

# Holding Regional Consultation Meetings with Tribal Leaders

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*This guidance was developed by the Interagency Working Group on Indian Affairs (IWGIA) which is made up of tribal program leads from many federal agencies. The suggestions that follow are based on their collective experience is intended to be used as appropriate given agency missions and mandates.*

Federal agencies often hold regional meetings with tribal leaders to ask their advice regarding policies, programs, and projects that may affect Indian tribes. Regional meetings bring groups of tribes together at a central location to provide such advice. While each tribe may have its own specific requirements regarding consultation, the following guidelines can be useful for planning regional meetings involving multiple tribal governments to discuss matters of mutual concern.

1. Establish that the meeting will be government-to government and ensure attendance by federal officials at appropriate levels. Government-to-government meetings are meetings held between representatives of the United States government and representatives of tribal governments. They are generally face-to-face. They require the participation of leadership and staff who can ensure that meeting recommendations will be brought forward to final decision makers should such decision makers not be present at the meetings. Government-to-government meetings are generally exempt from the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA).
2. Give timely notice. Letters of invitation should be addressed to individual tribal leaders if possible. If not, the Secretary of the Interior's "Dear Tribal Leader" format can be substituted. Letters of invitation indicating date, time, subject(s) under discussion, etc. should be sent out no later than six to eight weeks prior to the date of the meeting. The invitation should include arrangements for teleconferencing for those who cannot attend as well as a deadline for comments to be sent in by mail.
3. Be open to revising a draft agenda based on tribal input. The letter of invitation should ask for suggestions for additional items related to the general topic(s) to be discussed. If possible, these suggestions should be worked into the final agenda.
4. Involve tribal representatives in planning the meeting. Consider a small workgroup of tribal representatives with experience in attending or organizing tribal meetings. These need not be tribal leaders, but can be tribal staff, the staff of tribal organizations, or other tribal representatives. Advice from this group can be sought by telephone and email.
5. Allow enough time for discussion. Time needed, of course, depends upon the nature of the discussion. Many agencies have found regional consultation meetings of a day and half to be productive. The first morning can be spent introducing the issues, asking invited speakers to discuss their pertinent experiences, and generally setting up parameters for discussion. That afternoon and the following morning can be spent in discussions followed by meeting summations. The evening gives all parties a chance to reflect on the day's discussions while the next morning provides an opportunity for addressing new points or expanding on others.
6. Include tribal leaders as speakers. Most topics that require consultation in Indian Country are topics that have concerned tribes for many years, if not for generations. Tribal leaders speak most eloquently and meaningfully about them. Their participation can assist federal officials facilitate discussion.

7. Be hospitable. Serve coffee and light refreshments during the day. Host an evening event that allows for informal conversation.

8. Select central locations in Indian Country. Choose places that tribes can easily access or where they might have other business. Common places for tribal meetings include, but are not limited to, Denver, Seattle, Albuquerque, Phoenix, Anchorage, Nashville, Rapid City, Minneapolis, and Las Vegas, and of course, Washington, DC. Sometimes it is possible and appropriate to link a federal-tribal meeting to a previously scheduled tribal meeting.

9. Provide for a record of the meeting. This can be done by audio or videotape, and/or written notes. Federal officials must make it clear at the onset that meeting records will be kept. Federal officials should also be aware that some information may be culturally sensitive, and should consider how it can be protected. The meeting record should be made available upon request. Draft meeting notes can be posted online for review and comment.

10. Conduct an oral summation of results and recommendations at the close of the meeting. The appropriate officials should summarize the main points of discussion, the various points of view, areas needing additional discussion and further next steps. There should be an attempt to reach general consensus among participants that this statement is a fair, if general, summation of the meetings' results.

11. Follow up. Follow up on any tasks, telephone calls, letters, etc. that were agreed to during the meeting.

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