



PWI/EPOC Affinity Group: Best Practices in Outreach/Increasing Reach to Rural and Tribal Communities

Presented by: Sherri Downing and Kurt Schweigman

Advocates for Human Potential, Inc.

Thursday, December 7, 2023



Agenda



- 1. Community Agreements**
- 2. Introduction of Presenters**
- 3. Presentation: Working with Rural Communities**
- 4. Presentation: Working with Tribal Communities**
- 5. Q&A/Open Discussion**

Community Agreements Reminder and Discussion

- Be present and be an active listener.
- One mic, one voice.
- Practice inclusivity and show respect.
- Take space, make space.
- Honor confidentiality.
- Assume best intentions.
- Take care of yourself.
- Encourage growth.



Presenters



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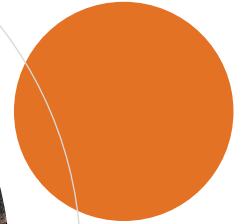


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Working with Rural Communities

Sherri Downing | December 7, 2023



Working with Rural Communities

After this session, participants will be able to:

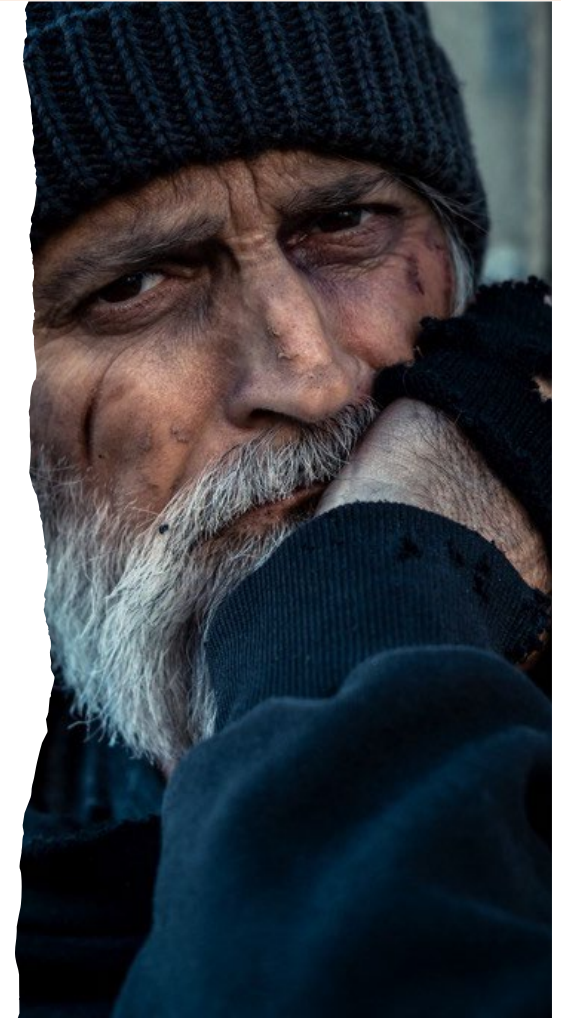
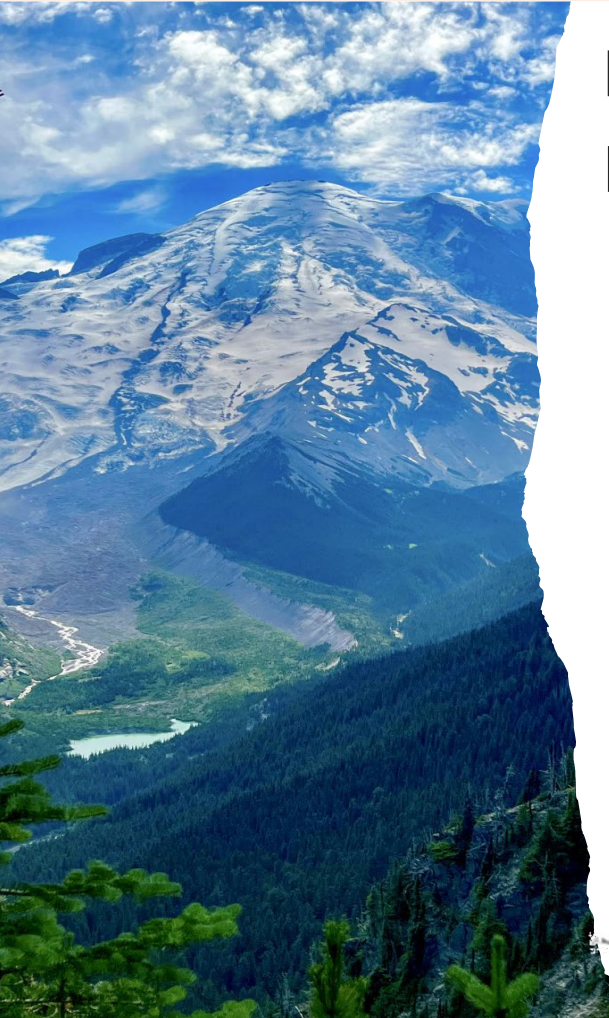
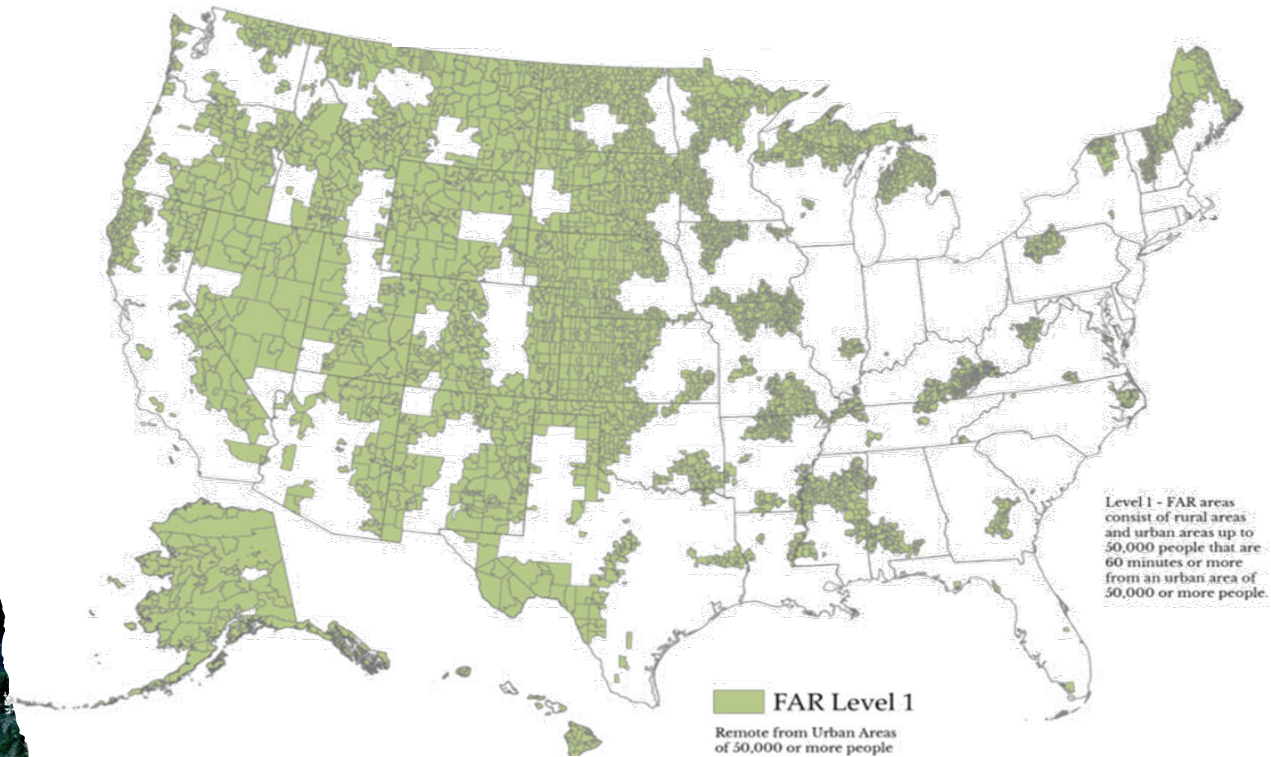
- Describe the difference between rural and frontier communities.
- Name at least three ways providing services to address behavioral health and/or substance use disorders is different in rural and frontier communities.
- Discuss some ways to ensure outreach to rural communities is effective.



