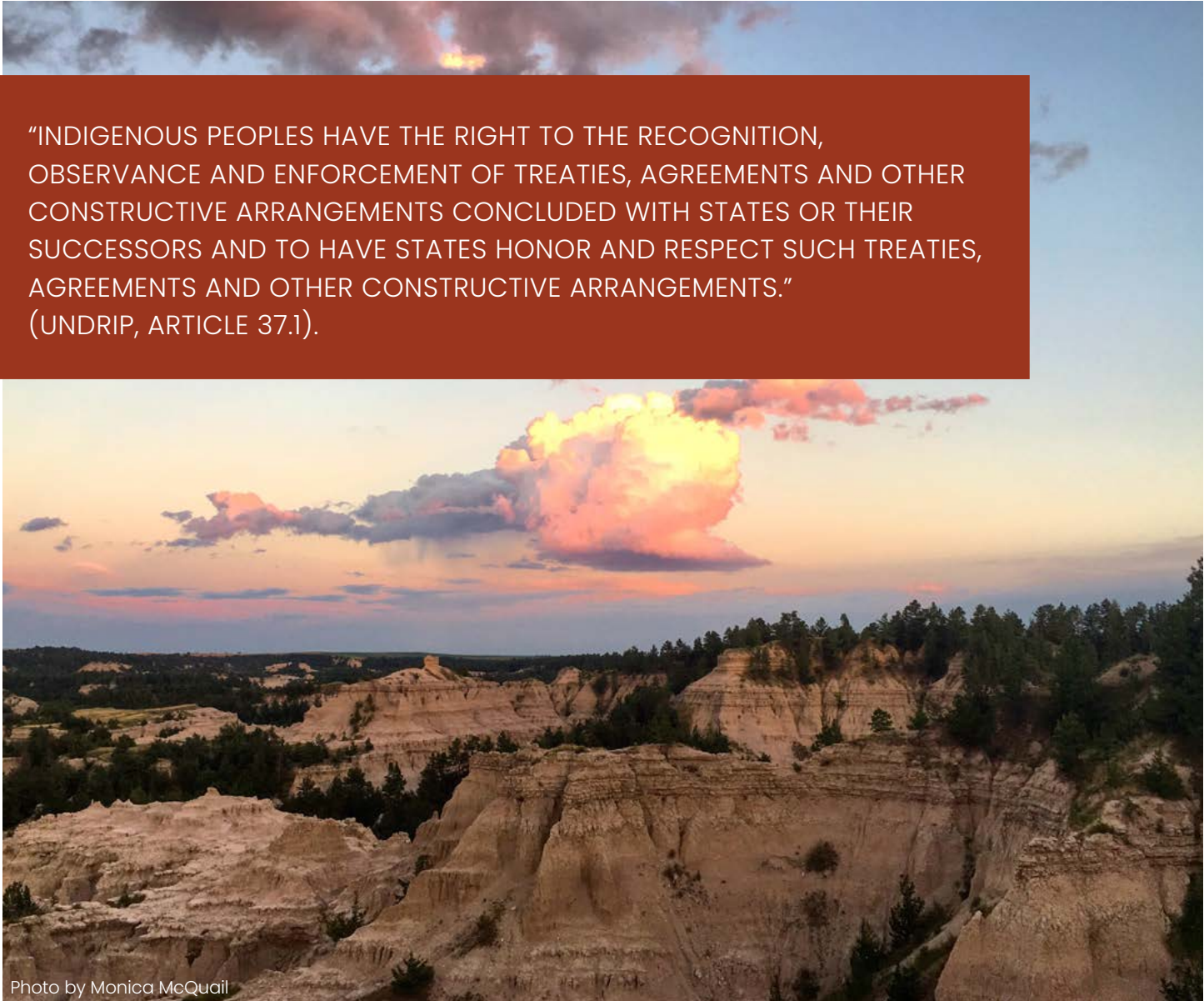


Figure 1. Defining “Community” in conservation projects requires an iterative and reflective process of understanding the legal context of the Native Nation(s) or Indigenous community(ies) in the area, as well as the history of land dispossession, and threats to / assertions of Indigenous sovereignty. The context of the lands, waters, wildlife or region is also critical pertaining to **reserved rights**, **Treaty lands**, and **off-reservation rights**. Finally, a reflection of who is or is not at the table is critical, and taking proper steps to allow for early, sustained and meaningful engagement with Indigenous Peoples.

When considering possible engagement with Indigenous Peoples in conservation, it is best to first establish a relationship with people outside of a project context — we discuss this in more detail in the **“5 Foundations for Meaningful Engagement in Conservation”** presented below. When considering a relationship, it is best to first understand the nature of Indigenous lands in the area. Because of the complex history of land dispossession, conservation practitioners should research the legal and inherently sovereign rights of Indigenous communities in the area, the Native Land Digital resources is an excellent place to start <https://native-land.ca/>. Is your project located on lands that would be considered **Treaty lands** (USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia), **ancestral homelands**, or **culturally significant sites** of one or more Indigenous communities? What is the history of these lands and who has stewarded them since time immemorial? Just because the lands are not legally recognized as Indigenous lands does not mean that Native Nations do not have relationships with this place. Many Indigenous People in the U.S. argue that all public lands are Indigenous lands.



