The background of the entire page is a photograph of a sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow that fills the sky and reflects off the clouds. The sky transitions from a pale yellow near the sun to a soft blue at the top. In the foreground, there are silhouettes of tall grasses and reeds, some with seed heads, reaching up towards the sky. The overall mood is peaceful and natural.

Indigenous Engagement Framework

March 2023



Guidelines & Principles

- To nurture a relationship of engagement, as a conservation organization/coalition we first must ensure we are honoring a request from a Tribe. This includes ensuring it is an authentic Tribal government request, not simply Native representation that may not have the authority to speak on behalf of a Tribe.
- The request is aligned on conservation values and outcomes; the land is being protected.
- Tribal sovereignty and priorities are not subsumed by a conservation organization's agenda. Tribal government to government relations are not impacted by this work.

This Framework and corresponding modules are intended to be in service to Federally Recognized and Non-Federally Recognized Tribes and Native American communities, as well as to conservation organizations' collaboration on shifting processes and approaches to National Monument designations and other related public lands protection. This Framework also recognizes that each Tribe has its respective governance structure, conservation priorities, and sovereign status, and should be respected accordingly. It is a clear reminder that you cannot treat all Tribes the same. Thus, we start with guidelines and principles. In simplicity, to ensure we do not start with replicating past inequitable practices and colonial models, we can proceed with action if:

- We are honoring a request from a specific Tribe.
- The Tribe is asking for help that the coalition can support with (expertise, knowledge, etc) and does not replace other Tribal sovereign relations and their leadership.
- The request protects the land as a conservation outcome, incorporating and valuing Tribal cultural practices.



Audience

There are at least two starting audiences for this framework and approach. The first is "Indian Country" in the sense of being able to support Tribal governments that may have an interest in the national monument designation process yet may be under-resourced and not informed in the approach. They may be asking for partnership support and how to navigate processes and relations with conservation organizations. The second is the "conservation world" as it undertakes systemic change in its approach to conservation. This means doing structural work, relational work, mind-shift work, and emotional work in how conservation work can and must be different with Tribal engagement. This requires moving beyond consultation into co-creation and sovereign amplification.

Approaching the Work for Systemic Change

Structural Change: This looks at elements such as policies, budgets, practices, and other resource flows that facilitate or impede change. For example, Tribes may have current priorities and urgency around policies governing water, establishing rights for free trade (tourism, timber, traditional burns), and enforcing treaty rights. As a way to unpack what Native representation means ask questions such as:

- "Where is the [name of Tribe] on this?" Example: Where is the Oneida Nation on this?
- "What is the (name of Tribe)'s position on the issue?" and "Does the (name of Tribe) have a policy position regarding the issue?"
- When was the (name of tribe) engaged in the campaign?
- What is the ongoing engagement of the (name of tribe) in this effort?
- Who represents the (name of tribe) on the campaign committee?

Relational Change: This looks at elements such as power dynamics, trust, and other relationship-building that can be crucial for how quickly and authentically the work moves. If the work moves at the speed of trust, that can mean taking the time to build trust and moving slowly to move fast. At the same time with deep reservoirs of trust, the work can move quickly.

Power dynamic and trust example: asking the question "What has been the relationship between the community and the organization with power? (for example a well-resourced nonprofit like The Nature Conservancy or The Trust For Public Land. Similarly referring to state and federal agencies.) Has the relationship been transactional? Extractive? Paternalistic? etc."

Mental Model Change: This looks at the mind shifts that can happen and are needed to move relational and structural change. It unpacks how we see the world and connects it with other ways of knowing and being, especially regarding how Indigenous people relate to the land, waters, and natural world. For example in the work of decolonizing and decoloniality shifting from a dominant mechanistic reductionist language to a life-honoring logic can illustrate the logic of valuation along with the responsibility that comes with the protection of a landscape with multifaceted value beyond recreation and extraction.



Engaging with Conflict

In many ways conflict is unavoidable but it should not be avoided for the sake of engaging in authentic transformative work. While there can be many conflict-avoidant spaces, organizations, and individuals, and conflict for conflict's sake may not be helpful, it can be crucial to see how conflict can be navigated as part of a restorative process. One helpful way this can be framed is to consider the role of fire in healthy ecosystems. Suppressing or ignoring it does not lead to healthy succession and healthy landscapes. It simply builds up fuel which can be set off by a spark and lead to an intensive destructive fire. However, an intentional low-intensity fire can be good for the land, especially in a fire-adaptive landscape. Thus, some things should burn, but not carelessly, so this asks us to consider how to be responsible fire tenders as well. Just like how we can ask, "How can prescribed fire be healthy for this land?" we can also ask, "What prescribed burning may be needed in this sociocultural/organizational/relational space?"

Inter-tribal conflict can be especially challenging since it is important to acknowledge while respecting sovereignty. Still, as a Lipan Apache tribal member responded once to this question: "No one makes it through 500 years of colonization unscathed." By supporting a healing-centered approach as much as a trauma-informed one, and not defaulting to values of White Supremacy (e.g. paternalistic saviorism) it can nurture necessary spaces for this work to happen and heal severed connections.

Conflict with NGOs can be more familiar but still crucial to facilitate the establishment of "power with" rather than "power over" relationships that ensure building on conservation successes of the past, but with new and more healing value systems. Some potential ways to engage can be:

- Be clear on your values and priorities
- Have an ethos of engagement
- Be clear on asks and roles

Potential benefits of this Framework and approach:

- It's a celebration of and for Tribes
- Intercommunity solidarity--From "we didn't cross the border, the border crossed us" to "the borders were created to contain us"
- A curriculum on Tribal sovereignty will educate ourselves and our partners to avoid pitfalls in the future and improve communications and partnerships.
- Encourages increased communications and collaboration between the Tribes and partners





Starting Questions & Considerations

For Tribes:

- What terminology makes sense to you and what does not? Just like with medical terminology, terms can be confusing and impede our ability to engage.
- Is a National Monument designation right for you? What current and potential conservation tools are available?
- What is the long-term vision of a national monument? How can a management plan address this vision?

