Stakeholder Engagement in Tribal Research Initiatives

American Indian Development Associates, LLC
Presented by Rita Martinez, BA
15th National Indian Nation Conference: NIJ Sponsored R&E Pre-Conference Institute
December 7, 2016

Introduction

Research within American Indian (AI) and Alaska Native (AN) communities is conducted throughout the country on a wide variety of health, social, economic, and environmental issues. The ongoing involvement of tribes in research is largely due to the recognition by tribal leaders (National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center, 2016) and tribal representatives for the need to have up-to-date information on important issues and concerns affecting tribal communities and AI and AN people.

Tribal governments are engaged in tribal driven research initiatives such as program evaluations, needs assessments, oral histories and observations that capture indigenous knowledge (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999 and Mariella, Brown, Carter, Verri, 2009); environmental and economic impact assessments; and census of housing, population and enrollment. Outside researchers from academia, private or non-profit research firms, states, federal and local agencies approach tribes to participate in research studies on a regular basis.

According to the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Policy Research Center (PRC) (2012), tribes see research as a tool for strengthening and enhancing tribal sovereignty (NCAI PRC, 2012). Many tribal leaders support the use of data obtained from research to inform effective tribal public policy, planning (NCAI PRC, 2012) and funding decisions at the national and local levels.

> *Stakeholder involvement has specific challenges that researchers and tribal communities can work together to resolve by having an engagement strategy that is open, transparent, and is a collaborative process.*

A growing number of tribes involved in research have developed or are in the process of developing important tribal research policies and practices that guide tribal research approval, regulation and oversight and involvement of key tribal stakeholders in local and national studies.

Tribal approval and regulatory mechanisms serve to protect tribal communities and ensure that outside researchers are informed and respectful of the historical, cultural, social, economic and environmental factors that make up the complex tribal context. Whether tribes are asked to participate in internal or external studies, research in tribal communities requires active and meaningful involvement and input from tribal leaders, citizens, and other stakeholders.

Who are Tribal Research Stakeholders?
Stakeholders include individuals or groups who are influenced or impacted directly or indirectly by the research being conducted (Fhi360 Research Utilization, 2012). In tribal settings, researchers, both internal and external, that seek to partner with AI and AN governments and communities have the primary responsibility to actively engage tribal stakeholders through a transparent and open strategic process (Carney, Whitmarsh, Nicholson-Cole, Shackley 2009). These participatory processes allow tribal stakeholders to be identified, recruited and involved in all phases of the research (NCAI PRC, 2006). Stakeholders are often grouped into categories; however, individual or

group perspectives, priorities, (Children's Bureau, 2013) knowledge, skills and abilities can vary significantly. These varying stakeholder perspectives provide important and diverse input that can strengthen tribal research projects.

Stakeholder Categories

Researchers
- Research Funding Agencies
- Academic Institutions
- Private or Non-Profit Research Firms
- Research Consultants
- Research Advisory Groups or Committees

Tribal Government
- Tribal Leaders
- Tribal Governing Bodies
- Policy Makers & Administrators
- Tribal Regulatory Bodies: IRB, RRC
- Program Managers & Service Providers
- Tribal Groups or Committees

Tribal Community
- Community Members
- Cultural/Spiritual Experts
- Business/Non-Profits

Non-Tribal Groups
- Advocates
- Coalitions
- Subject Matter Experts
- Support Groups: Formal/Informal

Tribal Stakeholder's Role in Research

Stakeholder roles can be grouped by the various research phases involved, such as:
- Formation of Research Initiatives,
- Research Approval,
- Regulation and Oversight,
- Advisory Committee and Guidance, and
- Reporting and Dissemination.

Formation of Research Initiatives: Stakeholders at tribal, state and federal policy levels, including academic institutions are invaluable in shaping research initiatives. Often informed and collaboratively developed research agendas can support the mission and interests of multiple stakeholders and have a greater

chance of meeting the research needs of tribes. Needed data and information that is lacking, outdated or not applicable to tribal communities hinders effective public policies and responses to address identified social problems important to tribes. Individuals on the frontline of issues and problems affecting tribal communities, to national tribal organizations and coalitions advocating for improved quality of life of tribal citizens bring awareness to issues and research needs for consideration by research funding agencies.

A prime example of how stakeholders helped to shape national research policy initiatives is the Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women's Act of 2005, Title IX, Section 904 (1)(2). Policy was developed through grassroots advocacy efforts by a number of stakeholders, including victims, tribal advocacy groups, non-profits and tribal leaders. Their efforts led to congressional legislation that authorized the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), National Institute of Justice (NIJ) in consultation with the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) to conduct research regarding violence against AI and AN women (VAIW) living in tribal communities (NIJ, 2013). NIJ developed a program of research to address the variety of issues raised by a Section 904 Taskforce made up of various stakeholders throughout Indian Country (NIJ, 2016). Stakeholders continue to be involved in NIJ's program of research on VAIW, which has been vital to successful implementation of the AI and AN research initiatives currently underway.