For example, the Cache La Poudre River in Fort Collins, Colorado is a designated Natural Heritage Area and the ancestral homelands of many Native Nations and peoples, including the Nunt'zi (Ute), Tsistsistas (Cheyenne), and Hinono'eino' (Arapaho) (<https://poudreheritage.org/celebrating-native-american-heritage-in-the-cache-la-poudre-river-national-heritage-area/>). The entire City of Fort Collins rests on unceded lands of the Cheyenne and Arapaho, and some Indigenous community members and scholars in Colorado assert that the City of Fort Collins is an illegal city on stolen lands, as the land was never conveyed to the City through a legal treaty process (Treaty of Fort Laramie 1951, Treaty of Fort Wise 1861). Taking into account this complex history is critical for collaborative conservation practitioners to understand. Today, there are over 2,000 Native American individuals that live in the City of Fort Collins from dozens of Native Nations (per 2020 census), and this number is likely undercounted. In Fort Collins, there is incredible potential to build a working relationship between various organizations, agencies, stakeholders, city governments, and Indigenous peoples in the conservation of the Poudre River Watershed, a process that is early on and developing (<https://www.fcgov.com/equity/native-community-engagement>).



“INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE THE RIGHT TO THE RECOGNITION, OBSERVANCE AND ENFORCEMENT OF TREATIES, AGREEMENTS AND OTHER CONSTRUCTIVE ARRANGEMENTS CONCLUDED WITH STATES OR THEIR SUCCESSORS AND TO HAVE STATES HONOR AND RESPECT SUCH TREATIES, AGREEMENTS AND OTHER CONSTRUCTIVE ARRANGEMENTS.”  
(UNDRIP, ARTICLE 37.1).

Photo by Monica McQuail

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

How can you learn about the Indigenous communities and Tribal lands (Federally-recognized and other) in your area? As a potential partner seeking to work with an Indigenous community, how might you address the subject of their inherent sovereignty? What is your organization's prior history in supporting Indigenous efforts in conservation, and how might this history affect future actions?



# III. BARRIERS, PITFALLS, AND CONSIDERATIONS

The previous section provides a framework that can inform Indigenous engagement strategies. It is helpful to explore some of the barriers that might affect this engagement by examining the complex issues involved. The model below presents three primary types of barriers to engagement: representational, structural, and political. Additionally, there are personal barriers that must be considered and might prevent collaborative conservation practitioners from engaging in relationships with Indigenous and Native communities. We provide some starting places for you to begin identifying barriers within your local context and personal sphere, and some considerations for overcoming these barriers.