Rural Myth

Myth: Not much of America is rural anymore.

Fact: About 97 percent of America is rural.



Rural or Frontier?

Rural

- More than 46 million Americans, or 15 percent of the U.S. population, live in [rural areas](#) as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Areas with small populations or unincorporated areas with population densities of less than 1,000 people per square mile. (Census Bureau)
- 97 percent of the U.S. is rural, but home to only about 20 percent of the population.

Frontier

- Denotes areas with fewer than six people per square mile.
- The frontier is home to 4 percent of Americans, yet covers about 56 percent of the U. S.



(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023)

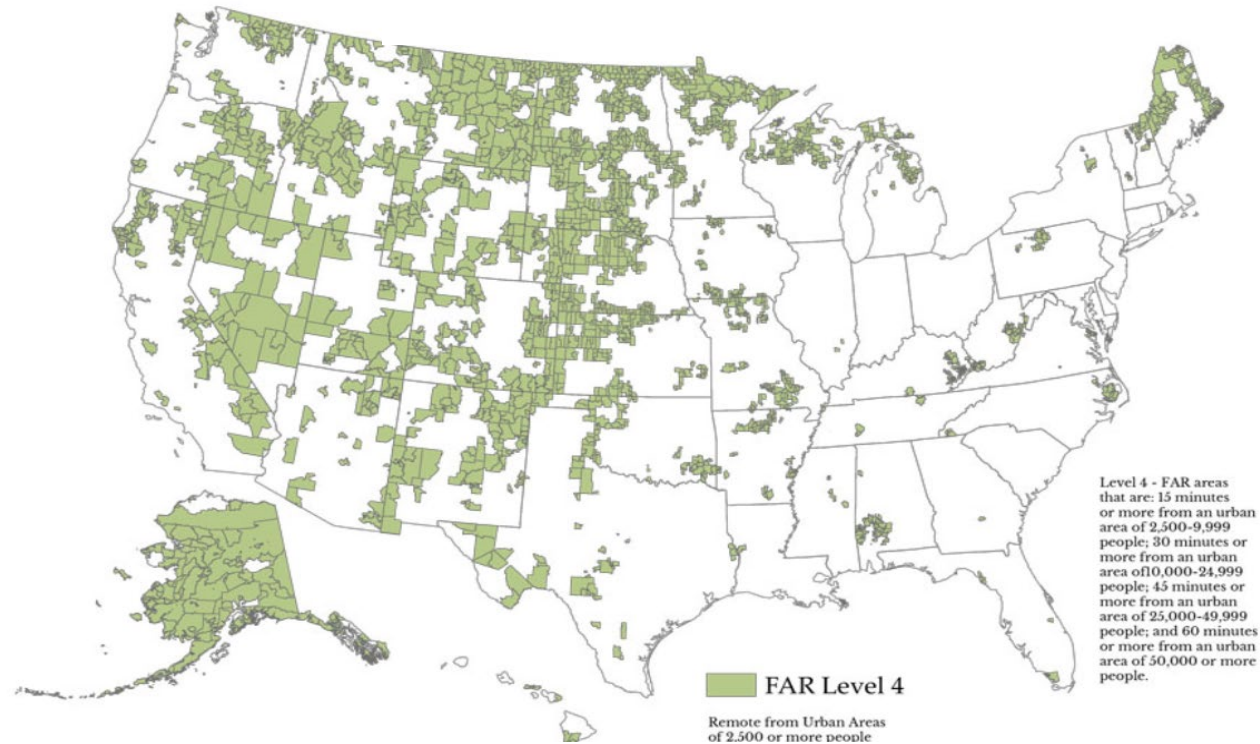
Frontier Myth



Photo by Cathi Geisler

Myth: The frontier disappeared in the early 1900s.

