



A Model for Tribal Collaboration at Archaeology Southwest

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In our most recent Strategic Plan (2021), Archaeology Southwest makes a strong commitment to Indigenous collaboration. Because of Indigenous Peoples’ loss of control over their homelands—and limited control of the interpretation of their ancestral places—there is a deep historical disconnect among the Indigenous inhabitants of such places, what is said about those places, and understanding of how those places should be managed and protected.

To help address these disconnects, Archaeology Southwest pledges to radically transform our work. To ensure Tribal engagement and co-creation, we—Archaeology Southwest staff and board—must share power equitably with Indigenous Nations and communities in all we do. Archaeology Southwest cannot consult on terms we set; we must enable co-creation of any terms of engagement with Indigenous Nations and communities.

Since creating the **2022–2024 Strategic Plan**, Archaeology Southwest staff have accomplished a number of things we set out to do. For example, the Tribal Working Group is now meeting monthly to provide insight and direction for cyberSW 2.0. Indigenous staff have joined our ranks. **Save History** features Indigenous expert blogs and Tribes’ efforts to protect cultural sites. The 2022–2023 Archaeology Café theme is collaboration. These are important first steps.

Drawing on our experiences as members of Indigenous communities, our experiences working with Native people, and our education and training, as well as our familiarity with the organization’s accomplishments, Ashleigh and Sky offer this model for Tribal Collaboration. It incorporates Indigenous values, knowledge, and scholarship to guide Archaeology Southwest on its journey of collaboration. The model provides staff, board, partners, and volunteers with an underlying philosophy behind the *way* we collaborate. It is not meant to be a guide for each collaborative project, but rather a template for building project-specific Tribal collaboration plans.

In short, this model provides us with the “why” behind the “how” we collaborate as we commit ourselves to fulfilling the organization’s goals for robust collaboration with the Indigenous Nations, communities, and citizens of the Southwest.

RELATIONSHIPS: THE FOUNDATION

Across Indigenous Country, the phrase “all my relations” or “all my relatives” is frequently heard (Deloria et al. 1999). This saying relays Indigenous understandings that Creation consists of interconnected relationships among all beings—and not just human beings, but also animals, plants, and other beings, including rocks and other things deemed inanimate by Western society (Arola 2011, Cordova 2007, Deloria et al. 1992, Harris 2005, Harris

and Wasilewski 2004, Wilson 2008). Because individuals are part of an interdependent web, humans must take into consideration our individual and collective impacts on human and more-than-human communities (Arola 2011, Hart 2010). This phrase also relays the worldview that we have relationships with ancestors and future generations: Our place in time does not relieve us of the responsibility of maintaining positive relationships with past and future relatives.

Although the phrase is simple, it encapsulates a great deal about what Indigenous Peoples value and how these values inform the building and maintenance of relationships. Understanding this as individuals and as an organization is integral to meeting our Indigenous collaboration goals. Relationship-building itself should be a goal of our organization, not simply a means to an end. Moreover, relationships should not end because a goal has been achieved or a project has been completed. The values underlying positive kinship obligations are varied, but Harris and Wasilewski (2004) outline four kinship values in an Indigenous ontology: relationship, responsibility, reciprocity, and redistribution.

RELATIONSHIP

What does it mean to be a good relative, specifically in collaborative research, outreach, education, and stewardship? The other kinship values—responsibility, reciprocity, and redistribution—answer this question in part. Yet, healthy relationships also incorporate a variety of other elements, including time, communication, truth, honesty, and humility, among others. For example, time spent with the communities and individuals we collaborate with is essential to developing long-term relationships. Rather than a one-off transaction, we should strive to build enduring relationships: “Successful relationships and work often extend for decades. Be prepared to be there for the long haul” (Dillon 2021:7). Again, *relationship-building is something to be celebrated as an achievement on its own, not just as a step toward achieving other goals.*

Part of establishing a respectful and reciprocal relationship is *having an idea of who the Indigenous collaborators are.* Some tips in this regard come from “Unfencing the Future” (Dillon 2021). The first step is to “Get acquainted with Indigenous individuals and peoples you hope to work with. Ask what’s happened in their communities and what’s important to them. Listen to their responses and try to understand them” (Dillon 2021:7). The second tip is “Don’t expect Indigenous people to educate you about Indigenous history and issues broadly” (Dillon 2021:7).

We should learn about each Indigenous community or Tribal Nation we hope to collaborate with in order to better understand their background, values, and needs—and we should not

expect them to provide us with knowledge without fair compensation. Because it can be emotionally draining for Indigenous people to discuss issues relating to settler-colonialism, compassion and discretion are essential when asking collaborators to discuss sensitive topics. Furthermore, collaborators may share information that is critical, challenging, or difficult for non-Indigenous people to hear. Critiques of Archaeology Southwest, the archaeological discipline, compliance archaeology, and other issues related to our work must be fair game if relationships are to thrive. Staff should be open to and humble in receiving such feedback.