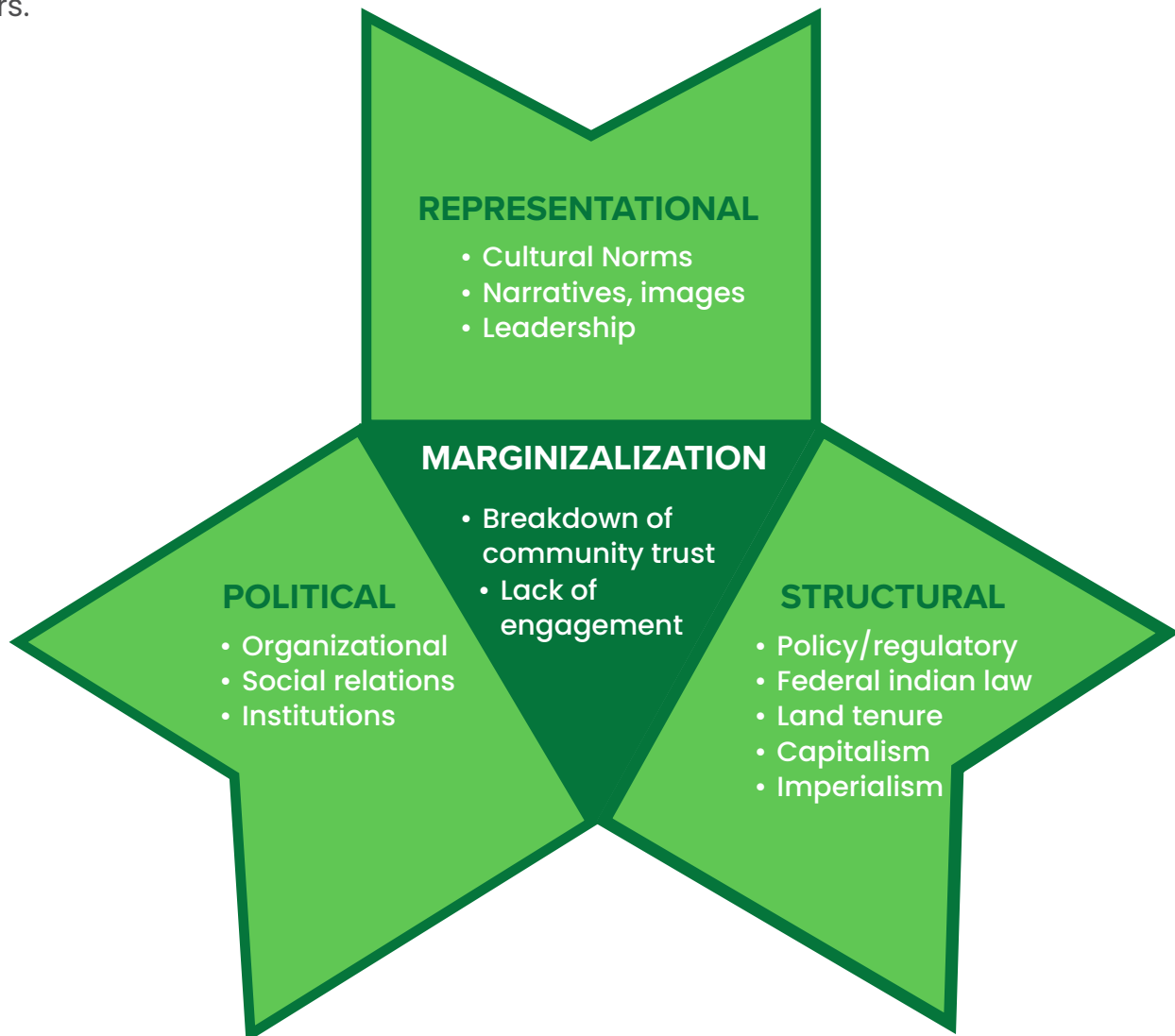


Figure 2. Representational, structural, and political/institutional barriers to engagement with Indigenous Peoples in conservation must be considered in order to identify solutions that reduce the marginalization of Indigenous voices, breakdown community trust, and result in zero or low Indigenous engagement in conservation.



## REPRESENTATIONAL BARRIERS

Representational barriers are the cultural norms, narratives, images, and faces of leadership that privilege some perspectives and marginalize others. The “founding fathers” of conservation from the 19th and 20th centuries who are typically cited include people like John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold, and Teddy Roosevelt, meaning that their teachings, philosophies, and priorities have historically been prioritized in conservation. When a small subset of ideals from a singular lens are prioritized, this leads to the creation of a field that is limited in diverse perspectives. Even today, the majority of Executive Directors, boards, and leaders of environmental organizations come from upper class, formally-educated, white, and male backgrounds. These non-Indigenous conservation organizations are being funded by white, wealthy philanthropists who are prioritizing a certain conservation agenda and marginalizing others, whether they intend to do so or not. Indeed, the vast majority of philanthropic funding for environmental issues goes to non-Indigenous, white-led environmental organizations, perpetuating a narrow type of conservation which gets prioritized and funded.

**According to the 2021 Closing the Gap report, from 2014–2018, a total of \$3.7 billion was awarded in the environmental and conservation field, with \$3.2 billion going to white-led organizations and \$498 million going to Black, Indigenous and People of Color-led organizations, representing a major inequity in funding of environmental organizations.**



Mount Rushmore is a useful example for understanding representational barriers in conservation. This National Memorial places visitors face-to-face with the founding fathers of the United States on the ancestral and traditional homelands of the Lakota, Cheyenne, Crow, Kiowa, Arapahoe, and many other Nations and Peoples. In doing so, Mount Rushmore contributes to the erasure of Indigenous Peoples from their homelands in the Black Hills. One of the primary goals of the United States' notion of Manifest Destiny during the late 19th Century was to uplift the ideals of the founding fathers of conservation such that the "unruly West" could be saved, tamed, and preserved by and for them. This was coupled with the presumed incompetence of Indigenous Peoples on how to use and manage their lands. These narratives are extremely well documented by Indigenous activists, scholars, and practitioners, and would be insufficient to summarize here, however we do provide a reading list in the References section to understand this context further and to begin to "unpack" how the field of conservation has worked to limit our understanding of Indigenous Peoples contributions, values, and perspectives in conservation.



# STRUCTURAL BARRIERS


Representational bias strengthens the structural barriers that were put in place to keep Indigenous communities away from their lands, and outside of the mainstream conservation movement even today. Structural barriers include regulatory (policy) decisions, especially Federal Indian Law and Policy, which created the reservation system, strengthened private land ownership, and employed oppressive tactics (i.e., racism, imperialism, patriarchy) to marginalize Indigenous Peoples.

For example, the Native and Indigenous Peoples of the State of Colorado are particularly marginalized due to the ongoing efforts of the United States to limit legally designated Tribal Lands here. Today, the Ute Mountain Ute and the Southern Ute Tribes are the State's only Federally-recognized Tribes and have jurisdiction in the Southwest corner of the state. However, their present day reservations are only a fraction of their original territories, and have been systematically reduced over time. Additionally, there are 46 additional Nations with historic presence in the state (<https://ccia.colorado.gov/tribes/historic-tribes-of-colorado>) yet these Nations no longer have land jurisdiction in Colorado, but rather in states far away from their homelands (i.e., Oklahoma, Montana, Wyoming, etc). As a result of this forced removal, many Tribal members and their descendants in Colorado have lost relationships with their lands, and with one another - though many continue to work to revive these.

Another important structural barrier to engagement with Native Nations in conservation is Native ownership and governance of natural resources. According to the Department of the Interior (<https://revenue.data.doi.gov/how-revenue-works/native-american-ownership-governance/>), the two types of Native American land ownership include:

- **Trust land**, in which the federal government holds legal title, but the beneficial interest remains with the individual or tribe. Trust lands held on behalf of individuals are known as allotments; and
- **Fee land** purchased by tribes, in which the tribe acquires legal title under specific statutory authority.

In the U.S., Native American land ownership is very complex due to a history of Federal Indian law and policy that has resulted in Tribal lands as a patchwork of titles with restrictions, obligations, laws, and regulations. Natural resources including minerals, waters, and timber continue to be extracted from Native American lands despite Treaties which promise otherwise. Conservation practitioners should be aware of the structural barriers such as land jurisdiction and Federal Indian law and policy which may prevent meaningful engagement with Native Nations.

