WHEN SCIENCE OUTPACES NATIVE POLITICAL WILL

T.A. Mala, M.K. Mau
Southcentral Foundation

Objective: To provide the reader with some considerations for designing research around Native communities from the viewpoint of two Alaska Native and a Native Hawaiian physicians.

Rationale: In the process of reviewing and writing many grants, the perennial question arises of "how to do research in Native communities?" How have the rules changed? What are the expectations that Native people have and how might they influence the nature of designing projects and implementing them once they are funded? A significant number of principal investigators have taken their proposals to Institutional Research Boards and community groups only to find their methodologies being rejected or questioned from the start. This has resulted in much frustration and elicited comments such as "where can we find the guidelines for research with Native peoples and how can we best address them?"

There is no one answer that covers all situations. Tribes are sovereign entities with the right to govern their own destinies. The authors here present their observations on the process with the hope that this paper will result in mutually beneficial discussions that will create partnerships and better understanding of one another’s needs.

This paper explores the design process based on community based participatory research and its outcomes resulting in benefit to the populations being examined. Questions include who owns the data? How will it be used? How will the results be reported back to the community? How are ethical standards being applied? What is the role of the community? What is the training and backgrounds of the principal investigators? How will the outcomes affect the community in the future? How to plan for future collaboration?

Conclusion: Research is possible with Native communities and even welcomed once basic ethical considerations are addressed and partnerships are developed based on consensus and respect.

Contact Ted Mala (tmala@scf.cc)