Within Indigenous communities, there are different levels of relationships. The first level is leadership. This level consists of Chair Persons, Tribal Councils, Governors, Presidents, and other official leadership positions. Because Archaeology Southwest is a nonprofit organization, we do not engage in the kind of formal government-to-government consultation federal agencies are required to do. We do at times engage with the leadership level, however. For example, some of us present our work to Tribal Councils.

The second level is Tribal Historic Preservation Offices and other cultural offices, which many of our staff currently have relationships with. These offices are responsible for archaeological and cultural resources, so their expertise and guidance is helpful and relevant to our work.

The final level of relationships is individual Tribal members who are not in cultural or leadership positions, but who assent to sharing their knowledge and experiences with us. These individuals are, for example, invited as guest speakers for Archaeology Café, hired on a contractual basis, or write blog pieces for SaveHistory.org.

Another key ingredient in meaningful relationships is *communication that goes beyond transactional exchanges*. Allowing time for introductions, visiting, and discussion are important to creating a sense of community, especially for Indigenous people. Furthermore, with open communication come opportunities to acknowledge hard truths: wrongdoings by archaeologists; institutionalized biases in the archaeological discipline; the impacts of settler-colonialism on Indigenous Peoples and lands; and past and ongoing inequities and impediments Indigenous people face in reclaiming control and effecting the return of ancestral remains, material culture, sites, and lands.

Transparency is also essential for collaboration to flourish. Recognizing one's positionality, for example, and how it impacts the work and relationships between collaborators can help with transparency (Kovach et al. 2013, Wilson 2008). For example, Duarte states that,

The methodology of positionality requires researchers to identify their own degrees of privilege through factors of race, class, educational attainment, income, ability, gender, and citizenship, among others... Doing so helps them understand how

their way of making meaning, of framing research, within their conceptual universe is tied to their positionality within an unjust world [Duarte 2017:135].

Through the sharing of where the researcher comes from, both literally and figuratively, two functions are served:

Firstly, it offers a relational placing, introductory function. For many Indigenous peoples, it is an intuitive act that precedes a formal address, and with our introductions there is often an acknowledgement of place, elders, friends. ... Secondly... introducing and locating oneself are an integral part of Indigenous methodologies and they ask that we as researchers put ourselves out there [Kovach et al. 2013:491].

By self-locating as part of the relationship-building and project processes, individual and collective work is better prepared for relationality and transparency. Self-location, or identifying who we are in relation to our work, allows collaborators to know us better and understand our connection to them. Self-location asks, “How did we come to this work?” The answers often help Indigenous people understand our intentions and whether they, as collaborators, want to commit to relationship-building.

In the same way we must prioritize our relationships with the Indigenous communities and people we work with, we must also attend to the relationships between and among Archaeology Southwest staff, board members, volunteers, and partners. We should strive for relationships that embrace responsibility, reciprocity, and redistribution. Taking time to build relationships among ourselves, and thereby fostering a “culture of commitment,” will lead to informing and fulfilling our mission. We should recognize that building relationships takes time and that investments of time should be intentional and well thought out. In other words, relationships do not “just happen,” and taking time to build them can help reduce harm, miscommunication, and mishaps among ourselves and with Tribal collaborators and other partners in the future.

RESPONSIBILITY

“Forget your rights and remember your responsibilities!” an Anishinaabe scholar urged Ashleigh and her colleagues at an Indigenous science conference. Just because we have a right to study something does not necessarily mean we should. Just as the recognition of *all my relations* spans social, temporal, and political boundaries, so too must we consider our responsibilities to Indigenous people along these axes. What impacts might our projects have on Indigenous senses of place, sovereignty, and community? How can we best involve Indigenous people as collaborators?

Collaborative Indigenous archaeology differs from other approaches in that it is responsible primarily to descendant communities (Atalay 2010, Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2010 et al., Nicholas 2008). For example, Indigenous collaborators should be encouraged and enabled to share control with Archaeology Southwest staff over the research design, methods, theory, interpretation, and mobilization of knowledge (Atalay 2010, Colwell-Chanthaphonh et al. 2010, Nicholas 2008). Still, it can and has been argued that much of the work that claims to be collaborative actually has little involvement of Indigenous people. We suggest that horizontalism, or “equal input and standing between the parties involved,” needs to be a goal of collaborative projects at Archaeology Southwest (Angelbeck and Grier 2014).

It is important to involve Indigenous collaborators *in every stage of the collaborative process, especially the beginning stages where their input can guide the next steps of the project*. Additionally, it would not be right to claim a project is collaborative when collaborators are involved in only a small part of a project, with little power over its planning, execution, and application. Projects need not be viewed in binary terms, as either collaborative or not. There are degrees of collaboration in which descendant communities have varying levels of power and control in the process. Moreover, Indigenous collaborators may not have the time, desire, or resources to be collaborative, so it is important to involve them early in the process and determine the degree of commitment they desire and are able to give. We may need to alter project plans to fit the needs of collaborators or provide resources that help them participate.