For conservation organizations: As you engage in the following modules, toolkits, and readings, consider these questions:

- Are you still failing to go to the source? Is it Tribal government or general "Native representation"?
- Are you honoring a Tribal request?
- Are your interactions with Tribal communities grounded in relationships versus transactions?
- Are the actions that your organization is undertaking grounded in an understanding of Tribal priorities and concerns?
- Are the funds you are raising for work in this specific landscape being done with transparency and benefiting the Tribe(s) or purely your agenda? (e.g. Arctic Refuge)
- In your communication and advocacy are you representing your organizational views and only expressing Tribal views with the expressed permission of Tribe(s)
- A reminder that Tribes are sovereign nations and this has a special role in the context of "DEI" work. "You're not dealing with 'minorities' you're dealing with sovereign nations," sovereign nations that were here before the USA.

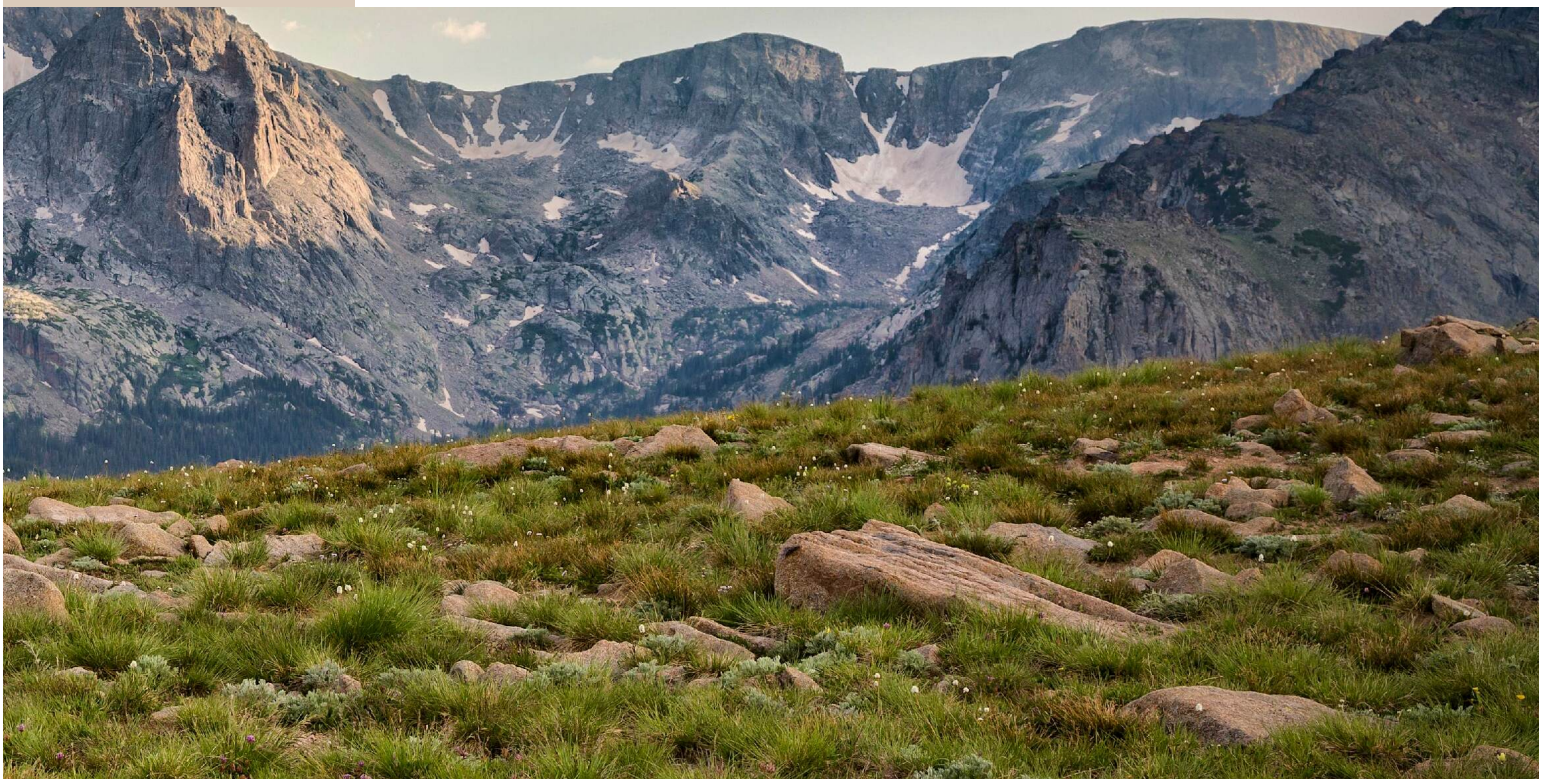
These examples provide **notes of caution**, in terms of applying learnings of how work with Tribes can be contextual:

- Bears Ears-- noticing the importance of connecting intent with the impact of Tribal engagement
- Camp Hale-- providing examples of what you shouldn't do

Many if not most of the current monument campaigns - even those with community support - were originated by mainstream conservation groups, funders or locally based conservation groups and not Tribal or people of color. Using the guidelines listed in this document can help the coalition be successful in prioritizing Tribal and community interests as it connect with these campaigns.

Resources for further reading

- Native News Online
- NAWPA Committee
- Monterey County Weekly



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