Fact: 46–56 percent of the U.S. is frontier.



What Are the Issues in Rural/Frontier America?

- Common intergenerational, crisis poverty and trauma
- High poverty rates
- Reduced employment opportunities resulting in high un- and underemployment
- Lack of transportation
- Low educational attainment status
- Few rentals/high homeownership rates
- Chronic shortages of health professionals
- Easy and early access to substances
- Prevalent chronic health conditions
- Lack of access to behavioral and primary health care
- Stigma around *using* behavioral health care



What Are the Strengths of Rural/Frontier Communities

- Deep roots and intergenerational ties to the community
- Strong sense of independence, self-sufficiency, and resilience
- Multiple points of connection and spheres of influence
- Fierce pride in family and community
- Rich culture where people take care of “their own”
- Culture of care and protection



Substance Use and Behavioral Health in Rural Communities



Photo by Kellen Downing, used with permission

Substance use is prevalent, but resources are limited for prevention, treatment, and recovery.



There can be deep stigma attached to accessing treatment for behavioral health or substance use treatment. This ties to fierce independence and pride in self-sufficiency.



People in rural areas experience isolation and discrimination due to mental health issues. There is a common perception that behavioral health disorders are personal weaknesses rather than medical issues. Deep poverty and long distances make it hard to get treatment. Lack of access to technology reduces options.



Rural Americans experience higher rates of depression and suicide when compared with their urban neighbors but are less likely to access care.



SEE: Pay attention to the strengths and the leaders (formal and informal) in the community. Take time to learn about the culture. Poverty may be obvious but look a little closer. Meet people where they're at.



VALUE: Recognize and appreciate what is working well. People in rural and frontier communities take a lot of pride in their communities.



Photo by Cathi Geisler



HEAR: Listen more than you talk. Practice listening deeply and with respect. Be aware of subliminal behavior: watch your tone of voice, word choice, body language, and room presence.



GIVE BACK: Build trust by making sure people feel heard and seen. Roll up your sleeves and pitch in. Beware of giving the impression that you think you have all the answers.

Connect with Respect:
You may only get one chance.



Photo by Kellen Downing

“ Living in a rural setting exposes you to so many marvelous things—the natural world and the particular texture of small-town life, and the exhilarating experience of open space.

— Susan Orlean

”

More Information



Photo by Kellen Downing

- [Rural Health Information Hub](#)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Rural Behavioral Health: [Rural Behavioral Health | SAMHSA](#)
- [NRHA Policy Brief on Mental Health in Rural Areas \(ruralhealth.us\)](#)
- Housing Assistance Council: Building Homes and Communities in Rural Communities: [Home - Housing Assistance Council \(ruralhome.org\)](#)
- Department of Agriculture Rural Development: [Rural Development \(usda.gov\)](#)
- Rural Resources Community Action: [Rural Resources – Community Action](#)
- The Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP): [Rural Health | HRSA](#)
- [Working Together: A Guide to Collaboration in Rural Revitalization | NC State Extension Publications \(ncsu.edu\)](#)

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Thank You



Working with Tribal Communities

Kurt Schweigman | December 7, 2023



Why Is Learning About Tribal Engagement Important?

- Tribal communities are unique, and their needs must be understood before they can be effectively addressed.
- It helps to form connections—establishes communication and partnerships. Building trust is key.
- It helps us to understand and co-create solutions around common issues.
- Cultural knowledge and wisdom that systems may not value or incorporate into western belief service efforts.
- Missteps are easier to avoid if we learn about appropriate engagement.