Oftentimes, more than one Tribal Nation is affiliated with a place. When many Tribes are involved, collaboration can be even more complex and time-consuming because of differing values, interests, and preferences. We should anticipate that Tribal collaboration, especially when it involves multiple Tribes, will be difficult. In addition, Tribal leadership and government-appointed positions often change with elections and staff turnover. Because Indigenous people are not static monoliths, personnel changes may result in changes to a given Tribe’s involvement on a project or to inter-Tribal dynamics.

RECIPROCITY

According to Merriam-Webster, reciprocity is “a mutual exchange of privileges.” In exchange for the help, insight, and knowledge collaborators bring, we must consider what we can do in return. Archaeology Southwest honors mutualism by offering honoraria to Indigenous collaborators in recognition of the value of their time, knowledge, and energy. Whether it be paying collaborators for their time, inviting them to be named as co-authors, giving them gifts such as food, or assisting them with their own projects, reciprocity is a significant part of relationships in an Indigenous worldview. Gift-giving is a common Indigenous tradition, so be prepared to graciously receive gifts, as well.

REDISTRIBUTION

Not only must we consider what we can do for individual collaborators who help us, we should also consider how to redistribute our resources to their communities. Redistribution is “the distribution of something in a different way, typically to achieve greater social equality” (Oxford Languages). An example of this at Archaeology Southwest is providing opportunities for Indigenous young adults to participate in programs such as Archaeology Southwest’s field school. This community redistribution goes beyond reciprocity and gives back to the Indigenous community as a whole. It offers additional opportunities that come from education and professional development, which builds capacity for Indigenous communities by training future Indigenous archaeologists.

Considering the restrictions of grants, timelines, and more, it can be difficult to redistribute resources to Indigenous communities—but it is not impossible. Other opportunities for redistribution include supporting land purchases and capital investments on behalf of Indigenous communities, providing opportunities for Indigenous youth, supporting Indigenous-led organizations, and hiring Indigenous staff or contractors. Redistribution can be challenging, specifically for Archaeology Southwest projects that are time-bound and reliant on funding that has a deadline attached to a goal or product. Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Nations are often addressing serious issues within their communities that take precedence. In addition, each Nation or community is unique in their capacity to participate in projects outside of their immediate communities. For these reasons, Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Nations often operate on timelines not readily compatible with, much less adaptable to, entities external to the community or Nation.

This challenge, like all others, can be met through relationship-building. More specifically, if the goal of our interaction with an Indigenous person, community, or Nation is solely to build relationships and that investment of time occurs before a collaborative project begins, then the timelines the collaborators work on are not as difficult. Redistribution of resources to these communities and Nations will also help collaborators who otherwise might not be able to participate due to a lack of capacity or resources. In order to ensure that redistribution will have positive effects, we should strive to learn what forms of redistribution each Nation or community would find most helpful and adapt accordingly.

NEXT STEPS: ACTION

Richard Morrison, an Anishinaabe Elder, once challenged, “You’re talking the talk, but are you walking the walk?” Tribal collaboration is easier said than done. As many of us have experienced, collaboration is not straightforward, easy, fast, or without mistakes. Therefore, it

is important to continually be open to learning and moving forward in action while centering relationship-building, respect, reciprocity, and redistribution in our work.

Archaeology Southwest is committed to Tribal collaboration. Therefore, it is paramount that we take accountability measures to ensure that we are implementing actionable steps of Tribal engagement and co-creation in our work. Directors at Archaeology Southwest will create Tribal collaboration plans annually, and the organization will undertake an annual review to assess how successfully Tribal collaboration is executed.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 To ensure Tribal engagement and co-creation, we must share power with Indigenous Nations, communities, and individuals.
- 2 This model provides us with the “why” behind “how” we collaborate.
- 3 Understanding the values embedded in the phrase “All my relations” is integral to meeting our collaboration goals.
- 4 Embrace the four Kinship Values—relationship, responsibility, reciprocity, and redistribution.
- 5 Intentional time spent with collaborators is essential to building enduring relationships.
- 6 Relationship-building is something to be celebrated, is a goal in and of itself, and should not be a mere means to an end.
- 7 Respectful and reciprocal relationships start with learning about each Indigenous Nation or community we collaborate with in order to understand their backgrounds, values, and needs.
- 8 Meaningful relationships come from communication that is transparent and goes beyond transactional exchanges.
- 9 We should ask ourselves, “What impacts might our projects have on Indigenous senses of place, sovereignty, and community?”
- 10 Indigenous collaborators should be encouraged and enabled to share control of research design, methods, theory, interpretation, and mobilization of knowledge.
- 11 Horizontalism—equal input and standing—between collaborators must be a goal of collaborative projects.

- 12 Understand that Tribal collaboration, especially when it involves multiple Tribes, will be challenging.
- 13 In exchange for help, insight, and knowledge, we must consider what we can offer in return.
- 14 Redistribution of resources will be dependent on feedback from Indigenous Nations and communities in order to ensure its effectiveness.
- 15 Tribal collaboration is easier said than done!

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