Research Approval: Once tribal research initiatives are established, researchers must gain the trust (Harding at el., 2012, Morton at el., 2013, and Burhansstipanov, Christopher, Schumacher, 2005) and

partnership of tribal stakeholders. Stakeholders at the tribal governmental level are individuals or groups that have important approval and regulatory roles within the tribal community (Fisher, Ball, 2003). These can include tribal leaders, tribal councils or legislatures, policy makers, program administrators and staff, and citizens.

Regulation and Oversight: Tribal Institutional Review Boards (IRB), and Research Review Committees (RRC) have been established in a number of tribes to fulfill the specific regulatory purpose of reviewing research proposals (Harding, Harper, Stone, O'Niel, Berger, Harris, Donatuto, 2012). Tribal IRBs and RRCs serve as a subset of primary stakeholders (Morton at el., 2013). Their purpose is to ensure research is adhering to human subject and community protections from potential research harms, and/or specific and contextual related concerns and needs of the community (Harding, et al., 2012). The NCAI PRC has established a guiding policy for tribes who are interested in establishing their own IRBs or review committees and can be found at: http://www.ncai.org/policy-research-center/initiatives/research-regulation.

Advisory Committees and Guidance: Program managers and service providers can serve as important tribal point of contacts (TPOC) for researchers in identifying tribal government protocols for requesting research review and approval. TPOCs can direct researchers to important resources in the community that may be needed during data collection. For example TPOCs can facilitate access to private locations for conducting interviews or surveys, identify counseling and trauma support services for sensitive research topics, and childcare and transportation resources. Tribal community members who may be the target audience of research through surveys, interviews, focus groups or observations are also important stakeholders to involve. They have important community knowledge that can be shared to ensure the study design and researchers are respectful of the community norms and values, and cultural calendars, events, and protocols. They are also important supporters that can assist with community outreach and awareness about the research being conducted.

Reporting & Dissemination: Dissemination of key research findings is often done through the preparation of peer reviewed journal articles, fact sheets, policy briefs and dissemination of the final report, including presentations at local and national events, and radio broadcasts. Regardless of the research methods used, tribal stakeholders need to review research findings and reports prior to dissemination in order to ensure individual and community-wide protections.

Stakeholder Engagement Strategies
As noted above, researches have the primary responsibility to actively engage tribal stakeholders in the research process. Stakeholder engagement can vary depending on the stakeholder roles and research aims (Fhi360 Research Utilization, 2012). Researchers must ensure stakeholders are not only informed about the research initiative, but are provided opportunities to be consulted, involved and collaborated with (Baker et al., 2014) throughout the process (NCAI PRC, 2012). Outreach strategies should include activities that build stakeholders' trust (Mariella et al., 2009) and support for the research. For example in-person meetings, letters, and telecommunication with tribal leadership and council members are participatory and beneficial in discussing the overall research purpose, funding mechanisms, proposed study methods, identification of stakeholders

and their anticipated roles, time commitments, overall research benefits, use of research data (Melton 2016), and reporting and dissemination strategies.

Broader outreach and engagement can include branding of the research through slogans, artwork and logos on brochures, frequently asked questions (FAQs), newsletter and magazine articles, press releases, presentations and networking at local and national events, and radio broadcasts. Presentation and publications provided by researchers at tribal venues, conferences, and community forums help bring awareness to tribal communities. Tribal stakeholders involved in the development of these presentation materials can ensure the targeted audiences are appropriate and the information presented in the materials meet the outreach objectives.

Stakeholder Engagement Benefits
❖ Involvement of stakeholders helps to provide important input and feedback on research priorities, methods, protocols, outcomes and dissemination strategies.
❖ Tribal stakeholders ensure research within AI and AN communities is respectful of the tribal community and citizens. They ensure the information gained from research causes no harm to individuals and the community as a whole; and is reliable, relevant and beneficial to tribal communities.
❖ Tribal stakeholders are ultimately the primary users that implement research findings and data into decision making processes at the local tribal, state and federal level (Melton 2016) through planning, policy, improved program and service delivery, direct funding and prioritization of day to day issues affecting tribal communities.
❖ Stakeholder involvement can enhance the research process by providing

varying perspectives into the specific community context vital to the success of research conducted in AI and AN tribes and communities. Research that has actively engaged and sustained stakeholders will produce research that minimizes barriers and surprises, and more easily identifies solution to problems that may arise during research implementation.

Challenges in Stakeholder Involvement
Participatory Engagement Strategies: Stakeholder involvement has specific challenges that researchers and tribal communities can work together to resolve through an engagement strategy that is open, transparent, and is a collaborative process.

