



OFFICE OF EQUITY
COUNTY OF SONOMA

County of Sonoma Office of Equity
Informational Brief on Intergovernmental
Relations with Native Nations
in Sonoma County

Brief: Intergovernmental Relations with Native Nations

sonomacounty.ca.gov/administrative-supportand-fiscal-services/office-of-equity

May 20, 2024

Prepared for:

County of Sonoma Office of Equity

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Sonoma County and the County of Sonoma are located within the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary land relationships of the Kashia (also spelled Kashaya) Pomo and Southern Pomo, Wappo, and Coast Miwok Tribal Nations, which include the federally recognized Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians, the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria, the Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, and Lytton Rancheria of California.

The Office of Equity has not adopted a land acknowledgment yet. We recognize that unless there is direction and subsequent allocation of resources for the County of Sonoma, as an institution, to authentically engage with Tribal Nations and members, a land acknowledgment standing alone can not replace the need for the creation of collaborative and meaningful relationships founded on respect, reciprocity, shared values and agreements, and a deep understanding of Tribal history and sovereignty, grounded in actions intended to heal past and present harm.



CALIFORNIA TRIBAL LANDS

California Native-American Pre-Contact Tribal Territories

Northern California Indian Development Council | ncidc.org

IN LAK'ECH

Tú eres mi otro yo.

You are my other me.

Si te hago daño a ti,

If I do harm to you,

Me hago daño a mi mismo

I do harm to myself.

Si te amo y respeto,

If I love and respect you,

Me amo y respeto yo.

Love and respect myself.

- Luis Valdez



Colorful Hands 1 of 3

George Fox students Annabelle Wombacher, Jared Mar, Sierra Ratcliff and Benjamin Cahoon collaborated on the mural.

Photograph by Tim Mossholder



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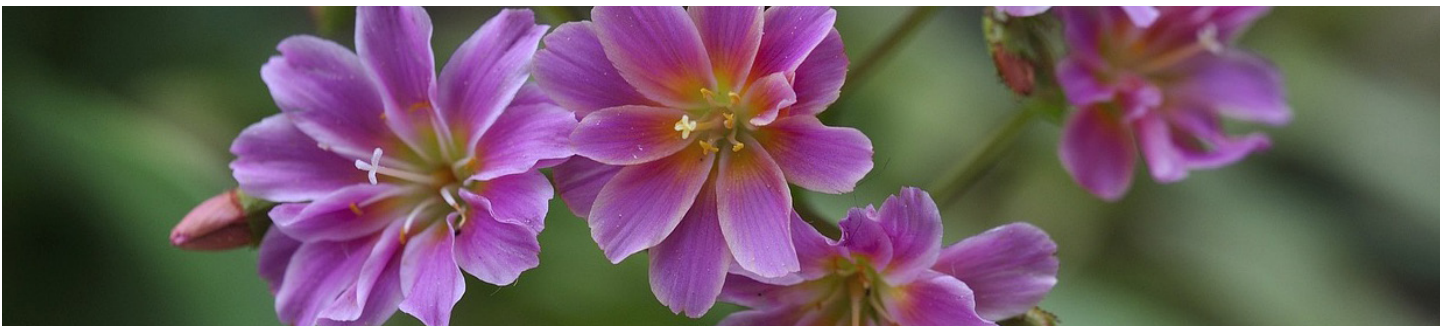
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INTRODUCTION

