

# Guidance for States and Localities to Outreach to Tribal Governments



Our nation's 574 federally recognized tribes span 35 states. In addition, 88 Native Hawaiian organizations are registered with the U.S. Department of the Interior. Many tribes possess significant telecommunications capabilities that are economically and politically important to their people and nearby non-tribal communities. Engaging with these nations and organizations is essential to FirstNet's success and the welfare of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian (AI/AN/NH) communities.

Working with tribal governments can be challenging; their remoteness, limited availability of public safety data, overlapping law enforcement and political jurisdictions, and historically frayed relationships can complicate collaboration. For mutual assistance to be effective we must work together in a coordinated manner, thoughtfully, and respectfully.

Trusted relationships are the key to success. The First Responder Network Authority, or FirstNet Authority, has two National Tribal Government Liaisons who assist with information sharing and relationship building. State and local government representatives are encouraged to reach out to these individuals for help with opening doors into Indian Country.

## RECOMMENDED OUTREACH PRACTICES

We recommend the considerations below when conducting outreach to tribes:

- **Connect with the right people:** Meet with the FirstNet Authority National Tribal Liaisons or spend some time learning about a tribe as you pursue introductions to the right individuals.
- **Visit the tribe:** Meeting in person on a tribe's land is a great way to build relationships.
- **Take a flexible approach:** Be adaptable in how you approach tribal nations. No two are alike, and varying access to technology can make it difficult to reach tribal members via phone or email.
- **Spend time getting to know one another:** Do not immediately start with business when you first meet. Take time to become acquainted.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR EACH STATE ABOUT TRIBES

- What outreach has been done with the tribes in your state?
- What are the biggest questions or concerns voiced by the tribes in your state?
- Does the state, or do any of the tribes, want a specific tribal outreach session conducted?
- What is the political climate between the state(s) and tribe(s)?
- Does the state's governor have a senior tribal advisor?
- Is there a state communications governing board with a tribal delegate?
- Do tribal members live on tribal land?
- Do tribal members call their land a Reservation, Pueblo, Rancheria, or do they not have designated land?
- What is their land base?
- How is tribal leadership structured?

- **Be willing to listen:** Approach tribes respectfully, as you would any organization with which you are unfamiliar and whose culture you must understand. Do not cite your ancestry as a way to relate.
- **Understand tribal differences:** Tribes within the same geographical area can be vastly different. Do not assume the same approach will work among multiple tribes.
- **Avoid assumptions:** Assuming who is a member of a tribe and who is not will get you into trouble.
- **Formalize engagement:** Ensure the right decision-makers are present and have appropriate meeting support (e.g., note-takers) when coordinating or consulting.
- **Tribal lead:** If a state or locality is not confident in the outreach it has conducted, or it would like to improve outreach, then a tribal lead may be a better approach. In this scenario, the FirstNet Authority will work with the state's tribal advisor, inter-tribal organizations, and/or FirstNet Authority regional staff to obtain contacts with the tribes in a state. FirstNet Authority staff will share communications with the state or local representatives and make every effort to introduce the state/local staff to tribal leadership.
- **Regional breakouts:** The state may feel more confident in joint outreach with the FirstNet Authority if multi-tribe gatherings are used. In this case, the state coordinates regional meetings and FirstNet Authority region and tribal staff attend.

For additional information in FEMA regions I-VIII, please contact Margaret Gutierrez at [margaret.gutierrez@firstnet.gov](mailto:margaret.gutierrez@firstnet.gov), or, in regions IX-X, Adam Geisler at [adam.geisler@firstnet.gov](mailto:adam.geisler@firstnet.gov).

## GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR EACH STATE ABOUT TRIBES

- What are their economic enterprises?
- What are their priorities for public safety?
- Do they have their own emergency medical services, police, or fire departments? If so, do they provide public safety services to neighboring jurisdictions off-reservation? If not, who provides public safety services?
- What kind of relationships do they have with neighboring jurisdictions?
- Do they have an emergency/risk manager?
- Local agency control of devices and use

## Want to learn more about FirstNet for Tribal Nations?

More information can be found at [FirstNet.gov/Tribal](https://www.firstnet.gov/Tribal).