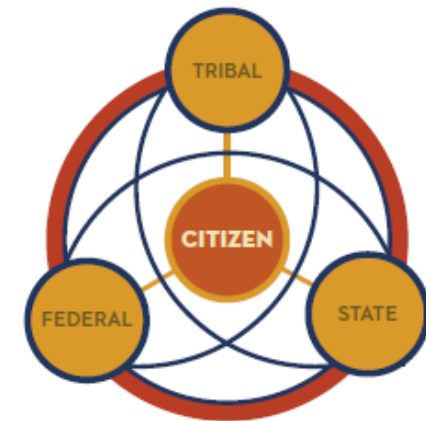
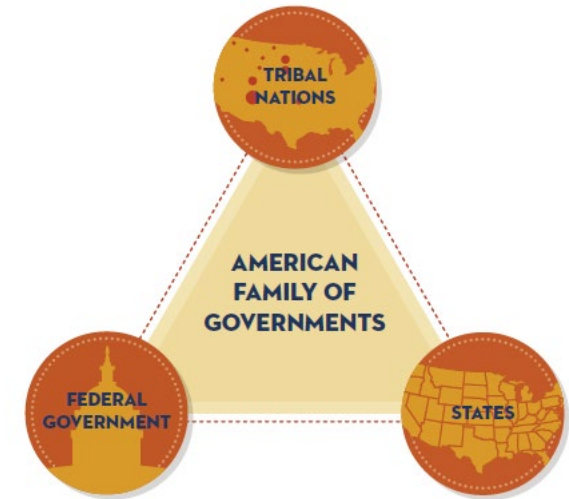


Photo and artwork: Cheryl Wilcox

Tribal Sovereignty

Tribal definition: The right to govern themselves to determine their own affairs and destinies. But it is a limited sovereignty because of federal laws. Tribal governments can create and enforce laws that are more strict or lenient than state laws. “States generally do not have legal authority over Tribal governments and Tribal members when they are inside the Tribe’s reservation or trust lands.” (Minnesota Department of Health, n.d.)

Federal government: Tribal sovereignty means that Native American Tribes are domestic dependent nations that exist within the boundaries of the United States and that they are wards of the United States, even though they may operate and manage internal Tribal affairs. (Nation Conference of State Legislators, 2013)



How to Create Positive Tribal Engagement

- Recognizing and identifying strengths in the community can provide insight into possible interventions.
- Recognizing elders play a significant role in Tribal communities.
- Knowing rapport and trust do not come easily in a limited amount of time; community members may speak to you about issues (e.g., suicide) as you may be perceived as an objective expert.
- Remembering that establishing trust may be difficult due to intergenerational trauma and historic distrust of non-natives.
- Respecting traditional spirituality and practices as important to Tribal culture and day-to-day living.
- Keeping in mind cultural nuances can vary across and within Tribal communities.



Initiating Contact

For many, but not all, phone calls are more effective than emails.

- If leaving a voicemail:
 - Keep it short.
 - Speak slowly and enunciate.
 - Leave your phone number.
- Ask for the preferred method of communication going forward:
 - Teams, Zoom, phone, email, in person. (Only offer this option if you are committed to travel.)
- Consider having an informal introductory meeting at the Tribal community. Ask to learn more about the Tribe by scheduling a visit.

Building rapport and trust is critical in Tribal engagement and takes time.

Meetings with Tribes/Tribal Entities

“It is common practice for tribes to open meetings with a prayer/blessing and sometimes a short ceremony.”
Please be mindful of showing respect to customs.

“Elders or cultural practitioners are often asked to offer such opening and/or closing words and are given a small gift as a sign of respect (honoraria are common).”

“If asking Native elders or cultural practitioners to open a meeting in this manner, please be sure to ask what they are comfortable with, confirm how participants should act and defer to their direction (especially relevant in the video conference era).”

- Thank attendees for their time and for the invitation, if you were invited.
- Introduce yourself and what your role is in the project and/or intent to assist.
- Share factual information at the appropriate time—when asked or when you are on the agenda.
- Accept small gifts with gratitude, if offered.
- Be aware you are a guest.

Communication Styles



(Office of the Tribal Advisor, n.d.)

Native people “communicate a great deal through nonverbal gestures—observe body language to avoid misinterpretation.”

Communication through storytelling or narrative is common—it is more important to listen than to express frustration or urgency.

“Humor may convey truths, difficulties, pain—‘laughter is good medicine’ is a way to cope.”

Expect Tribal Culture to Influence Interactions

Cultural humility is integral to forming connections and respectful interactions.