Native Nations¹ have governed themselves since time immemorial, pre-dating colonization by Europeans and the formation of the United States. As self-ruling sovereign Nations, Native Nations have negotiated hundreds of treaties with the United States on a Nation-to-Nation basis since 1778. The right to maintain sovereignty as Native governments has been hard fought, with multiple Supreme Court decisions, and other U.S. Government actions that worked to erode Native self-governance over the last 150 years (Self-Governance Communication and Education Tribal Consortium, n.d.). Even when Native Nations have been able to fight deeply systemic structural injustices to successfully achieve federal recognition, the U.S. government has then backtracked. The California Rancheria Termination Acts from 1956-58 terminated three Native Nations in Sonoma County: the Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians, Lytton Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, and Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, who then had to work to make the case for reinstatement in 1983 (Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians, n.d.), 1991 (Lytton Rancheria, n.d.), 2000 (Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, n.d.) respectively. The Mishewal Onasta Tis Band of Wappo continue to work to be federally recognized. Today's legal and political relationship between Native communities and the U.S. Government is rooted in this history to recover and retain a long legacy of Native self-governance. This legal and political relationship is also embedded within a history of land theft and dispossession, physical and cultural genocide, and racism directed by the U.S. government.

It is within this historical context that the County of Sonoma acknowledges the sovereignty of Native Nations and the government to government relationship it holds with the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria, Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians, and Lytton Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians whose ancestral land is within Sonoma County. Recognizing and respecting tribal sovereignty and the corresponding inherent powers of self-government ensure that any decisions about Native Nations with regard to their property and citizens are not only made with their participation and consent, but by deferring to their federally-recognized right to self-govern.



¹ Equity First Consulting recognizes that language shifts over time and that terminology is a matter of personal preference. The use of certain language in this document does not imply universal preference and time should be taken to learn what individual and community preference are.



As a part of the Office of Equity's Community Engagement Plan, the project Core Team sought to engage with folks from Native communities. However, the Community Engagement Plan is not adequate for addressing government to government relations with Native Nations, as community engagement is not a practice a government can engage in with peoples who have their own sovereign government. As a result, the Community Engagement Project Team ("Project Team") engaged in core learning crucial to engaging in consultation with Native Nations whilst honoring their sovereignty; interactions with Native Nations require a profound understanding that government to government relations are guided, boundaried, and mutually agreed upon in order to respect the sovereignty of these Nations.

This brief aims to add to a foundation for potential healing that is grounded in learning, humility, and the honoring of the wisdom and time of participants who agreed to an interview. This brief serves as a snapshot of what is needed, and is reflective of the insights shared by some Native community members and County staff. It is also an incomplete picture of what is needed to improve government to government relations for there is much inherent complexity given the vast history and depth of harm experienced by Native governments and communities at the hands of the U.S Government.

LEARNINGS ON METHODOLOGY

Consultation with Native Nations and members of Native communities began with outreach through trusted Community Based Leaders (CBLs). The project team quickly learned that outreach was premature and inappropriate and undertook research of existing protocols for building intergovernmental relations with Native Nations within the County and nationally. The project team conducted interviews with County staff to learn about existing protocols and the extent to which these protocols are documented.

The County's existing intergovernmental relations protocol guided subsequent steps of this process:

- *The Director of Office of Equity worked through the Chair of the Board of Supervisors to formally request and invite an interview with the Tribal Chairs of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria, Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians, Cloverdale Rancheria of Pomo Indians, and Lytton Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians.*
- *The Chair of the Board of Supervisors made the initial invitation and approved ongoing communications through the Office of Equity in an effort to schedule these interviews.*
- *The Director of the Office of Equity and a member of the Project Team attended interviews.*

One interview was conducted with a Native Nation and six were conducted with members of Native communities and County staff. It is imperative to stress that members who are non-government representatives who identified as Native American or American Indian only represented their perspective and experience and did not intend to speak for, or on behalf of, any Native Nation or Native American communities as a whole. These interviews provided powerful insights and important recommendations on the topic of government to government relations, as well as ideas and proposals for improving engagement and service to members of Native communities, which were supplemented by additional research. These conversations do not represent the breadth of perspectives from all five Native Nations, or a majority of Native community members, within Sonoma County. Much work remains for the County to develop and evolve intergovernmental relationships that can fully encompass dignified, respectful, and culturally responsive exchanges between the County of Sonoma and Native Nations.

KEY FINDINGS

FINDING 1:

INTERVIEWEES NOTED A NEED FOR COUNTY STAFF TO RECEIVE NATIVE-LED TRAINING ON SOVEREIGNTY AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS WITH NATIVE NATIONS.

