

POLICY BRIEF

Indigenous Data Sovereignty in Arizona: Setting an Agenda

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Indigenous data sovereignty derives from tribes' inherent right to govern their peoples, lands, and resources. In the United States and internationally, Indigenous Data Sovereignty has grown in recognition and action over the past five years.



Strengthening Indigenous Governance

A Call to Action for Native Nations, Tribal Citizens, Governments, Organizations, Scholars, and Funders

Indigenous data sovereignty asserts the rights of Native nations and Indigenous Peoples to govern the collection, ownership, and application of their own data.^{1,2} Indigenous data sovereignty derives from tribes' inherent right to govern their peoples, lands, and resources. In the United States and internationally, Indigenous data sovereignty has grown in recognition and action over the past five years.^{1,3,4,5} Defining a strategy for enhancing Indigenous data sovereignty for tribes in Arizona is needed in order to support tribal rights and interests in data.

A Convening

On April 24, 2019, the “Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit in Arizona: Building shared understanding and identifying Tribal Leader needs” was held at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. Summit attendees included tribal leaders and data practitioners, academic researchers, employees of the state of Arizona that have experience working with Native nations, students, and others. The day included grounding presentations on Indigenous data sovereignty in practice and facilitated discussions. Summit presenters shared how the Indigenous data sovereignty framework applied to their research with their own tribal communities.

Summit Objectives

The Summit's goal was to gain an understanding of how to enhance and strengthen tribal data systems, data collection, data analysis, data capacity building, and workforce competency around data management and control for tribes in Arizona. The objectives were to:

- (1) Better understand Indigenous data sovereignty principles to build efficient data systems in Indian Country.
- (2) Identify practical implementation and evaluation strategies for tribal departments and community members.
- (3) Determine the role of tribal governance in developing Indigenous data sovereignty protocols and procedures.

1 | Carroll, S. R., Rodriguez-Lonebear, D., & Martinez, A. (2019). Indigenous Data Governance: Strategies from United States Native Nations. *Data Science Journal*, 18(1), 31. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/dsj-2019-031>

2 | Kukutai, T. and Taylor, J. 2016. Data Sovereignty for Indigenous Peoples: Current Practice and Future Needs. In: Kukutai, T and Taylor, J (eds.), *Indigenous data sovereignty: Toward an agenda*, pp. 1–22. Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22459/CAEPR38.11.2016.01>

3 | Rodriguez-Lonebear, D. 2016. Building a data revolution in Indian country. In: Kukutai, T and Taylor, J (eds.), *Indigenous data sovereignty: Toward an agenda*, pp. 253–272. Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22459/CAEPR38.11.2016.14>

4 | National Congress of American Indians. 2018. Resolution KAN-18-011: Support of US Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Inclusion of Tribes in the Development of Tribal Data Governance Principles. 4 June 2018. Available at http://www.ncai.org/attachments/Resolution_gbuJbEHWpkOgcwCIFinal.pdf

5 | Kukutai, T., & Taylor, J. (Eds.). (2016). *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an agenda*. Acton ACT, Australia: ANU Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1q1crgf>

Enhancing Indigenous Data Sovereignty in Arizona

Attendees convened in three separate workgroups defined by their primary, self-selected work focus: tribal leaders and representatives; researchers and academics; and individuals that work with tribal communities in Arizona. The goal of the workgroups was to gain a deeper understanding of how the Indigenous data sovereignty framework is or might be applied in their work.

Tribal leaders

Tribal leaders identified a desire to govern both research and data to the benefit of the tribes.

The tribal leaders group highlighted the necessity of:

- Networking and building relationships with researchers and others engaging with data about and with tribal communities, including identifying what data are being collected and how data are used.
- Equipping researchers with the history of research in the community, community goals, and opportunities to enhance tribal data capacity and capability to strengthen tribal governance of research and data.
- Engaging in community-driven research that aligns with goals and needs, and enhances capacity and capability.
- Assessing the tribe's current data infrastructure and developing it further to protect and benefit the community.
- Implementing research and data policies (eg, data collection, data sharing, researcher agreements, research review boards) and making them publicly available.
- Creating internal tribal data infrastructure and policy to facilitate data sharing within tribes.
- Communicating with tribal citizens regarding these topics in order to design policy and research priorities that align with the future goals of the community.

Academics

The academic group discussed their responsibilities to the communities in which they work or collaborate.

The academic group highlighted the necessity of:

- Understanding tribal sovereignty, potential cultural impacts of the work, and history of research with the community.
- Asserting tribal rights to and interests in data; researchers are data stewards and do not own the data.
- Involving community members in the data processes to enhance capacity and capability.
- Disseminating and returning data, information, and lessons learned to the community.
- Communicating with tribal leaders and community members from beginning to end of the research as an act of responsible research.
- Actively collaborating with communities to guide the research process and information dissemination.
- Navigating research collaborations and building relationships takes time and looks different for every community. Tribal policies and procedures such as tribal IRBs, tribal codes, and other research review processes provide a guide.

Working with tribes

Those working with tribes emphasized the need for stronger relationships and increased engagement of tribes, including Indigenous project or research team members and seeking direct feedback from tribes on projects.

The entities working with tribes group highlighted the necessity of:

- Recognizing and supporting expertise in tribal communities.
- Assisting with survey development, sharing analysis methodology, and building and leveraging capacity for tribally-led data collection.
- Actively incorporating the Indigenous data sovereignty framework into discussions about working with tribal communities.

- Assessing internal policies that may hinder the development or implementation of the Indigenous data sovereignty framework.
- Working beyond mandated protocols to strengthen relationships with tribal communities for increased transparency and assist with enhancing capacity, capability, and infrastructure.
- Communicating with peers, coworkers, advisors, and leadership on why the Indigenous data sovereignty framework is necessary.
- Supporting tribal rights and interests in data, including tribal data ownership and control.

Recommendations for Supporting Indigenous Data Sovereignty in Arizona

- Future gatherings to educate and raise awareness of Indigenous data sovereignty for tribal leaders, tribal citizens, and youth.
- Convene focused events on specific issue areas such as climate, human health, and intellectual property law.
- Share tribal research and data governance policies and regulations, as well as learning about what other tribes have done.
- Create institutional policies and guidelines in support of Indigenous data sovereignty and tribal research and data governance policies and regulations.
- Review of the Arizona Board of Regents Tribal Consultation Policy and its implementation at the three state universities.
- Educate researchers and those working with tribal communities on tribal sovereignty and the history of problematic research in Arizona.
- Provide technical assistance and funding for tribal communities to develop Indigenous data governance protocols and procedures.

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Questions?

For more information, contact the Native Nations Institute at nni@email.arizona.edu.

Join the Network!

For more information on the US Indigenous Data Sovereignty Network and to join its community of practice that supports Indigenous data sovereignty through data governance-focused research, policy advocacy, and education, visit usindigenousdata.org and join us on Twitter: @USIDSN.

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