

Consultation Foundations: Your First Meeting

The goal of your first meeting is to lay a strong foundation – for stakeholders in the Tribal consultation process to get to know each other and to co-create the consultation process. This meeting is not designed to dive into data or detailed plans, but rather to start the relationship on a foundation of shared values. Dedicating an entire meeting to developing relationships and building a solid consultation process will pay off many-fold in more effective and efficient subsequent meetings. Your foundation will be unique and specific to your setting.

Discussion Topics

Introductions

Get to know all stakeholders names, roles, and guiding values. Understanding one another's roles and educational values will help create a solid base from which you can build effective relationships. Each person in the meeting is present for a reason. Each person present will add value to the discussion. Some questions to get you started are listed below:

1. What is your name and your role within Indian Education?
2. What motivates you to be here today?
3. Please share one value that guides or underlies your work in education and why?
4. Name a person who influenced you in your education career? How did they influence you?
5. Name one interest you have outside of your work in education?

Go around the circle of participants allowing each person to answer the question without interruption. Then repeat that process for a second question and so on. This circle format facilitates deep listening and reflection.

Shared Principles

The purpose of this discussion is to identify shared principles for your group. From your principles, will flow the process for each meeting and for achieving broader goals for American Indian students in your district. Framing your principles and process as a structure for improving the educational outcomes for American Indian students in the district rather than to meet the requirements of ESSA, is key. Meetings held to “check off a box” on Tribal consultation will not achieve academic success for students. It is important to discuss why you are here, and to find the common principles you share. These principles are a foundation for constructive dialogue.

1. What are we here for?
2. What do we hope to get out of this process?
3. What are our common goals?

4. How do we value the ideas of others?
5. What is the value of a good relationship in this process?

Go around the circle of participants allowing each person to answer the question without interruption. Then repeat that process for a second question and so on. This circle format facilitates deep listening and reflection.

Process

Once you have your principles identified, you will need to clarify your process.

1. You have your goals. How are you going to get there?
2. What should the process be?
3. What are the ground rules for effective communication?
4. What will it look like to exchange perspectives, needs, and concerns?
5. Define concrete meeting formats, roles, and responsibilities.
6. Define a process for making decisions.

An open discussion format may be most useful for this part of the meeting. A district staff person should take notes and prepare a summary of the conversation. It is useful to turn the summary into a formal Process Agreement.

Process Agreement

A Process Agreement is a document outlining how a group will function. It ensures that all participants have a shared understanding of how the group will function and the expectations of members. Topics to consider for inclusion in a process agreement are:

- ❖ Purpose statement (may integrate list of shared principles)
- ❖ List of participants and their roles
 - Are your meetings public
 - Who is able to sit at the table?
 - Only committee members?
 - Anyone who would like to participate
 - Invited guests only
 - Are community participants welcome?
 - Who is able to vote
 - Who is able to speak
 - Can anyone come just to listen but not vote or participate?
- ❖ Ground Rules
 - Discussion guidelines
 - Information gathering and exchange
 - Data request timelines
 - Participants should receive the information (3), (5), (7), or (14) days before the next meeting

- Attendance guidelines
 - Consistent attendance
 - Specific responsibilities
 - Always attending (superintendent, Tribal representative)
 - Sometimes attending (title coordinators, specific program directors)
- ❖ Meeting schedule
 - All meetings at the same location
 - Meeting locations rotating between organizations
- ❖ Roles (i.e., note-taker, facilitator, etc.) and expectations
 - Facilitators should be equally represented from the School and the Tribal Nation. Co-facilitation can be implemented with one leader from both organizations.
 - Who will be taking meeting notes? Is this a rotating responsibility? How will the information be disseminated?
 - What are the expectations of each role?
- ❖ Collaborative process for setting the agenda for meetings
 - Agree to the next agenda at end of each meeting
 - Agenda set by all attendees
 - What will happen with emergent issues that need attending to immediately?
 - Send agenda items to specified person
- ❖ Decision making process

A draft of the Process Agreement should be discussed and finalized at the second meeting. A **process agreement template** can be found under [Tribal Consultation Guidance](#), on the Indian Education page of the MDE website.

Ground Rules

Your group should set its own ground rules, but here are some ideas:

- ❖ Listen to learn, not to prepare a response.
- ❖ Don't make assumptions. Ask questions.
- ❖ Presume positive intent.
- ❖ Speak from the heart and take risks to share what is really important to you.
- ❖ Share interests (*why*) rather than positions (*what*).

Decision Making

It is important to create clarity in the decision making process before any large scale resolution is decided. There are options available when making choices, and the method you choose will be up to your group of participants. There will be a diversity of ideas within your consultation group, and this diversity will lead to greater valuation of all of the ideas designed to help American Indian students succeed.

Since both the tribal representatives and the district need to agree that the consultation was successful, decisions will generally be made by consensus. It is helpful to define consensus before getting started. Consensus does *not* mean that all participants are 100 percent satisfied. In a consensus decision, the level of

agreement reached is often related not so much to the fact that everyone absolutely agrees, but that each member has decided they can live with the decision. One useful definition of consensus is:

The group will operate by consensus, and every effort will be made to meet the interests of all of the participants. The group will reach consensus on an issue when it agrees upon a proposal and each participant can honestly say:

- I believe that other participants understand my point of view.
- I believe I understand other participants' points of view.
- Whether or not I prefer this decision, I support it because it was arrived at openly and fairly and it is the best solution for us at this time.

Members should not block or withhold consensus unless they have serious reservations with the approach or solution that is proposed for consensus. If participants disagree with the approach or solution selected by the rest of the group, they should make every effort to offer an alternative which satisfies all participants. Members should remain at the table during deliberations to hear the full discussions in order to make informed judgments when decision making occurs.

For information on developing a concrete process for consensus assessment, please review:

[Guidelines to Successful Group Decision-Making and Problem Solving.](#)

[Decision-Making Strategy: Fist-to-Five.](#)

[Team Decision Making: Gradients of Agreement.](#)

Conclusion

Developing strong relationships, shared principles, and a clear process will not only help you to have an effective and efficient consultation, but it will help you to accomplish your shared goals for the education of American Indian students. Taking the time to lay this foundation is well worth the effort.

The Office of Indian Education is able to provide facilitators to assist with your foundational meetings as we move forward into effective Tribal Consultation. If you would like support facilitating, please contact the Office of Indian Education at 651-582-8280, or email: mde.indian-education@state.mn.us.