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AMERICAN INDIAN CENTER

# Engaged Partnerships with Native Nations and Communities

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The UNC American Indian Center is available to offer consultation, education, and networking opportunities to University faculty, centers and institutes interested in engaging with Native Nations.

Engaged partnership with Native Nations requires a patient, nuanced and humble approach. The following are considered best practices for engaging with Native Nations. These best practices are organized along the values of the American Indian Center and are commonly found across many tribal communities.

## RESPECT.

- Consider your role. Native Nation leaders and tribal citizens are experts and should be considered partners in the process. Consult with your experts early and often throughout all phases of the project. Recognize their time is valuable and their input is considerably meaningful to the process.
- Respect Native territories. When you enter tribal territories, buy local, patron the businesses, meet at or near tribal offices, and offer to engage tribal leadership on your visits. Also, consult the tribal calendar before you arrive. You don't want to compete with scheduled community events.

## RESPONSIBILITY.

- Get to know your partners. Spend time getting to know the Native Nation, its gatekeepers and its citizens. Ask them about their histories, their realities and what it means to be a citizen of that Nation. Each Native Nation is unique. Gatekeepers are not always the individuals you first encounter. Also inquire about the tribe's process for approving partnerships with the tribe. This will vary across Native Nations. It will be critical for you to understand this process before you begin a project.
- Design your project to address the self-determined needs of Native Nations. Ask Native leaders what their priorities are for their Nations. Shared goals are the best goals.

RESPECT. RESPONSIBILITY. RECIPROCITY. BALANCE.

## **RECIPROCITY.**

- Give back in a meaningful and positive way. Compensate participants or volunteers, ask tribal leadership what would be helpful and be certain there is value to the Nation beyond contributing to the greater knowledge of society. Always share your work back with tribal leadership and the community before disseminating your findings.
- Be ready to address the *why* and *how* in your project. Identify why the Native Nation should engage in a partnership with you and how they will benefit as a result of their partnership. This question will arise at some point. Be ready with an answer!

## **BALANCE.**

- Value indigenous knowledge. Different forms of knowledge, both Indigenous and academic, are valuable. Indigenous knowledge has been learned, lived, and passed down for generations.
- Relationships precede projects. Create trust. Be authentic. Be humble. Develop and maintain respectful relationships and a successful project will follow.

For more information or consultation, contact:

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*The mission of the UNC American Indian Center is to bridge the richness of American Indian cultures with the strengths of Carolina in research, education and service.*

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