



Overview

Strong State-Tribal relationships can advance state policy with thousands of years of ongoing Indigenous ecological knowledge and research. State and Tribal collaborations can offer mutual benefits by reducing legal conflict, identifying redundancies, and increasing federal funding. While states have [no authority](#) over Tribal nations unless granted by Congress, **all states have [treaty obligations](#) to Tribal nations**, whose [Tribal sovereignty exceeds](#) state sovereignty. The relationship between Tribal nations, states, and the federal government is [complicated](#), but recognizing Tribal sovereignty can help states avoid [costly mistakes](#).

Policy Options

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution for uplifting Tribal sovereignty, the following options may be relevant to consider with Tribal partners.

- **Respect Jurisdiction:** Washington [H.B.2233](#) allows Tribal governments to end state interference in Tribal court jurisdiction. [Many states](#) still claim jurisdiction over Tribal citizens and lands set by [now-denounced](#) efforts to renege on treaties and [forcibly assimilate](#) Tribes.
- **Require Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC):** Washington [S.B.5373](#) would reinforce [existing requirements](#) to consult with Tribes and direct state agencies to seek FPIC.
- **Establish Intergovernmental Assemblies:** Maine [L.D.2118](#) would create an assembly of state and Tribal representatives to develop and maintain government-to-government relationships.
- **Give Land Back:** Returning land to Tribal control [improves biodiversity](#), [increases land access for all](#), and [restores social and decision-making powers](#) to Tribal nations. California [A.B.408](#) would encourage state-Tribal co-management and land return.
- **Honor Indigenous Land Access:** Treaty rights often include free movement and subsistence on land. Minnesota improved treaty compliance with [free state parks access](#) for Tribal citizens, also proposed in Nevada [A.B.84](#), Arizona [A.B.2237](#), Maine [L.D.25](#) and South Dakota [H.B.1142](#).

BUILDING STATE-TRIBAL COLLABORATION

Like state governments, Tribal governments vary in capacity and resources but have no shortage of local expertise and strong contexts for policy solutions.

- **Know the Nations:** Identify Tribal governments [based within state boundaries](#) and Tribes with [ancestral, historic, and contemporary state ties](#). States may have Tribal relations offices or councils with this knowledge, and state or regional inter-Tribal councils may also assist.
- **Reach Out Respectfully:** Tribal leaders are leaders of sovereign nations, have powers exceeding governors, and should be treated as such. It is often best to start by contacting Tribal [offices](#) and listening at public Tribal council meetings. The Bureau of Indian Affairs Office [serving a Tribe](#) can often provide appropriate contact information.
- **Trust Takes Time:** Different state and Tribal governments, histories, and politics may mean what works for a state will not work for state-Tribal partnerships. Tribal nations often have [difficult relationships](#) with [states](#), and officials may not immediately trust or value collaboration.

Additional Resources

- [Native Americans in Philanthropy](#) (NAP)
- [National Congress of American Indians](#) (NCAI)
- [Native American Rights Fund](#) (NARF)
- [Indian Country 101](#) - Educational Program

