

“Guidelines on Working with Indigenous Partners and Information”

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Guidelines on Working with Indigenous Partners and Information

Introduction:

Indigenous information is deeply embedded in museums, libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions. Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have frequently come together over the past 30 years to draft thoughtful ways of creating, describing, storing, and sharing this information, ranging from finding aids to care of collections objects.

However, there are no existing guidelines for thesauri, controlled vocabularies, or metadata creation. Below is an aggregation of existing resources and their potential application to the vocabularies/metadata context.

This list is in no way comprehensive; its purpose is to provide an introductory guide to available resources that have been vetted by Indigenous and non-Indigenous professionals. Also, be aware that each Indigenous community will have its own standards for information use and collaboration. This is no substitute to dialogue with Indigenous partners.¹

Existing Guidelines:

[Protocols for Native American Archival Materials](#) -- Society of American Archivists

Covers:

These protocols were developed in 2006 by a network of Native American and non-Native American scholars/cultural heritage professionals to address the lack of guidance on how to work with Native materials in U.S. archival collections.

Provides a specified list of potentially sensitive items, images, or recordings that archivists, librarians, or workers with document collections may encounter in their collections.

Contains protocols for contacting Native archivists, registrars, or other cultural heritage information professionals, including tribal preservation officers.

Suggestions on how to create/reword finding aid descriptions if they contain culturally sensitive or inaccurate information.

Illustrates examples of how to train staff on Indigenous information practices.

¹A note on terminology. Indigenous here refers to Indigenous people in a global context. Native American and the shorthand Native refers to the original communities living in what is now called the United States. Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders relate to the original inhabitants of what is now called Australia and Tasmania. Source: Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012 and Russo Carroll, Stephanie, Rodriguez-Lonebear, Desi, and Martinez, Andrew, "Indigenous Data Governance: Strategies from United States Native Nations," *Data Science Journal*, 18, no. 31 (2019): 2-3.

Implications for Vocabularies/metadata work:

- Sensitive cultural information in finding aids/archival materials can be similar to those found in cultural heritage metadata and in vocabularies (visual resource collections, museum collections records, controlled vocabulary terms, etc.) Steps should be taken to evaluate their impact with relevant community partners.
- This work is an ongoing process; may begin with discovery of Native materials but does not end with its publishing or removal. Sustained dialogue is key to ethically managing Native data.
- Internal usage of Native data is just as important to consider as external usage. (Finding aids were recommended to be revised not just because they are used by researchers, but also because they are used daily by archivists.)
- Staff training may be necessary if Native data exists in the collection.

[Guidelines for Collaboration](#) -- School of Advanced Research and Indian Arts Research Center

Covers:

Guidelines for both cultural heritage institutions and for community partners on how to conduct meaningful collaboration. Does not limit its guidelines to covering just one type of project (i.e. not just for exhibition consultation or conservation) but is meant to be extensible to all types of collaborative work.

Divides guidelines by timeframe, describing questions cultural heritage professionals and community members should ask themselves before the museum visit, during the museum visit, and after the museum visit.

Highlights the importance of documenting all visits, including all communication made between institutional staff and community members.

Implications for Vocabularies/metadata work:

- All requests for data contributions, clarification, or informational resources are requests for collaboration and should be treated with the same level of importance as larger projects.
- Following that, the Guidelines for Collaboration should be considered before contacting a tribal preservation office, museum, or Native Studies university department.

[Memorandums of Understanding](#) and [Practicing Pikyav](#) -- Karuk Tribe of California and Sustainable Heritage Network

Covers:

Both documents are created by and property of the Karuk Tribe in California. The first is an example of a memorandum of understanding, a type of document that affirms the relationships and agreements between parties. This document has been approved to be shared as a resource through the Sustainable Heritage Network; the

SHN recommends such memorandums to document museum/community partnerships.

The second document outlines how to conduct research concerning the Karuk Tribe and its informational resources. How to craft a research proposal, Karuk officials to contact, and proposed workflows are all included in this document.

Implications for Vocabularies/metadata work:

- Indigenous communities will have their own processes for collaboration and research; it is important to become familiar with those who you may work with. At the same time, these are not always separate workflows; as the Karuk example shows, guidelines are often made to respect both Indigenous and non-Indigenous information needs.
- Memorandums of understanding can be a useful tool to document collaborations with Indigenous partners.
- Collaborations with Indigenous partners should state clearly their benefits to the wider community as part of initial communication. This aspect is usually included within most tribes' research guidelines, but not always.

[Intellectual Property and the Safeguarding of Traditional Cultures](#) -- Molly Torsen and Jane Anderson, for WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization)

Covers:

Summation of basic copyright information, including explanation of what copyright laws cover in different countries and definitions of moral, economic, and resale rights.

