

# Things to Consider for Partnering With Local Tribes in Teaching about Tribal Sovereignty

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We are excited you are embarking or continuing your journey on including tribal perspectives in your social studies classes. We honor you for the work you are already doing. Know that our curriculum doesn't replace what you're already doing; it only enhances it.

The best way to ensure successful implementation of your curriculum is to build a long-term *relationship* between your school and local tribes. Be patient with yourself, your school, district, school boards, and local tribes. This is a lengthy, gradual, and complex endeavor and cannot happen overnight. We realize that while you are ready to embark on including tribal perspectives into your social studies program, you may not be quite ready to take on the lead in building a school-tribal partnership. This is okay; we have faith that it will happen in time. If all you can do right now is use bits and pieces of our curriculum throughout the year, which is okay, too. But with a little lead time, the ways that local tribes can support you are varied and exciting. Tribal partners can...

1. Assist in planning your lessons and/or units
2. Help adapt your lessons to reflect local tribal history, traditions, and perspectives.
3. Arrange for guest speakers to come into your classroom
4. Arrange for tribal presentations to your department, grade level, or staff
5. Arrange for classroom visits to your local tribe's fishery, cultural center, museum, or other appropriate destination
6. Invite your class to tribal cultural events
7. Act as a sounding board for your ideas or questions
8. Suggest sources and materials particular to their tribe(s)

When you decide to initiate your involvement in building a school-tribe partnership, there are some things to consider. Historically, tribes have an inherent distrust of non-tribal educational institutions. They have experienced time and time again most of the following:

- Tribal children forced to attend government or religious boarding schools designed to eradicate tribal culture and tradition altogether (cultural genocide);
- An assumption that non-tribal education is superior to tribal educational objectives, methods, and initiatives;
- Inaccurate histories written about tribes and tribal people by those who have neither consulted nor visited the tribes;
- Tribal people often being viewed as relics or spectacles;
- An assumption that tribes have nothing of value to offer non-Indian communities;
- Ulterior motives or hidden agendas; and
- A lack of long-term commitment to partnering with local tribes in the educational success of their children

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** The most efficient or consistent way to successfully build this relationship is to have at least two contact people from the [include district positions] tribe that you regularly interact and communicate with. Tribal leadership changes, just like district and other governmental officials. With new heads of tribal governments, you may find that the commitment to the process changes as well. When you have a few people familiar with you and the earnestness of your goals, these people can act as your liaisons to arrange for other tribal members to contribute to your teaching as well, and you don't have to start over if you sole contact is unavailable.

**To get the ball rolling, here is what we suggest:**

1. Start w-a-y ahead of time. Dealing with governments and governmental bureaucracy takes time. It's not the same as just arranging for a guest speaker.
2. Contact your district's Indian Education or Title Programs Director. Chances are they already know about our curriculum and may already have contacts and relationships with your neighboring tribes. This is the person who should make initial inquiries and arrange meetings with tribal members. Failing that, have your building administrator make initial contacts on your behalf. Your aim is to regularly communicate and work with your tribal partners. While the success of this approach varies from tribe to tribe and district to district, it has been our experience that when a school district official makes contact, the tribes better understand that there is "buy-in" at the district level.
3. Prepare for the journey:
  - a. Visit the tribal website(s).
  - b. Visit tribal museum, library, or cultural center websites.
  - c. Know the names of the people and department(s) who you will likely work with.
  - d. All 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington State have supported this curriculum. Nearly all tribes know about it.
4. If your district does not have a person to assist you in obtaining a connection with your local tribe(s), identify the local tribe(s) education department, director, or liaison through the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs Tribal Directory:  
<http://www.goia.wa.gov>.
5. Phone calls are more effective than emails.
6. Consider offering to visit and meet at the tribe's offices.
7. Be flexible about timing meetings and communication with your local tribe(s). Be aware that for most tribal people, it is more important that everyone be present at the meeting than starting and ending on time.
8. Emphasize that your goal is to teach with the tribes, not just about them.
9. Be persistent.
10. Be prepared for difficult conversations.