

POLICY BRIEF

Data Governance for Native Nation Rebuilding

VERSION 2

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Native nations in the United States increasingly are exercising Indigenous data sovereignty—the right of each tribe to control the collection, ownership, and application of its own data. Data governance provides the mechanisms for enacting that right.



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
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Strengthening Indigenous Governance

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

Native nations in the United States increasingly are exercising Indigenous data sovereignty¹—the right of each tribe to control the collection, ownership, and application of its own data.² Data governance provides the mechanisms for enacting that right.

Purpose

This brief is a primer on Indigenous data governance. It describes the relationship between reclaiming Indigenous data and Native nation rebuilding. It extends the Indigenous data sovereignty conversation to tribal data governance and discusses the implications of Indigenous data sovereignty for non-tribal entities that govern tribal data.

Data and Data Governance

A Native nation's data are any facts, knowledge, or information about the nation and about its citizens, lands, resources, programs, and communities. Information ranging from demographic profiles, to educational attainment rates, maps of sacred lands, songs, and social media activities are all data. Data governance is the exercise of a nation's broad right to control all of this information.

Native Nation Rebuilding

Native nation rebuilding acknowledges the destructive impact of colonization on tribal governance infrastructure and leadership mechanisms. It refers to the reclamation of Native self-rule and increased self-determination. It occurs as a Native nation harnesses its capacity to make and implement strategic decisions about its own affairs. It is a comprehensive effort to rebuild tribal societies that work on tribal terms.³

Data Governance and Nation Rebuilding

Data sovereignty, data governance, and nation rebuilding go hand in hand. Tribes need accurate, relevant, and timely data for policy and decision-making. Tribes also need mechanisms to protect and control their information. As tribes rebuild their governance institutions, they increase their capability to govern their data, which in turn, facilitates stronger evidence-based decision-making.

Indigenous data sovereignty is a right; it is also a state to be achieved through data governance (see Figure 1). Every tribal nation is positioned along a spectrum from data dependency—the state of depending on other entities to provide data about the tribe and about its people, communities, and resources—to data sovereignty. By implementing

mechanisms of data governance, tribes are working toward data sovereignty. In this process, they will develop and use mechanisms such as research review boards, data sharing agreements, and data repositories. They also will revisit, reuse, and revise these mechanisms continuously to better achieve their goal. As technological advances or changes in tribal government activities create new data, the process will continue to evolve.

Figure 1. Toward Indigenous Data Sovereignty: The Process of Decolonizing Data



It is important to note that exercising the right to Indigenous data sovereignty occurs within a larger data system in which other governments, corporations, and entities also control tribes' data. Thus Indigenous data sovereignty also requires these external entities to incorporate tribal principles into their own data governance practices.

Tribes in the United States are incredibly diverse. Indigenous data governance strategies are similarly varied. We posit, however, that there are common principles of data governance that support tribes as they work toward Indigenous data sovereignty. These may include trust, recognition of inherent tribal sovereignty by external entities, and tribal ownership of a Native nations data, among others. What might be some of the other Indigenous data governance principles shared among tribes in the United States?

Recommendations

- Identify common principles of Indigenous data governance for use by tribes, governments, organizations, corporations, and researchers within the United States.
- Explore the development of tribe-specific data governance principles.
- Identify and develop mechanisms to facilitate effective tribal data governance.
- Develop data governance mechanisms that non-tribal governments, organizations, corporations, and researchers can use to support tribal data sovereignty.

This brief was produced by the Native Nations Institute and has been made available to the US Indigenous Data Sovereignty Network. 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-driven research, policy advocacy, and education, visit usindigenousdata.arizona.edu.

Suggested Citation

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1 | Rodriguez-Lonebear, D. (2016). Building a data revolution in Indian country, in T. Kukutai & J. Taylor (Eds.), *Indigenous data sovereignty: Toward an agenda* (pp. 253-272), Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press. Rainie, S.C., Schultz J.L., Briggs E., Riggs P., & Palmanteer-Holder N.L., (2017), Data as strategic resource: Self-determination and the data challenge for United States Indigenous nations, *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 8(2), retrieved from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/iipj/vol8/iss2/1>, DOI: 10.18584/iipj.2017.8.2.1.

2 | Rodriguez-Lonebear D. & Rainie S.C, (2016), US Indigenous Data Sovereignty founding documents, retrieved from <http://usindigenousdata.arizona.edu/about-us-o>.

3 | See M. Jorgensen (Ed.), (2007), *Rebuilding Native Nations*, Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.