- “Elders play a significant role in Native communities and are considered valuable in decision-making processes.” (Office of the Tribal Advisor, n.d.)
- “It is customary in many communities to show respect by allowing elders to speak first, not interrupting, and allowing time for opinions and thoughts to be expressed.” (Office of the Tribal Advisor, n.d.)
- “It is acceptable to admit limited knowledge of tribal traditions and invite people to educate you about specific cultural protocols in their community.” (Office of the Tribal Advisor, n.d.)
- Take part in tribal wellness and community gatherings (e.g., Big Time, Pow Wow) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, 2009)

We work to help, not direct, Tribal communities and entities.

Respecting Spirituality and Ceremonies

- Many Native communities have a strong spiritual community, whether traditional, Christian (due to European contact), or a combination of both.
- Specific practices such as ceremonies, prayers, and religious protocols vary among Native peoples and communities.
- It is best not to make assumptions about belief systems, but be aware that many Native beliefs and practices are considered sacred and are not to be shared publicly or with outsiders.

(Office of the Tribal Advisor, n.d.)



Cultural Identity

- “When interacting with Native individuals, it is important to understand that each person has experienced their cultural connection in a unique way.”
- “Many Native people are multicultural, and there is wide variation in how or if they integrate their traditional and cultural practices into their identities.”
- “When identifying where they are from, many Native people will identify the name of their Tribe and/or the location of their traditional homeland.”
- “Some Native people choose to identify as citizens of a specific Tribe(s) indicating that they are part of a political body (e.g.. Tribal council member), while others choose to identify with their cultural group generally (e.g., Pomo).”

(Office of the Tribal Advisor, n.d.)

Being Respectful of Time



Photo: Steve Smith on Upstash

- Always be on time or a little bit early.
- Be prepared to wait.
- If you are at a Tribal meeting, wait to be introduced before speaking.
- Never request to be moved up on the meeting agenda to accommodate your schedule.
- If your meeting is postponed or rescheduled, it's not about you.
- Be flexible.

(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, 2009)

Land Acknowledgement

A land acknowledgement is a **statement that recognizes and respects the original stewards of the land and their enduring relationship with it.**

- “If you are unsure who the current and/or past inhabitants of the area are, use [Native-Land.ca | Our home on native land](#). You can easily search by address.”
- “Learn how to properly pronounce the name of the Native Tribe:” [Pronounce Native American People's Names | North America's Tribes Pronunciation – YouTube](#)
- Know the difference between a land acknowledgement and a blessing.
- Generally, don’t automatically assume a Native person will provide a land acknowledgement.
- Don’t bring in a Native person to only give land acknowledgement. Have someone who’s part of the presentation/process.
- Includes appreciation for the past and present care of the land; acknowledges past and current struggles as well as the resiliency of the people; looks to the future with commitment to support the care of the land, air, water, and all living things.

Expanding Our Understanding

What Can We Do?

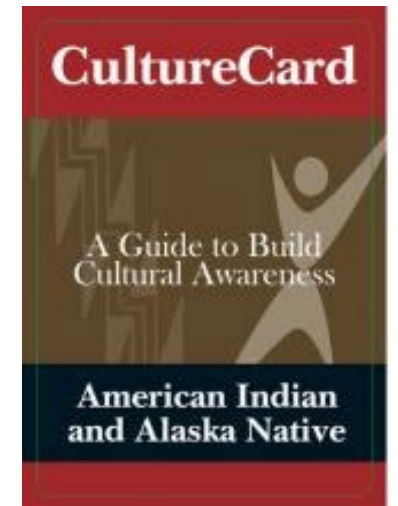
- Learn about Tribe(s) prior to working with them or outreaching to them.
 - Look at their website.
 - Read their history.
 - Take note of accomplishments.
 - Read AIAN Culture Card: A Guide to Build Cultural Awareness

Wopila Tanka (Great Thanks) for listening and learning!

Kurt Schweigman, MPH

Senior Program Manager – Tribal Behavioral Health Development

Enrolled Member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe



Open Discussion/ Q&A





Please fill out the feedback survey in the chat for today's event!



Thank You

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