Provides extensions of those concepts into cases with Indigenous materials, including examples of Indigenous-made copyright standards and how they interact with non-Indigenous laws. Also discusses use of copyright law by Indigenous creators to protect cultural heritage material.

Includes example policies from digital archives, museums, Native American tribes, and state cultural departments on how to integrate Indigenous copyright concerns into existing copyright infrastructure.

Implications for Vocabularies/metadata work:

- Review how images by or of Indigenous materials/culture/individuals are used and displayed online in DAMS or publicly-available catalogs (ex. Artstor.)
- Review digitization policies/workflows for Indigenous materials; some information may have restrictions on what can be copied, shared, or replicated into different formats.
- Some data fields and values may need to be reconsidered; for example, some materials recording Indigenous information have the scholar/non-Indigenous body as the rights holder, with no attribution to the Indigenous creators of that material.
- Many copyright resources are lacking protections for Indigenous materials or do not adequately consider Indigenous knowledge systems. It may be

necessary to adjust current practices when determining usage rights for materials.

[Digital Stewardship Curriculum](#) -- ATALM (Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums); Sustainable Heritage Network

Covers:

Step-by-step workflows on how to digitally process indigenous materials through the general activities of ingestion, preservation, and access. More specifically, defines ingestion of collections as a collaborative process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners, defines preservation of images/objects as prefacing indigenous stewardship methods, and defines access based on the cultural protocols of the communities involved as well as physical access to the collections.

Implications for Vocabularies/metadata work:

- Recommends that description standards should be flexible; Indigenous communities determine what classes and terms should be used first before that of the institutional schema. May require internal shifts to metadata/terminology workflows.
- Flexibility towards proposed changes to data storage and preservation methods; some information may require permanent deletion or extra security. Other types of information may need to be allowed to disappear over time.
- Commitments to information access may need to be revised to fit specific use contexts; a digital divide persists in some Indigenous communities, for example.

[United States Indigenous Data Sovereignty Network CARE and FAIR Principles](#) -- USIDSN

Covers:

The USIDSN has combined the FAIR principles (guides to creating findable, rich metadata) made by the GOFAIR initiative with an added layer: CARE, standing for Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility and Ethics. These guidelines are meant to emphasize Indigenous data sovereignty within FAIR's metadata creation guidelines.

The USIDSN also offers a variety of publications and tools specific to data collection from Indigenous partners, with an emphasis on helping Indigenous organizations gather data about their populations.

Implications for Vocabularies/metadata work:

- Provides an example to follow in constructing guidelines within a particular workflow or department.
- Emphasizes that Indigenous knowledge systems can be successfully integrated with other knowledge systems, and illustrates points where they may diverge (FAIR's guidelines on open data vs. CARE's governance of data principles). Those diverging points are not negative, but simply an illustration of flexible practices.

[Indigenous Data Sovereignty](#) -- Tahu Kukutai and John Taylor, eds.

Covers:

This volume, building off of a similarly-themed workshop in Canberra in 2015, is primarily focused on projects to develop standards for data collection, representation, and use on matters relevant to Indigenous people.

Has a particular emphasis on government data collection and collaboration with tribal governments and NGOs, as well as recommendations on how to support Indigenous partners in developing their own data analysis resources. However, the contributors also offer broader guidelines on what data sovereignty is and how it can be integrated into data collecting practices.

Implications for Vocabularies/metadata work:

- As metadata and controlled vocabularies/thesauri are information sources, control over these items is just as key as the data being represented by it. An understanding of data sovereignty principles is key for obtaining and utilizing Indigenous metadata.
- Highlights the importance of considering all types of information as authoritative sources, including but not limited to oral histories, material culture, and information embodied in particular places.
- Not all Indigenous information sources can or should be identified by an individual attribution. Some information is shared in particular networks or communities; for it to be used or collected, it needs consultation from all parties. In turn, some kinds of metadata or terms will need to be identified as multiple entities, instead of a singular one (for example, several people or a whole region attributed to a work instead of only the artist.)

[Deepening Histories of Place Protocols](#) -- Australian National University

Covers:

Provides information clearance forms, protocols for handling sensitive cultural materials, and a list of Indigenous cultural heritage property rights, specifically for the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context.

Built specifically for the Deepening Histories of Place Protocols project at Australian National University, but can serve as a case study for other history/art history projects.

Implications for Vocabularies/metadata work:

- Illustrates how guidelines can be shaped for community-specific needs (in this case for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concerns.)
- New or edited metadata fields may be needed to flag sensitive materials, for example, flagging human remains for Indigenous viewers or flagging objects used in particular ceremonies for non-Indigenous viewers. The Traditional Knowledge labels created by the Local Contexts project offers a tangible example.