Indigenous-based Community Assessment Model

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"WE ARE OUR OWN MEDICINE" (UMONHON ELDER)

Stage 1: Researching a Tribal Community/Nation
Researching tribal communities/nations in your state is imperative before you begin any type of communication with them. Most tribes have websites that will tell you their history, language, traditional social events, political structure, programs, services and treaty information. The internet also has information on most tribes in the United States. There are currently 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States. You should also research major federal legislation that have impacted tribes throughout history like the: Dawes Act, Morrill Act, Major Crimes Act, Indian Reorganization Act, Self-Determination Act, Indian Freedom Religion Act and the Indian Child Welfare Act. These laws will give you a perspective of what Native People in this country have had to go through in dealing with the United States government. Also, research the history between your state and the tribal communities/nations in your state. What type of relationship does the land-grant university and the tribal communities have in your state? This knowledge will give you an informed perspective of the history and relationship the tribal communities/nations in your state have with the United States, the state you are living in, and your university.

Stage 2: Building Relationships
Relationships are at the center of Indigenous communities/nations in the United States. I am not just talking about human being to human being relationships, but relationships with the natural world. Through their creation/origin stories, Native People have a special connection/relationship with all living things in this world. So, try to open your mind up to these type of worldviews. As for your personal relationship with tribal communities, please try to practice humility and sharing with them. These are two values that will endear you to tribal communities, clans and families. Also, understanding the role that elders play in tribal communities is very important. When speaking with groups within tribal communities, it is important to acknowledge all elders first and thank them for allowing you to speak at the event. If
you are hosting a Native event, it is appropriate to approach an elder before it starts and ask them to say a prayer and a teaching before you start your agenda. It is also important to share a gift with the elder for their prayer and teaching. If you are successful in developing a good relationship with a tribal community, clan or family, you will become a relative to them. They may call you brother, sister, uncle or auntie, and they might even have an adoption ceremony for you. Again, relationships are very important to Native Peoples.

Stage 3: A Request
A community assessment request from the tribal council or tribal member should be brought forward and acknowledged before you begin an assessment. It is imperative that this model begins from the community and not from an outside source. This model is an “inward – outward” assessment in which the community takes on the responsibility for planning, implementing, evaluating, writing the resolutions and sponsoring the annual community forums. If you utilize this model, you will be the facilitator that assists the community through their own assessment.

Stage 4: A Community Coordinator
A community coordinator(s) needs to be selected for this assessment. This position should be a Native American person who has experience in the area of assessment within the Tribal communities, and who has a sense of objectivity or non-bias with the community involved in the assessment. Also, the community coordinator should be someone who can commit to the assessment from beginning to end.

Stage 5: The Planning Committee
A committee of community members from the Umonhon Nation is needed to help plan, implement and evaluate the assessment. The planning committee should be made-up of community members that are representative of their community. We are talking about students, parents, elders, business and educational leaders, tribal council members and single adults. They should all be tribal members.

Stage 6: Guidelines for the Planning Committee
Guidelines for conducting planning committee meetings should be established by the planning committee. They should be fair and mirror the values of the community. This is not a committee that hears complaints from the community, that is the tribal council’s job.

Stage 7: The Plan - Vision
The planning committee will need to put a plan together to complete the assessment; this plan will be the vision for this community assessment. The vision will consist of goals and objectives that will determine if the assessment’s desired outcomes have been met. These goals and objectives are fluid and may change from year to year.

a) Goals:
- A broad statement about the long-term expectations of what should happen as a result of the community assessment, the desired results. Goals serve as the foundation for developing the assessment's objectives.
• For example: As a result of the community assessment, an annual evaluation will be conducted to measure if the desired outcomes of the previous year have been achieved.
• For example: As a result of the community assessment, an Indigenous Community Assessment Survey will be developed.

b) Objectives:
• Statements that describe the results to be achieved, and the manner in which they will be achieved. You usually need multiple objectives to develop a clearly-defined goal.
• For example: The tribal council, tribal college and state university will partner to sponsor an annual evaluation of the community assessment’s previous years outcomes. Data from the evaluation will solely belong to the tribe, and will be accumulated, analyzed and given back to the community.
• For example: The Umonhon Nation Planning Committee, NICC and UNL will partner to develop and implement an Indigenous-based community research tool (the assessment survey) in the communities of the Umonhon Nation during the first-year of the plan.

c) Survey:
• A community assessment survey should be developed and implemented by the planning committee. The tribal college and the state university can be asked to assist in this process.
• Community members (possibly targeting students) can be hired and trained to conduct surveys. All survey workers will be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement.
• Surveys will be tabulated and formulated into an assessment document to be given to the planning committee and then to the Tribal Council.
• The planning committee will then prioritize the key issues identified by the community surveys and schedule appropriate community forums to address these issues.

d) One Week of Community Forums:
• Once the key issues are identified, then the planning committee lays out the agenda for the community forums. The community forums are scheduled for one week from Monday through Friday at a central location in the community. This location should have a kitchen and a cafeteria to serve food, and it should also have a community room and breakout rooms or large meeting area.
• In the mornings, a prayer and an elder providing traditional/cultural teachings are given to remind the community to conduct themselves in a respectful manner. Then, Tribal program directors, school administrators,
and any pertinent committees as well as any additional officials, agencies, and/or departments are asked for written reports and presentations about their programs and schools to the community. Lunch is then served.

- The afternoon hours consist of a roundtable discussion with a hands-on workshop per department/program area consisting of those officials who presented in the morning with the community membership, a recorder documenting the discussion, and a facilitator leading the discussion. For example, program directors will discuss their funding, goals, activities and results of their respective programs with their respective discussion group to identify issues and possible solutions.

- To this effect, per roundtable discussion group, the results of these discussion groups are recorded, and presented back to the discussion circles for approval. They are then written in resolution format and approved by the planning committee. Then, the resolutions are presented in community meetings for discussion and approval.

- Once this is completed, the resolutions are presented to the appropriate Tribal Council Committee for discussion and approval.

- Finally, the Tribal Council Committee presents the resolution to the Tribal Council for discussion and approval.

- A community Pow Wow is then scheduled over the weekend to celebrate the completion of the community assessment.

Stage 8: Option – NICC Founder’s Day
The planning committee can elect to include the Tribal College in its annual community assessment. If they do, the assessment can be held on the date the college was founded. The annual assessment could then be called Founder’s Day in honor of that date and event. Other Tribal Nations have elected to do this.

Stage 9: Timeline
YEAR ONE – FIRST YEAR
The selection of a coordinator, a planning committee, the development of the community survey and the completion of the community survey should be completed within the first year of the plan. However, if the planning committee elects to shortened the survey process by limiting the amount of surveys conducted, then the amount of time for the survey assessment would be considerably less as well.

YEAR TWO – SECOND YEAR
The tabulation and formulation of the assessment document, identifying key issues and holding the community forums, creating the resolutions and presenting them to the communities and tribal council should be completed within the second year.

Stage 10: Cost
To be determined.