A large school of salmon swimming in clear water over a rocky riverbed. The fish are densely packed, moving in various directions. The water is clear, revealing the dark, rounded stones on the river floor. The lighting is natural, highlighting the silvery scales of the fish.

“INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE THE RIGHT TO REDRESS, BY MEANS THAT CAN INCLUDE RESTITUTION OR, WHEN THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE, JUST, FAIR AND EQUITABLE COMPENSATION, FOR THE LANDS, TERRITORIES AND RESOURCES WHICH THEY HAVE TRADITIONALLY OWNED OR OTHERWISE OCCUPIED OR USED, AND WHICH HAVE BEEN CONFISCATED, TAKEN, OCCUPIED, USED OR DAMAGED WITHOUT THEIR FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT.”

“UNLESS OTHERWISE FREELY AGREED UPON BY THE PEOPLES CONCERNED, COMPENSATION SHALL TAKE THE FORM OF LANDS, TERRITORIES AND RESOURCES EQUAL IN QUALITY, SIZE AND LEGAL STATUS OR OF MONETARY COMPENSATION OR OTHER APPROPRIATE REDRESS.”  
(UNDRIP, ARTICLE 28).

# POLITICAL/INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

Political or institutional barriers occur both within and across organizations. There may be political barriers that would prevent an organization or its leadership from engaging with Indigenous partners in conservation. These can include a lack of focus on community engagement and people with the expertise to carry it out, seniority or tenure within a division or department whereby new ideas or critical feedback are not listened to, as well as a general indifference to the issue. For example, the creation of significant public lands in the State of Colorado coupled with the reduction of Indigenous lands have had ripple effects whereby Indigenous Peoples are spoken about in the past tense and simply seen as not present, and often not considered at all. Another problem is when natural resource agencies or nonprofits consider a Native Nation as a “stakeholder” which is incorrect as we have discussed in the Legal Context section. Other institutional barriers within State, county, and city-level land, water and conservation agencies may be a general indifference, where they feel that it is not their responsibility or prerogative to engage with Indigenous Peoples and thus the conversation often does not even begin. As well, there is often a lack of funding available to support the time necessary for genuine relationship-building.



## PERSONAL BARRIERS

Many practitioners are uncomfortable because they lack working relationships with Indigenous individuals or communities; it can pose a roadblock because it is difficult to know where or how to start. Cultural differences can also manifest through, for example, different understandings of time, objects, and our view of the natural world. For non-Indigenous conservation practitioners, self-reflection, self-education, and personal commitment to unpacking this reality is an important first step.

Language is one of the most crucial barriers to cross-cultural communication. Many people fear saying the wrong things or the lack of shared experiences, and may have to overcome mistakes and misunderstandings made by others. The best way to overcome this barrier is to begin from a place of humility and learning. When first starting, it is often helpful to reach out to an organization or individual that is trusted by the community with whom you wish to connect. Create opportunities for open communication in neutral, culturally-appropriate ways, such as over a meal. Find aspirations and values that you share. Address problems, miscommunications, or past grievances — if they are allowed to fester, it will be more difficult to move forward.



Having knowledge and expertise to bring to the table is an important aspect of any project. However, this expertise can also present a barrier to collaboration, especially when trying to form new relationships. This is because mainstream science tends to value scientific knowledge over other knowledge systems, such as Indigenous Knowledges. However, Indigenous Knowledges are a Science, rooted in place-based, and systematic ways of knowing. Expert “scientific” knowledge not only comes with abundant gaps in understanding, but also power. In order to generate solutions that reflect the priorities, identities, and insights of Indigenous communities, try to recognize and address historical power imbalances, especially those that are exacerbated because one knowledge system has been prioritized over others.

These power imbalances can also be exacerbated through the unconscious judgements people tend to make based on ingrained stereotypes. These implicit biases can undermine efforts to build trust, relationships, and equitable power. Good implicit bias training courses should go beyond awareness – they should also provide strategies for changing behavior.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

Which Barriers, Pitfalls, and Considerations stand out for you? What are some of your greatest challenges (organizational and personal)? Going forward, what are some things you will do differently? How might you use some of these ideas to help build a relationship?



# IV. 5 FOUNDATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

To address the barriers mentioned in Section III, we suggest an engagement approach which is rooted in listening, reciprocal relationships, critical reflection, humility, and action. Listening is one of the keys to building trust and a thriving relationship. This requires a willingness to acknowledge inherent power dynamics, and Letting Go of preconceived agendas, and previously determined project priorities. This sets the stage for shared leadership and opportunities for transparent decision-making. Trust and relationships are also built upon Reciprocity and mutual benefit. This engagement model is embedded within the 5 Foundations for Meaningful Engagement listed below.

## 1. CRITICALLY EXAMINE THE HISTORY OF CONSERVATION

- Acknowledge and seek to understand how the field of conservation has had a history of excluding Indigenous voices, and undermining Indigenous sovereignty. Attend local events, read Native authors, and do personal research in your field (e.g., Tuck and Yang, 2012).
- Find out whose lands you are on and the communities that you or your organization could be working with (see #2). Native Land Digital can be a great starting point (<https://native-land.ca/>).
- Keep notes or a journal to track your thoughts as you engage in this process. Record questions that arise, and note colleagues or other practitioners that you might invite into this process. Proceed with a frame of examining our field and past actions honestly.





