A stylized map of Alaska is the background for the text. The map uses a color gradient from light green in the north to light blue in the south, with orange and yellow areas representing landmasses. The map is outlined in a thick, dark red border.

# **Alaska Natives and Conservation Planning: A Recipe for Meaningful Participation**

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**TWS 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference  
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# Acknowledgements

- We would like to acknowledge and thank the people who agreed to be interviewed for this study.
- We would also like to thank the Student Conservation Association and the Region 7, National Wildlife Refuge System, Division of Conservation Planning and Policy for their combined support.

# The Problem

“Alaska Native culture isn’t the same as Western culture, and this point isn’t taken into account as much as it should be when it comes to both attitudes and formats; things that work for Western society won’t necessarily be successful with Alaska Natives.”

Alaska Native Federal Employee

# Purpose

**Better understand and  
improve public participation  
on the part of Alaska Natives  
in conservation planning.**

# Objectives

- **Begin to build a conceptual model of Native participation.**
- **Identify factors that facilitate or impede Native participation.**
- **Identify preferred practices and methods.**
- **Develop suggestions for implementing these practices and methods.**

# Methods

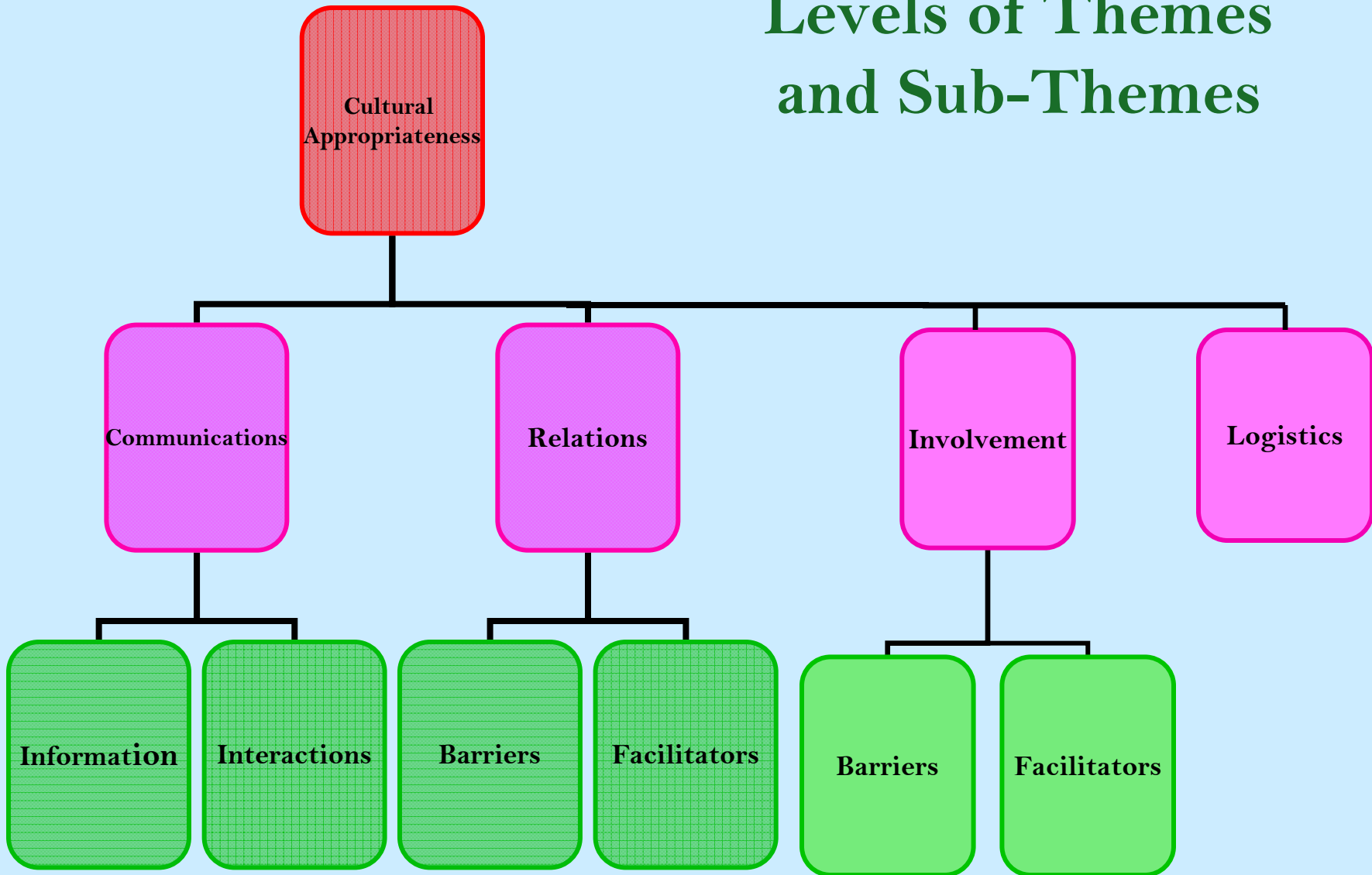
- **Grounded Theory approach**
  - Inductive design
  - Discovering theory in qualitative data
- **Interviews with 31 key informants**
  - 10 to 90 minutes
  - 140 pages of dialog and notes
- **Snowball sampling (i.e., peer referral)**
  - 10 Alaska Natives
  - 21 non-Alaska Natives
  - 24 males, 7 females
  - Federal agency, university, and Native corporation employees
- **Thematic analysis**
  - Emergent categories
- **Findings written as propositions**