ACKNOWLEDGE:

Interviewees emphasized the importance of the County of Sonoma acknowledging the harmful histories and legacy of genocide between the U.S. Government and Native Americans within the context of the need for an increased understanding of sovereignty.

Members of Native communities and County staff (Interviewees) stated that there is a need for increased understanding within the County about sovereignty and the implications of the County being in a sovereign, government to government, relationship with Native Nations. Interviewees noted that this understanding needs to inform efforts to consult with Native Nations, as well as how the County of Sonoma engages with Tribal Citizens who utilize County services.

Members of Native communities noted that a consequence of the lack of understanding of sovereignty shows up in the tendency to define all American Indians or Native Americans solely as a race or ethnicity, when being a member of a Native Nation is more accurately a political relationship with the U.S. government that does not derive from race or ethnicity. This included feedback that this misidentification renders invisible the nuances between federally-recognized and non-federally recognized tribes.

EDUCATE:

Interviewees emphasized the importance of the County of Sonoma providing Native-led training on sovereignty, Native history, law, culture, and cultivating relationships.

Interviewees shared that there is a critical need for employees and representatives of the County of Sonoma to receive culturally responsive training and education on the historical context, and modern day implications, of the government to government relationship it holds with Native Nations. To honor the sovereignty of sovereign Nations, it is important that training with local organizations is prioritized.

Specifically, Interviewees shared the need for training on sovereignty, the distinction between federally-recognized and non-federally recognized tribes, Native cultures and cultural affiliations,

local Native history, and laws including the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 or NAGPRA. Additionally, the County must continue to stay up-to-date, and knowledgeable about, the latest policies that affect Tribal communities, whether it be grant programs, state funding, and projects that local Tribes are involved in, and find ways to support and strengthen these efforts.

Interviewees noted that a lack of understanding of Native history, culture, laws and sovereignty, as well as the present day manifestations of this legacy, has a resulting impact of invisibilizing Native peoples, and negatively impacts how members of Native communities' experience social services. Members of Native communities noted that this manifests as a lack of adherence to, understanding of, and implementation of critical laws such as ICWA, and fraught and harmful interactions with Tribal Citizens who engage with County services. It was added that this can have a negative impact when the County of Sonoma wishes to consult with Native Nations. Interviewees said it is important for employees and representatives of the County of Sonoma to understand that each Native Nation, both federally-recognized and those still seeking federal-recognition, have their own history, language, land, culture, economy, and political relationship with the County.

Members of Native communities shared that appropriate internal training and education practices would be a beneficial foundation for building trust, and that trust building is of paramount importance for meaningful consultation and cultivating relationships.

“We have our own genocide curriculum, written from California Native perspective. If our K through 12 education systems believes in teaching about the Holocaust, then they can teach about the genocide that’s happened to our people, and to also acknowledge that it wasn’t just the genocide of people, but we also make the argument of ecocide, which is the genocide that happened to all of our land.”