## 2. UNDERSTAND COMMUNITY IN YOUR CONTEXT

- Seek to understand the legal context of the Indigenous Peoples within your area, project scope, or organization's reach. In other words, what Federally-recognized Tribes are in or around your area? What other Indigenous communities consider your area to be ancestral homelands or culturally significant sites (**Figure 1**)?
- Listen to the ways that the Indigenous communities in the area define themselves as well as how they assert their inherent sovereignty to their lands and waters. Learn the Indigenous names of local places.
- Understand the history of colonization in the area. Are there Nations and Peoples that have stewarded these lands for millennia, yet continue to be misrepresented or disregarded in conservation spaces today?
- Understand that claims around organizational success and actions are incomplete if Indigenous priorities have not been considered. Don't be afraid to use your voice and ask difficult questions.



Photo by Jose Chalit and Treston Chee, Trees, Water & People

### 3. IDENTIFY AND REDUCE BARRIERS TO MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

- Carefully examine your intentions for seeking to collaborate with Native or Indigenous peoples. Assess what personal barriers you may face in doing so.
- What collaborations with Native and Indigenous communities, organizations, or individuals have happened in the past? Did they go well? What is the status of the relationship?
- Identify some of the representational, structural, and political barriers to engagement that exist at your organization. Review your organization’s internal and external facing documents to see if Indigenous communities have been acknowledged in past work (**Figure 2**).
- For each personal, representational, structural, and political barrier that has been identified, what are some short-term next steps that can be taken within the context of your organizational role? Perhaps this process has revealed that Indigenous engagement may not currently be a viable option; what are some initial steps that can be taken?
- Before contacting an Indigenous practitioner to speak on the issue of improved collaboration with Native Nations, first explore opportunities within your organization. There may be staff from within that have expertise or interest in the topic, as well as readings, webinars, and other resources that can build understanding and context.





Photo by Jose Chalit and Treston Chee, Trees, Water & People

## 4. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND AVOID COMMON PITFALLS

There are a variety of strategies that can be used when first embarking on building a relationship, including hosting community listening sessions, building a relationship with a well-connected liaison or organization trusted by the community, and/or setting up informal get-to-know-you meetings with community leaders. We urge the readers of this Toolkit to engage in this process slowly, and only after assessing that you have the confidence, personal awareness, and commitment required by this process.

Here is a summary of some of the most common pitfalls that conservation practitioners face when reaching out to Indigenous communities, Tribes, or individuals.

	COMMON PITFALLS	BETTER OPTIONS
	Contacting an Indigenous person or community via email a couple months before a grant is due to see if they want to be a collaborator.	Face-to-face introductory meetings that help establish a relationship outside the context of a project. Following community permissions and protocols (i.e., Tribal IRBs).
	Bringing a resource to a community right off the bat. Your message is that you're the expert and you have knowledge (power) that they don't.	First listen and learn about the community, their concerns, values, and aspirations. Ask permission to speak and limit your speaking time.
	Forcing a collaboration or inviting yourself into a space you may not be welcome in.	Co-develop a flexible, small initial effort together to establish a working relationship. This occurs upon invitation by the community.
	Seeking to integrate Indigenous knowledge or expertise into your project without Indigenous leadership at the table (an extractive use of Indigenous Knowledge).	Partner with Native Nations and Indigenous communities throughout all stages of the project to apply Indigenous Knowledge as an intellectual partner to Western Science.
	Assuming the project is going well but not creating the spaces for dialogue to justify this conclusion. Assuming that the successful completion of the project in and of itself is enough. This can lead to a process that feels extractive.	Build in time to reflect as a practitioner-community team to ensure the ongoing collaboration is mutually beneficial, reciprocal, and can grow beyond the initial parameters of the project.

## 5. INCREASE PARTICIPATORY POWER OF THE COMMUNITY



“INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE THE RIGHT TO DETERMINE AND DEVELOP PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OR USE OF THEIR LANDS OR TERRITORIES AND OTHER RESOURCES.”  
(UNDRIP, ARTICLE 32.1)

When playing the role of a convener, conservation practitioners must make decisions around how engagement happens. As presented in the “Levels of Engagement” model (Table 1, adapted from the International Association for Public Participation and David-Chavez et. al 2018), conveners should explicitly recognize the role that partners and rights holders will play in the project. This model reflects the core belief that those affected by a decision have a right to be involved in some way in the decision-making process. However, as shown in **Table 1**, not all modes of participation are equal. The Levels of Engagement occur along a spectrum, representing a progressive continuum of increasing influence on a project. Each Level doesn’t just describe a general mode of engagement; it also represents the amount of participatory power, agency, and decision-making authority of each party.

On the left side of **Table 1**, the **Inform and Consult** levels engage interested/affected community partners through one-way communication. Those in the middle levels (Involve and Collaborate) have greater involvement and influence, and thus increasing impact on the decision-making. Working in these levels requires deeper relationships, trust, and a willingness to share power. The far right mode of engagement (Indigenous-led) reframes the engagement process entirely, with the community setting the agenda and wielding ultimate decision-making authority.

While there are advantages (as well as disadvantages) of engaging interested/affected partners at each of these levels, the focus of this Toolkit is engagement that happens at the Involve, Collaborate, or Indigenous-led levels. The inclusion of partners at these levels align with the 5 Foundations of Meaningful Engagement, and will help yield project outcomes such as greater creative problem-solving, leadership from the community, and conservation and community impacts.

Working at these levels often requires relationships that are established outside of the parameters of the project. Without this — time taken to listen, build trust, and understand community needs — Indigenous community members are likely to be tokenized and assume they are being asked to participate only because the project leader is pursuing the relationship to fulfill a grant requirement or policy need.