# Interview Themes

## Results

- **Cultural Appropriateness – Core Category**
  - **Communications**
    - Information and Interactions
  - **Relations**
    - Barriers and Facilitators
  - **Involvement**
    - Barriers and Facilitators
  - **Logistics**

# Levels of Themes and Sub-Themes





# Cultural Appropriateness

“Processes are not meaningful outside of the conventions (e.g., worldview) in which they fit ... the whole process the government uses is based on Western things not Native things.”

Alaska Native Federal Employee

# Communications

## Sub-Dimensions

<b>Information</b>	<b>Interactions</b>
<b>Presentation</b>	<b>Style</b>
<b>Content</b>	<b>Access</b>
<b>Methods / Format</b>	<b>Coordination</b>
<b>Flow</b>	<b>Use of Representatives</b> (i.e., democratic principles)
<b>Interpretation</b>	

# Communications/Information/Content

“The problem with public participation is that much is irrelevant: many government plans are very abstract, which makes it inherently difficult to get a lot of participation, especially among peoples dealing with everyday fundamental needs, like food and water; ... there are lots of other things to worry about in villages.”

Non-Native Federal Employee

# Communication/Information/Methods, Format

People say, “you get Alaska Natives, and they just talk forever at meetings”; refuge planners try to put too much discussion into a short time, and “when you cover too much ground, you don’t get participation because you don’t allow for engagements on their terms; need to let them finish and get it off their chests.”

Non-Native Federal Employee

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# Relations

## Sub-Dimensions

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Facilitators</b>
<b>Lack of Trust</b>	<b>Building Relationships</b>
<b>Perception of Government</b>	<b>Trust</b>
<b>Negative Attitudes</b>	<b>Positive Attitudes</b>
<b>Differences</b> (i.e., conflicting worldviews)	

# Relations/Barriers/Differences

“Hunting has a deeply spiritual meaning for a lot of people; it’s how people live, and so kind of just boiling it all down to a little wire tag that you stick, and then a number, is very Western, very non-Native.”

Non-Native Federal Employee

# Relations/Facilitators/Building Relationships

“Having personal relationships is really what’s important and valued—who you are in context: who’s your family, tribe, region, who you know.”

