



Urban vs. Rural Considerations & Practice Tips

Urban Indian communities and rural/reservation Indian communities evolved differently, resulting in variations in how they respond to their community needs and how they interact with children’s service organizations. Tribal leadership also evolved differently in urban and rural settings affecting the environment and values of the communities we serve. These differences affect how tribes interact with non-tribal agencies, individuals, and with each other.

In urban areas, the relocation efforts of the post-war era of the 1950’s led many Native people to develop support systems through activism and coalition building, often in the face of community apathy and/or hostility. Urban Indian agencies joined the competition for non-profit resources, often with little political support. Leadership and influence in urban locations is marked by the success and longevity of an agency, how long an individual has been part of the community, and personal reputation. Population statistics and health data in urban areas have been unreliable due to the inconsistent and difficult identification of American Indian/Alaska Natives.

Tribal leadership in rural/reservation areas is not only determined through an election process (tribal councils). It can also be determined by history of family influence, tribal creation stories, and clan relationships. Traditional roles of leadership by lineage through birthright may still be a factor in the determination of current and future leaders. Leadership is also recognized by the ability to protect and lead the tribe in a modern society. A leader’s inherent ability to serve the larger community, over time, helps us understand why rural/reservation areas function as large, interwoven family structures.

The following tables provide a list of important to considerations and practice tips. Keep in mind that all tribal and or community settings are unique.

Urban	Rural & Reservation
<p>Leadership within agencies tends to be distinct and each agency can be independent of the other.</p> <p>Multiple agencies provide social services to American Indian/Alaska Native communities. It will be useful to personally meet prominent individuals who work in or lead those agencies.</p> <p>Ability to identify youth may be a challenge as many families may not easily disclose their American Indian/Alaska Native heritage.</p> <p>Youth and families gather at <i>inter-tribal</i> events such as pow-wows and cultural days including Native American Day (September).</p> <p>Collaborations, consortia, and stakeholder forums may exist to address the needs of Indian children.</p>	<p>Tribal agencies are often overseen by tribes.</p> <p>Communities function as large interwoven families. As such, it is valuable to be “introduced” to the community through a trusted individual and to consider the differences in values of dominant society vs. traditional tribal values.</p> <p>County social workers are encouraged to work closely with the tribe’s designated ICWA representatives, tribal family services, tribal advocates, and/or tribal social services.</p> <p>Some tribes may not be federally recognized and some children can fall through cracks. It is best to follow the Spirit of ICWA.</p>



Practice Tips for Social Workers *Culturally Effective Engagement in Urban, Rural & Reservation Settings*

Urban	Rural & Reservation
<p>You may need to approach and establish multiple relationships with agencies: Tribal Health, Tribal TANF, Title VII Indian Education, Recovery Centers, Shelters, and/or American Indian FFAs, unless an active consortium exists.</p> <p>Seek advice from these agencies to inform your staff about services offered.</p> <p>Consider sending staff/social workers to local inter-tribal events such as pow-wows and cultural days including Native American Day (September) and begin making introductions.</p> <p>There may be tribal-specific cultural organizations that are local to your area such as Cherokee Heritage Group, or a Navajo Community organization that can be helpful.</p> <p>Identify any faith-based organizations that provide services for and with the local tribal community. There may be a specific church(es) that will be willing to assist.</p> <p>If you are asked to attend a meeting, a family night, or social event, it is good form to say 'yes' and to bring something. Expect to have a meal together and make sure to take time to relax and visit. This is the community's way of getting to know "individuals" rather than "agency representatives."</p> <p>It may be useful to explain the Spirit of ICWA to support children who are not eligible for enrollment or who are members of a non-recognized tribe.</p>	<p>Rural communities act and respond more like members of a large family. Take the time to consider who the Tribal Elders and gatekeepers are and which are known to advocate for the needs of Indian children – they will be your best way to enter into their system of communication.</p> <p>Make sure to identify and get to know the Tribe's ICWA designated agents. Work with them when you need to enter the reservation.</p> <p>Be aware of the local access points for services: Indian health services, Head Start, and Tribal Courts.</p> <p>Take some time to review the tribal history and historical context in your area. Building trust-based relationships may be slow and deliberate. Seek advice and mediation, and consider the tribal value/principle of reciprocity. (Never go empty handed when asking for assistance or advice; always find a time and way to say 'Thank You'.)</p> <p>Remind your staff that many Tribal community members are related to each other, so advise them to be careful what they say to community members. Confidentiality protects the client, social worker, and the agency.</p> <p>It would be a good idea to make contacts with non-federally recognized tribal representatives for the purposes of identifying homes for future placement. Protocol would apply, as with any other tribe.</p>

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