At the **Involve, Collaborate, or Indigenous-led levels**, the assets a community brings are leveraged to support shared learning and problem solving. The aspiration of shared power at these levels means that all participants play a role as collaborative leaders, and thus learning about and practicing collaborative leadership is an important strategy for organizations and individuals looking to engage in meaningful ways with communities. Mickel (2021) found that interpersonal behaviors that build and strengthen relationships “emerge as the most salient” in collaborative leadership. Mickel (2021) demonstrated that people exhibiting these behaviors actively listen, see issues from others’ perspectives, recognize the contributions of others, and honor and value differences while treating everyone with respect. They are transparent, consistent, positive, and have fun. They act with courage, openly share knowledge, provide feedback, and speak up “when something doesn’t seem right or just.” They are curious, “open to new ideas and ways of thinking,” resilient, and adapt to changing circumstances. They also empower others, advance a shared vision, and dig into the details of issues.



# PARTICIPATORY POWER, AGENCY, AND SHARED DECISION-AUTHORITY

NATURE OF ENGAGEMENT	ROLE OF COMMUNITY	CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONVENER
<b>INFORMING</b> Convener provides community members with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem and possible solutions. Convener proposes which approaches to pursue, how to do the project, and which results are significant.	<b>INFORMATION RECIPIENTS:</b> "here's what's happening."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tailor the message and information to maximize relevancy for each audience.</li> <li>• Less time, commitment, and resources are allocated to community engagement</li> <li>• Scientific knowledge is prioritized over Indigenous and local knowledges</li> <li>• Organizations or conveners drive the project agenda and solutions.</li> </ul>
<b>CONSULTING</b> Convener obtains feedback from community members on possible alternatives, decisions, and/or analysis. Convener uses this information to identify constraints and opportunities, set priorities, and for decision-making. Most of the key decisions are made by the Convener.	<b>INFORMATION SOURCES:</b> "here are some options, what do you think?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is at the table? Who is missing? Why would somebody come (or not come)?</li> <li>• What are the opportunities for reciprocity?</li> <li>• Tailor the message and information to maximize relevancy for each audience.</li> <li>• Less time, commitment, and resources are allocated to community engagement</li> <li>• Scientific knowledge is prioritized over Indigenous and local knowledges</li> <li>• Organizations or conveners drive the project agenda and solutions.</li> </ul>
<b>INVOLVING</b> Convener works with community members/partners throughout the process, creating a joint enterprise. Each partner integrates a variety of knowledge sources into collaborative decision-making. The concerns, values, and aspirations of the communities are consistently understood and taken into account. Still, the overall effort is organized and led by the Convener. Funding usually goes to the Convener's organization, and they typically control decisions about what issues to address.	<b>ADVISORS:</b> "here's a problem, what ideas do you have?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will you approach engagement with an Indigenous community as a rights holder (different from other stakeholders)?</li> <li>• Listen, Let go, Reciprocate.</li> <li>• Build relationships outside the context of the project.</li> <li>• Begin by asking questions and listening (rather than bringing your ideas).</li> <li>• Requires participatory structures and careful process design.</li> <li>• Less time, commitment, and resources are allocated to community engagement</li> <li>• Scientific knowledge is prioritized over Indigenous and local knowledges</li> <li>• Organizations or conveners drive the project agenda and solutions.</li> </ul>
<b>COLLABORATING</b> Partners help identify and address the issue. There is a Convener role, but each partner shares in the leadership and is involved with every aspect of the project, from setting the agenda to identifying and implementing the solution.	<b>ADVOCATES:</b> "let's work together to solve the problem."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen, Let go, Reciprocate.</li> <li>• Build relationships outside the context of the project.</li> <li>• Begin by asking questions and listening (rather than bringing your ideas).</li> <li>• Requires participatory structures and careful process design.</li> <li>• More time, commitment, and resources are allocated to community engagement.</li> <li>• Greater partnership between scientific knowledge and Indigenous Knowledges</li> <li>• Community needs are a driver of project agenda and solutions.</li> </ul>
<b>INDIGENOUS-LED</b> The project originates with a community concern, which motivates the community to invite the Convener's help – community members help determine the project and priorities based on their needs. There is shared leadership with final decision-making at the community level. Tangible improvements in people's lives are priority outcomes. Community members may share funding and co-design project approaches and protocols. Each context, the community shares credit and authorship in any academic publication.	<b>IN CONTROL:</b> "you care about this issue and are leading the initiative; how can we support you?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community needs are a driver of project agenda and solutions.</li> <li>• Community sets the agenda and has authority over the process, outcomes, and decisions.</li> <li>• More time, commitment, and resources are allocated to community engagement.</li> <li>• Greater partnership between scientific knowledge and Indigenous Knowledges</li> <li>• Community needs are a driver of project agenda and solutions.</li> </ul>

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

Reviewing these **5 Foundations**, what stands out for you? What resonates with you? What are some of your greatest challenges (organizational and personal) in adopting these? Going forward, what are some things you will do differently? How might you use some of these ideas to help build a relationship?



**Table 1** (on page 38). Levels of Engagement. When playing the role of a convener, conservation practitioners must make decisions around how engagement happens. This model reflects the core belief that those affected by a decision have a right to be involved in some way in the decision-making process. Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation and David-Chavez et. al 2018.