Cooperative Extension Agent

# Involvement

## Sub-Dimensions

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Facilitators</b>
<b>Authority</b> (e.g., lack thereof for Natives/tribes)	<b>Roles</b>
<b>Impact</b> (e.g., lack of influence)	<b>Liaisons</b>
<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
<b>Irrelevant Issue</b>	<b>Relevant Issue</b>



# Involvement/Barriers/Qualifications

“You have to be a biologist to get promoted in management here; with those kinds of restrictions, people can’t compete for jobs and they can only go so far.”

Non-Native Federal Anthropologist

# Involvement/Facilitators/Roles, Opportunities

“Have communities become full partners by taking on roles themselves, doing their own surveys and collecting their own data, so they can collect information and show changes on the issues important to them.”

Non-Native Federal Anthropologist

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# Logistics

## Sub-Dimensions

Schedules and Flexibility

Volume

Location

Funding

## Logistics/Funding

“It doesn’t show much interest in making a successful program or plan, if there’s no funding. The government wants so much, and yet we don’t have the resources to get there.”

Alaska Native Federal Employee

# Propositions

1. All aspects of the relations between the government and Alaska Natives influence each other.
2. The use of methods and practices that are not culturally appropriate substantially impedes Alaska Native participation in government processes.
3. A low level of trust between Alaska Native groups and the government impedes cooperation and prevents success.
4. Greater opportunity for Alaska Native involvement and participation builds greater trust and increases ownership.
5. Agency employees who are culturally sensitive and effectively build personal relationships are more successful and efficient.
6. Lack of understanding of issues and proposed projects among the Native/rural populations prevents participation.
7. Logistical issues, including the scheduling, number, and location of meetings, greatly affects participation.

# Implications

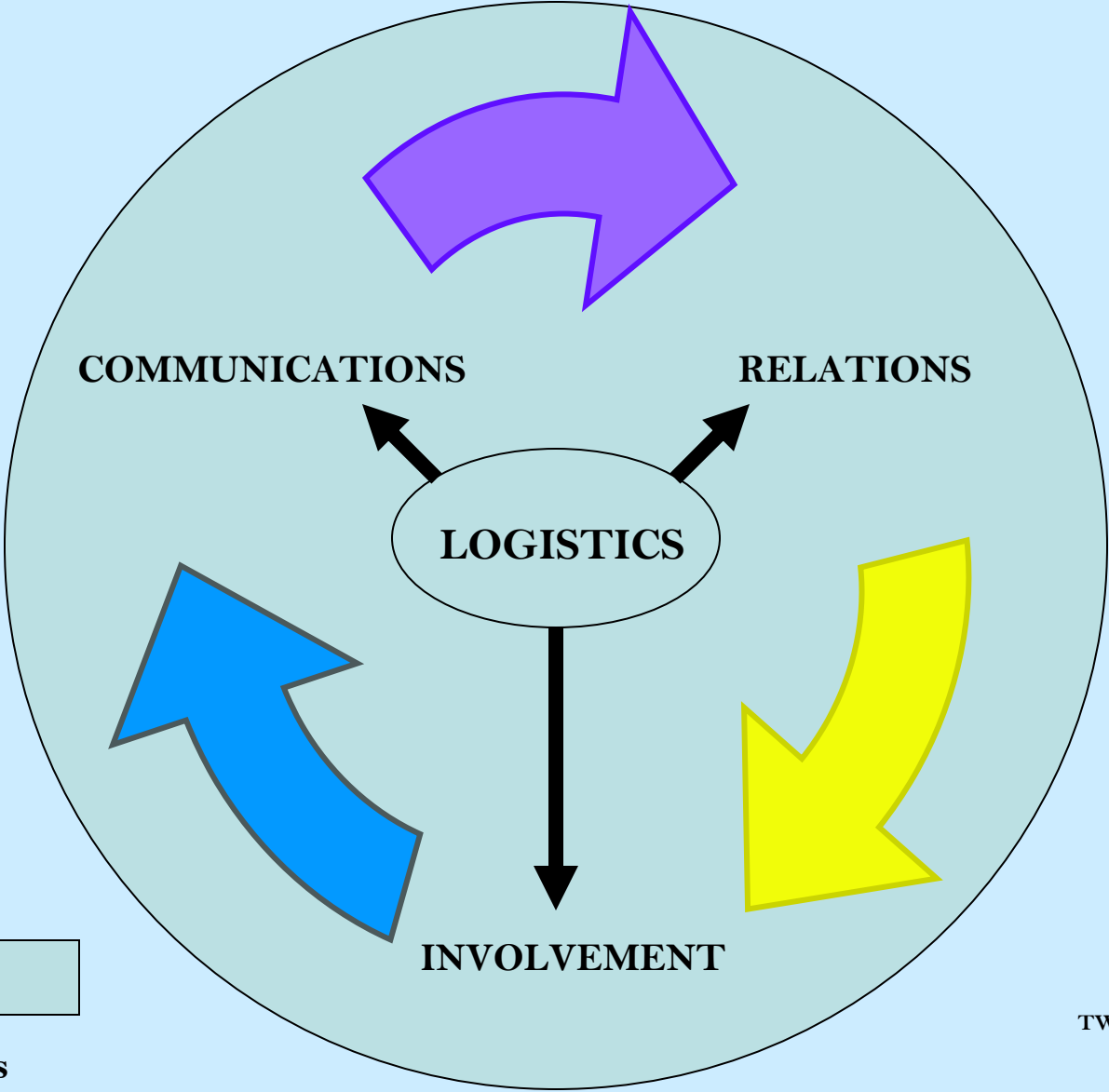
1. Build relationships on continuity, respect, and integrated understanding.
2. How to best develop methods and formats that are appropriate—requires Native expertise.
3. Provide more responsibility and visibility through Native involvement.
4. Relax job requirements/qualifications and duties for Natives.
5. Training, hiring skill sets, and duty stations for Federal employees.
6. Increase outreach and explanations.
7. Allow for flexible scheduling.