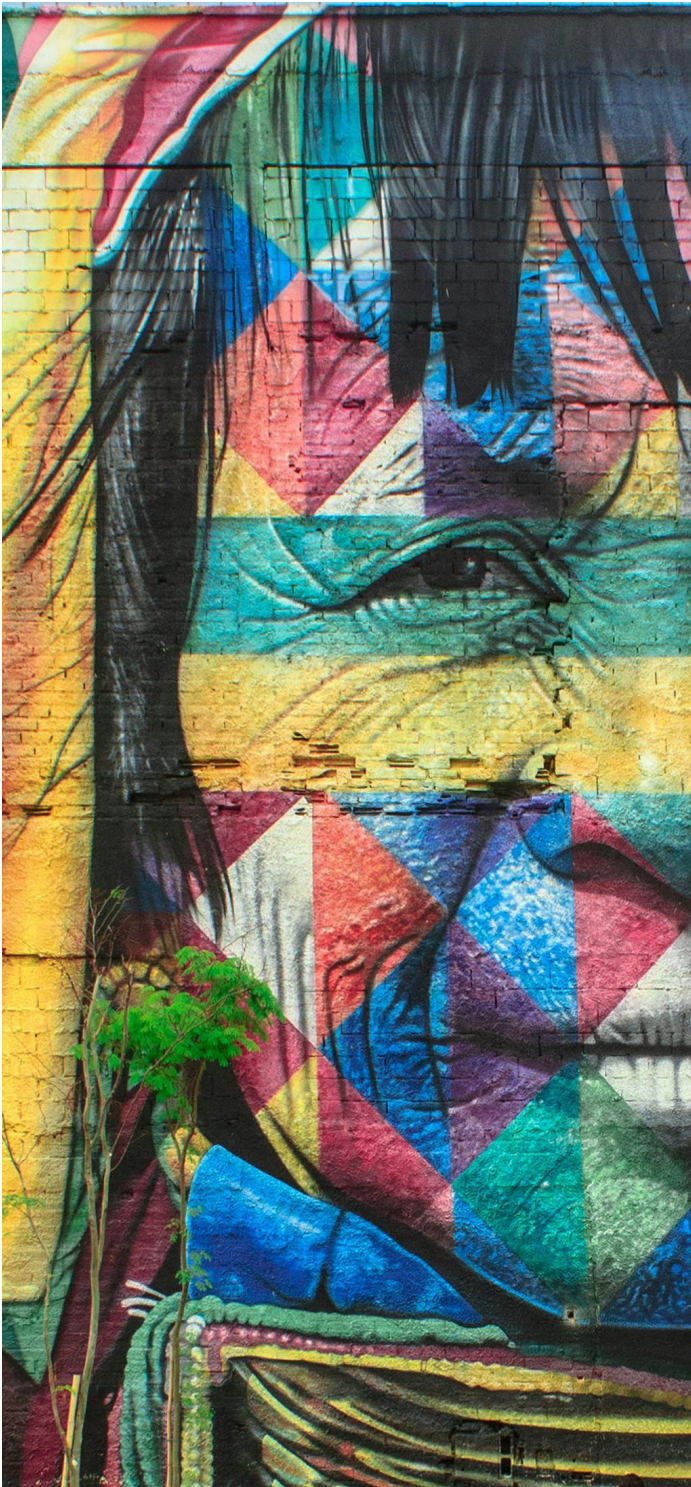
***—Rose Hammock,
Member of Native Community***

KEY TAKEWAYS:

- *The County of Sonoma has not yet issued an official acknowledgment of the government’s role in the physical and cultural genocide and continued harm of Native Americans and of the land it occupies, in contrast to the State of California (Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, 2019).*
- *All County of Sonoma representatives need education and training to understand sovereignty, Native history, laws, and culture.*

FINDING 2:

INTERVIEWEES NOTED A NEED FOR THE COUNTY OF SONOMA TO INVEST IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH NATIVE NATIONS.



There is a need to create systems to clarify protocols and systems of relationship development for government to government consultation within the County of Sonoma. Interviewees also voiced a need to improve systems of intergovernmental consultation specifically around issues of shared interest such as houselessness, housing, healthcare, behavioral health, substance abuse, missing and murdered children, and climate change. Interviewees shared that it is important to keep in mind that consultation with each tribe will look different because each tribe has a different level of capacity.

“We’re not long lost, we’re not extinct, we’re very much here, we are in these spaces. And I think that really needs to be present. And it needs to be respected. To acknowledge that, you know, we are in this space.”

—Member of Native Community

Additionally, a County staff member stated that the County needs to invest in a dedicated Tribal Liaison who has the capacity to support improved documentation, training, and implementation of protocols for consulting with Native Nations. They further stated that this protocol needs to ensure that sovereignty is honored and adhered to, that culturally responsive practices are in place for consultation with Native Nations, and that all five Sonoma County Native Nations are included in communications.