# V. GLOSSARY

This Glossary is provided as a starting point for understanding the nuances in talking about Indigenous Peoples respectfully. When in doubt, it is best to ask a person or group individually how they prefer to be called. In the U.S., members of Native Nations often prefer to use their tribal affiliation in their own language (ex: Diné instead of Navajo Nation), however there are still personal preferences to take into account. It is never appropriate to use the term “Indian” as a settler, or non-Native identifying person. For additional information, please visit [www.nativegov.org](http://www.nativegov.org), and the Elements of Indigenous Style by Gregory Younging (2018).

## REFERRING TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES RESPECTFULLY

### Indigenous Peoples:

Indigenous Peoples are distinct societies who share intergenerational, cultural, or kinship ties with the pre-colonial stewards of ancestral lands and waters in a specific region of the world, holding distinct rights-based status irrespective of recognition by colonial governments (UN General Assembly 2007). Indigenous Peoples (capitalized, plural) can be used to collectively address AI/AN, Native Hawaiians, First Nations, and Indigenous people worldwide, for example in the Americas (Mayas, Chorti, Lenca, Garifuna), the Inuit and Aleutians of the circumpolar region, the Saami of northern Europe, the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia and the Maori of New Zealand (UN General Assembly 2007).

### American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN):

A legal framing for the current 574 **federally recognized tribes** in the United States. For a complete list, please visit <https://www.usa.gov/indian-tribes-alaska-native>. Federally recognized tribes have a trust relationship with the United States government under which the government has a duty to protect tribal Treaty rights, lands, assets, and resources. AI/AN is commonly associated with the term **Native American** or **Native** to refer to members of one or more AI/AN Nations. **Native Nations or Tribal Nations** are framings which are becoming increasingly popular to show respect for the sovereignty and self-determination of the 574 independent AI/AN Nations in the United States, inclusive of an American Indian or Alaska Native tribe, band, nation, pueblo, village, or community that the Secretary of the Interior acknowledges as a federally recognized tribe pursuant to the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994, 25 U.S.C. 5130, 5131.



### **Native Hawaiian (also known as Kānaka Maoli) and Native Hawaiian Community:**

Any individual who is a descendant of the aboriginal people who, prior to 1778, occupied and exercised sovereignty in the area that now constitutes the State of Hawai'i. A Native Hawaiian Community is a distinct Indigenous political community that the U.S. Congress has recognized and which a special political and trust relationship is defined. For more information about engagement with Native Hawaiians in conservation, visit <https://seagrant.soest.hawaii.edu/kulana-noii/>.

### **State-recognized Tribes:**

In the United States, there are currently 63 state-recognized Tribes. State tribal recognition does not include the same benefits as federally recognized Tribes, however it does acknowledge tribal status within the state, and remains a primary way to build state-tribal collaboration. State-recognized tribes are not necessarily federally recognized; however, some federally recognized tribes are also recognized by states. Federal recognition remains the primary way in which tribes seek to be recognized. For a full list of state recognized Tribes in the U.S. visit <https://narf.org/nill/triballaw/directories.html>.

### **First Nations, Inuit, and Métis:**

In Canada, there are currently 630 recognized First Nations under the Indian Act, which legally differentiates Canada's Indigenous Peoples from other Canadians. Not all people who identify as First Nations are Status Indian under the Indian Act. In addition to First Nations, Inuit and Métis are two other Indigenous Peoples recognized in Canada, meaning there is a nation-to-nation relationship. For more information on Canada's Indigenous Peoples, visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs.html>.



Photo by Monica McQuail

## Native and Indigenous peoples of the State of Colorado:

In addition to the two Federally-recognized Tribes in Colorado, The Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe and the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, there are at least 46 additional Native Nations with historical ties to the State (visit <https://ccia.colorado.gov/tribes/historic-tribes-of-colorado> for a full list). Additionally, Indigenous Peoples outside of the United States' present borders have also inhabited and stewarded Colorado's lands including Indigenous Peoples of present-day Mexico. "Native" refers to AI/AN Tribal members in Colorado whereas "Indigenous" is used as an umbrella term to include non-Federally recognized Indigenous Peoples in Colorado as well as AI/AN Tribal members.

## Indigenous Peoples of Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and American Samoa:

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo signed in 1848 resulted in tens of thousands of Indigenous Peoples who lost their homelands in the present day U.S. Southwest (formerly Mexico), and who are neither recognized by the United States or Mexican governments today. Similarly, it is important to acknowledge the United States' relationship with the Indigenous Peoples of its current Territories in the Pacific Islands (Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa), and Caribbean (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands). These islands are the homelands to many Nations and Peoples who continue to assert their sovereignty amidst a colonial relationship with the United States. For more information on community engagement with the Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific Islands, please visit NOAA's Tribal Consultation Guide <https://www.noaa.gov/legislative-and-intergovernmental-affairs/noaa-tribal-resources-updates>.



# KEY CONCEPTS FOR INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT IN CONSERVATION:

## **Tribal consultation vs. Indigenous engagement:**

In the United States context, **Tribal consultation** is a formal, government-to-government dialogue between official representatives of Tribes and Federal or state agencies to discuss matters that impact both parties. Oftentimes consultation occurs because of a State or Federal program that requires Tribal input. **Indigenous engagement** goes beyond minimum Tribal consultation protocols to include dialogue beyond matters of Federal or state programs that require Tribal input, and expands into areas of common interest, concern, or collaboration between Tribal governments, Native nonprofits, or Indigenous communities worldwide. Engagement can occur by Federal and state agencies as well as by researchers, nonprofit groups, conservation agencies, etc.