# Ingredients of Meaningful Participation

	Communications	Relations	Involvement
<b>Facilitators</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Apply generously</li> <li>•Enhance</li> <li>•Increase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Clarity and Explanations</li> <li>*Two-way Flow of Information</li> <li>*Culturally Appropriate Formats</li> <li>*Access to People</li> <li>*Good Relations</li> <li>*Opportunities to Communicate/Cooperate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Cultural Awareness</li> <li>*Listening</li> <li>*Building Personal Relationships</li> <li>*Continuity</li> <li>*Positive Attitudes and Respect</li> <li>*Openness</li> <li>*Availability</li> <li>*Accessibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Local Contacts/Liaisons (e.g., RITs)</li> <li>*Having Roles Available for Natives</li> <li>*More Opportunities</li> <li>*Understanding of the Situation</li> <li>*Positive Attitudes and Respect</li> </ul>
<b>Logistics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Adapt to Alaska Natives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Schedules and Flexibility</li> <li>*Physical Location</li> <li>*Distance/local</li> <li>*Funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Schedules and Flexibility</li> <li>*Distance/local</li> <li>*Funding</li> <li>*Volume</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Schedules and Flexibility</li> <li>*Physical Location</li> <li>*Distance/local</li> <li>*Funding</li> <li>*Volume</li> </ul>

\*Cell entries are specific issues that should be addressed by planners and managers.

# Model of Participation for Alaska Natives



Cultural  
Appropriateness

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# Summary

- **Respect and understanding are key barriers or facilitators; having these opens all the other doors to meaningful participation; lack thereof closes the doors.**
- **Practices need to be flexible and based on the audience—changeable depending on the requirements and conditions of the public.**
- **The process and the system need to be made more personal and less standardized/formal. “If the public is not Western, then, the process should not be either.”**