Education and training on cultural responsiveness and government to government relations are necessary for the potential evolution of meaningful relationships. Interviewees shared that it is key to understand the oppressive burden the County continually places on Native Nations through its requests. At minimum the County should hold awareness of the timing of ceremonies, the truth behind harmful stereotypes, the importance of providing meals, and provide flexibility and adaptability in creating spaces for cultivating relationships. Education is needed to include ensuring the County of Sonoma is taking responsibility for relationship development, and patiently continuing to make this effort even should that desire not be reciprocated. County representatives need to understand the implications of the harmful genocidal and oppressive history between governments and expect Tribal representatives to take a cautious approach to proposals to meet.

“I also think there needs to be a general want to communicate with Native American people and uplift them.”

—Member of Native Community

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- *Need to honor the core value of reciprocity and how that informs decision making.*
- *Learn what it means to build trust with Native Nations and Native American peoples.*
- *Be mindful of the burden created through requests, timing of ceremonies, and protocol for outreach. County representatives may not hear back, that is okay, and there is a responsibility to continue reaching out.*
- *Be intentional and transparent around any data collection, and as much as possible, defer to Tribal governments to do data collection related to Tribal members.*
- *Adapt timelines and priorities to center building trust and cultivating relationships; take care of people; respect elders; gather with food; and have a vision for the next seven generations.*
- *Acknowledge and celebrate the native cultural teachers already woven into the community.*
- *Practice listening and believe what Native elders, leaders, and community members share.*
- *Prioritize and honor local Tribal elders, leaders, and community members, and acknowledge the intertribal Indigenous Native/American Indian community.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations strive to uplift and honor the vast wisdom shared by Interviewees. While these recommendations are not a complete picture of what is needed, they offer starting points for the County of Sonoma.



- 1 Draft a public acknowledgment of harm and genocide against local Native American communities.** Interviewees suggested that publicly acknowledging this history is an important foundation for building deeper trust and relationships, such as has been done by Governor Newsom’s executive order N-15-19 formally apologizing to California’s Native Americans for historical mistreatment, violence, and neglect (Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, 2019).
- 2 Increase investment in intergovernmental relationship cultivation.** This includes increased staff capacity dedicated to relationship cultivating with Native Nations and increased representation of members of Native communities in County staff (aligned with Community Engagement recommendations). Additionally, it is recommended to document and train on existing protocols that clearly delineate guidelines on what Tribal Governments and the County have mutually agreed on when conducting intergovernmental relations.
- 3 Provide Native-led culturally responsive education and training.** Training should cover sovereignty, Native history, culture, laws (including ICWA and NAGPRA), and the present day manifestations of this legacy. All staff should be trained on foundational protocols around intergovernmental relations with Native Nations, with more in-depth training based on County staff role that includes guidance on data sovereignty, data collection, and the creation of data use protocols in partnership with Native Nations.

CONCLUSIONS

These findings and related recommendations are the result of wisdom gifted to the Office of Equity and the Project Team, who did their best to show up to this process humbly and without expectations, knowing the legacy of centuries of broken treaties (the 18 unratified treaties) and trust between the U.S. Government and Native Nations. As recipients of this gifted knowledge, the County of Sonoma has the responsibility and opportunity to honor what was shared by taking actionable steps toward implementing the recommendations listed in the section above. There is desire, hope, and interest within County staff and members of Native communities to address the findings learned, and there are examples of progress within the County from which to learn and build from in creating a path for clarity and stronger intergovernmental relations. This includes Tribal-County consultations that occur on numerous public and private projects to address cultural and tribal resource protection, as well as County consultation with Native Nations around some Tribal projects to address off-reservation impacts, which is provided for in some Tribal-County MOUs. These examples of government to government relationships offer a starting point from which the recommendations can build upon and further.

Gratitude is held for all Tribal leaders, members of Native communities, and County staff who graciously shared knowledge, relationships, and wisdom to inform this process with the hope of change within the County of Sonoma.



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