## **Cross-cultural engagement:**

One's ability to understand people from different cultures than their own and engage with them effectively and appropriately.

## **UNDRIP:**

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the most comprehensive international instrument on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. It establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous Peoples of the world and it elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situation of Indigenous Peoples.

## **Federal Indian law and policy:**

The body of United States law and policy (i.e., Treaties, statutes, executive orders, administrative decisions, and court cases) that defines and exemplifies the unique legal and political status of the over 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes; the relationship of tribes with the federal government; and, the role of tribes and states in our federalism. According to the Native American Rights Fund ([narf.org](http://narf.org)), Federal Indian law has three fundamental legal principles:

- a. American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes that are recognized by the federal government are independent sovereign governments, separate from the states and from the federal government.
- b. Unless Congress provides otherwise, the inherent sovereignty of federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes generally extends over their federally recognized geographic territory (e.g., reservations, allotments, trust and restricted Indian lands, and other Indian country), including over the activities and conduct of tribal members and non-tribal members within that territory.
- c. The sovereignty of federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes is inherent and exists unless and until Congress takes it away.

### **Indigenous Sovereignty:**

Indigenous sovereignty consists of spiritual ways, culture, language, social and legal systems, political structures, and inherent relationships with lands, waters and wildlife. Indigenous sovereignty exists regardless of what the nation-state does or does not acknowledge and “continues as long as the People that are a part of it continue” (Indigenous Environmental Network).

### **Rights holders vs. stakeholders:**

Indigenous Peoples are “rights and title holders” meaning that they have an explicit legal relationship with another nation and may have **Treaty or reserved rights**, **off-reservation rights**, or a governing voice in regards to activities that occur upon **culturally significant sites**, or **ancestral homelands**. Indigenous Peoples, AI/AN Tribes, Native Hawaiians, etc. are not “stakeholders” so it is best to avoid using this term because it is inaccurate and can reduce trust and respect in a relationship by not acknowledging Indigenous sovereignty. Stakeholders are individuals or groups concerned about an issue or may hold rights to manage or make decisions about a resource (i.e., ranchers, state agencies, city governments, nonprofits).

### **Trust land:**

Lands in which the federal government holds legal title, but the beneficial interest remains with the individual or tribe. Trust lands held on behalf of individuals are known as allotments; and **Fee land** purchased by tribes, in which the tribe acquires legal title under specific statutory authority.

### **Unceded Lands:**

Lands that were never legally surrendered, relinquished or handed over in any way by Indigenous Peoples to settler governments or individuals. This includes lands that were taken by illegitimately signed treaties.

### **Indigenous Knowledges (capitalized, plural):**

Indigenous Knowledges are a body of observations, oral and written knowledges, practices, and beliefs that promote environmental sustainability and the responsible stewardship of natural resources through relationships between humans and environmental systems. Indigenous Knowledges have evolved over millennia, continue to evolve, and includes insights based on evidence acquired through direct contact with the environment and long-term experiences, as well as extensive observations, lessons, and skills passed from generation to generation.

### **Elders and Knowledge Holders:**

The term “Elder” is given to an individual by their community due to the spiritual and cultural knowledge that they hold, and is not a reflection of one’s age but the level of cultural and traditional knowledge they hold. The term “Knowledge Holder” refers to an individual who has been taught by an Elder within their community, and is a person that has been taught how to care for these knowledges and when it is and is not appropriate to share with others (adapted from <https://www.queensu.ca/indigenous/ways-knowing/about>).

### Indigenous land stewardship:

Indigenous or Native-led efforts to restore, protect, and conserve natural resources including wildlife, forests, waterways, lands, and oceans using practices rooted in Indigenous values, and knowledges. Indigenous land stewardship can occur on public, private, Tribal, or ancestral lands and waters.



Photo by Jose Chalit and Treston/Chae, Trees, Water & People

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2023. United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Indigenous People's Knowledge, Insight Needed to Address Global Climate Crisis, Speakers Stress, as Permanent Forum Opens Session. Twenty-second session, 1st and 2nd Meetings.
- Webinar Series on Incorporating Indigenous Knowledges into Federal Research and Management:  
<https://www.usgs.gov/programs/climate-adaptation-science-centers/webinar-series-incorporating-indigenous-knowledges>.





## SUGGESTED READING

### BOOKS

- “As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock” by Dina Gilio-Whitaker. 2019.
- “Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants” by Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2013.
- “Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks” by Mark Spence. 1999.
- “Trust in the Land: New Directions in Tribal Conservation” by Beth Rose Middleton. 2011.
- “The Rise of the Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege and Environmental Protection” by Dorceta Taylor. 2016.
- “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples” (2nd ed.) by Linda T. Smith. 2012.

### ARTICLES

- “What Do Indigenous Knowledges Do for Indigenous Peoples?” by Kyle Whyte. 2018. Published in “Keepers of the Green World: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Sustainability,” edited by Melissa K. Nelson and Dan Shilling.
- “We don’t want ‘equity’, acknowledge our sovereignty” by Phillip Mills (Kulkaigal Nation)
- “Indigenous environmental justice and sustainability” by Deborah McGregor, Steven Whitaker, and Mahisha Sritharan. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 43, 35–40.

### OTHER TOOLKITS

- The Wilderness Society’s Public Lands Curriculum. 2022.
- AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research. 2020.



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