Address Poor Research Practice: AI and AN tribes and citizens have endured many negative experiences with studies both past and present (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), contributing to the concern that current researchers will repeat the same negative and poor research practices. Some of these poor practices include: experience with researchers that have been disrespectful of cultural protocols, researchers dismissing non-academic knowledge as valid input, research results that are not shared with tribes or the information is too technical to understand for the varying tribal audiences or potential users of the information and far to often, research that has little benefit to tribal communities (Morton, Deborah et al., 2013, Burhansstipanov et al., 2005).

Engaging stakeholders, especially those who are distrustful of researchers and government agencies, takes time, but it is necessary to build trust (Burhansstipanov et al., 2005). Planning for the time needed to build trust is an important task for researchers. By addressing tribal stakeholder concerns from the beginning stages of the

research process, tribal stakeholders and researchers can develop methods and protocols addressing tribal stakeholder concerns. By addressing concerns they can prevent research practices that are harmful to AI and AN individuals and tribal communities. Doing research in a good way, builds relationships between the researchers and the tribal community that are reciprocal and trustworthy (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, NIJ 2013).

Acknowledge Burden of Research on Stakeholders: Other challenges to tribal stakeholder involvement include: understanding that stakeholders are overloaded with their day-to-day roles and responsibilities. Additional responsibilities create burdens that may limit stakeholder involvement due to time restraints, manpower, budget restrains, and priorities.

Understand Stakeholder Limitations and Concerns: Technical research terms and methodologies can be overwhelming to stakeholders, and require capacity building, in which those involved may need regular training on research methods, data collection strategies, and data analysis. Stakeholder

engagement may fluctuate causing a drop out from participation due to changing positions, new administration priorities, vacancies, and other tribal commitments. Finally, sensitive topics, may limit stakeholder involvement for fear of how the data will be interpreted and used.

Conclusion

It is important to engage stakeholders in the research process whether the research is tribally led or a tribe is asked to participate or partner in research. The role stakeholders have in all phases of the research process is vital to researchers successfully navigating through tribal policies and protocols and implementing research within AI and AN communities.

Tribal stakeholders engaged in the research process help to ensure research is respectful of the tribal community (Joffrion, Fernandez 2015) and the rights of tribal members, as well as ensure the research follows culturally appropriate protocols (Harding, et al., 2012) for data collection, analysis, publication, data storage, dissemination of results, and the use of collected data or information.

References

Burhansstipanov L, Christopher S, Schumacher SA. (2005). *Lessons learned from community-based participatory research in Indian country*. Cancer Control. Vol. 2. pp. 70-6.

Carney, S., Whitmarsh, L., Nicholson-Cole A., Shackley S., (2009). A dynamic typology of stakeholder engagement within climate change research. Tyndall Centre. Manchester.

Children's Bureau. (2013). *Tribal evaluation workshop: a road map for collaborative and effective evaluation in tribal communities.* Children's Bureau. Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Washington, DC.

Fhi360 ResearchUtilization. (2012). Moving evidence into action: eight strategies for research to practice. Durham, NC. Retrieved from https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/eight-strategies-for-research-to-practice.pdf.

Fisher, Phillip, A., Thomas, Ball J., (2003). *Tribal participatory research: mechanisms of a collaborative model.* American Journal of Community Psychology. Vol. 32.

Joffrion, Elizabeth, Fernandez, Nathan. (2015). *Collaboration between tribal and non-tribal organizations: sharing expertise, knowledge, and cultural resources.* Western Libraries Faculty Publications. Paper 32

Harding, Harper, Stone, O'Niel, Berger, Harris, Donatuto (2012). *Conducting research with tribal communities: sovereignty, ethics, and data sharing issues.* Environmental Health Perspectives. Vol. 121:1. pp. 6-10.

Mariella, Patricia, Brown Eddie, Carter, Michael, Verri Venessa. (2009). *Tribal driven participatory research: state of the practice and potential strategies for the future.* Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice. Vol. 3:2. pp. 41-58.

Morton, Deborah, J., et al. (2013). Creating research capacity through a tribally based institutional review board. American Journal of Public Health. Vol. 103:2. pp. 2160-2164.

Melton, Ada Pecos. (2016, November, 18). Personal interview.

NCAI-PRC. (2012). Walk softly and listen carefully: building research relationships with tribal communities. National Congress of American Indians & MSU Center for Native Health Partnerships. Washington, DC.

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples. Z*ed Book Ltd. New York: New York.

Ross S, Lavis J, Rodriguez C, Woodside J, Denis JL. (2003). *Partnership experiences: involving decision-makers in the research process.* J Health Serv Res Policy. 2003 Vol. 2. pp. 26-34.

National Institute of Justice (NIJ). (2013). *Conducting research in tribal communities.* U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.nij.gov/topics/tribal-justice/research/pages/conducting.aspx.

National Institute of Justice (NIJ). (2016). *Violence Against American Indian and Alaskan Native Women: Program of Research.* U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC. Retrieved from http://www.nij.gov/topics/tribal-justice/vaw-research/Pages/welcome.aspx.