

TRIBAL CIVICS

A Guide For Fostering Engagement





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Who We Are.....3

Acknowledgment..... 4

Understanding Our History6

What is Tribal Civics and Why is it Important?.....8

How to Use This Guide 11

Identifying Leaders and Champions for this Initiative..... 12

Content and Topics.....14

Gathering Knowledge17

Sharing Knowledge.....20

Making Time for Reflection..... 23

Implement and Refine Your Tribal Civics Project..... 25

In Closing 26

Additional Resources..... 27

Credits.....30

WHO THIS IS FOR

This is a guide to developing a Tribal civics engagement plan or program within your own nation. Our goal with this guide is to provide a resource to nations and their grassroots leaders so that they can develop and implement their own customized program for engaging their citizens in the important work of governing.



WHO WE ARE

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS CHANGEMAKERS AND NATIONS

Native Governance Center is a Native-led nonprofit supporting Indigenous changemakers and nations in Mni Sota Makoce, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Our programs deliver leadership development and Tribal governance support services grounded in Indigenous knowledge. Our work helps Native nations strengthen their sovereignty so they can secure a vibrant path forward for their citizens.

Native people know best how to govern their nations and are working to design a future that elevates their values and community assets. We believe that governance forms a strong base upon which Indigenous-led change can thrive. Government touches every aspect of our lives and strong Tribal governments (those aligned with community values) lead to improved quality of life for Tribal citizens. Citizens are more likely to feel invested in their government if it reflects the way they see the world.

We deliver programming across three main areas:

- **Tribal Governance Support (TGS):** Our Tribal Governance Support program engages elected Tribal leaders, Tribal administrators, and Tribal citizens in strengthening their Tribal governance systems through educational opportunities, technical assistance, and resources. TGS uses the Native nation rebuilding philosophy to empower leaders and citizens to create change that will impact the next seven generations and beyond.
- **Leadership Development:** We empower Indigenous changemakers to strengthen their communities through the Native Nation Rebuilders program. As a two-year cohort experience, the program provides participants with Indigenous governance-focused instruction during year one and customized support during year two (such as one-on-one coaching and full cohort check-ins).
- **Community Engagement:** We believe in the power of sharing knowledge with our broader community. We host free events throughout the year that are open to all and present content that is approachable for a wide variety of communities, including people without any knowledge of Tribal sovereignty.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

INSPIRATION

Cohort 9 Native Nation Rebuilder Levi Brown (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe) inspired us to create this guide. Witnessing him create and implement a successful civics course for his own Native nation, we knew we needed to find a way to share his model with others in our region and beyond.

Levi originally launched his civics course as part of his Native Nation Rebuilders program experience with our organization. He thoughtfully collaborated with other Rebuilders to create resources to support his civics course. Levi has observed the positive impacts his course has had on citizens of his nation. Levi's civics course resulted in an increased understanding by his fellow citizens that all Anishinaabe citizens have a role to play in their government. Requests from other segments of his nation to share this knowledge, such as from the Tribal college, Gaming Division, and others, reflect a strong interest in engaging citizens in Tribal civics.

Levi hopes other Native nations will feel inspired to create a civics educational experience of their own.

Levi Brown:

"It has been one of my life's great honors instructing the first year of this course, and we have learned a lot not only about our government but our employees. We have a lot of human capital, but we must invest more in our training for our staff to ensure they are being given the tools to be successful. An informed nation is a strong nation."



COLLABORATORS

The best solutions come from within the community; we are grateful to Levi for establishing a Tribal civics engagement pathway in our region. He created a strong foundation that allowed us to bring together collaborators from across our region to develop this guidebook. Our collaborators include talented grassroots leaders and Tribal leaders, administrators, and educators. Their thought partnership and contributions are invaluable. This resource is the result of a collective visioning process focused on the revitalization of Indigenous knowledge, culture, civic engagement, and governance.

Chi miigwech, pidamayaye, pilamaya, wopila tanka, maacigiraac (thank you)!

Rebecca Crooks-Stratton

Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux
Community
Cohort 2 Rebuilder

Les LaFountain

Turtle Mountain Band of
Chippewa
Cohort 1 Rebuilder

Dr. Valentina Merdanian

Oglala Lakota Nation
Cohort 1 Rebuilder

Roger White Owl

Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara
Nation
Cohort 5 Rebuilder

UNDERSTANDING OUR HISTORY

Before colonization, Native nations and Indigenous peoples had their own forms of governance and leadership systems. These systems were grounded in Indigenous cultural values, practices, and languages. They were intricate, strategic, and intentional. During and after colonization, the U.S. federal government, local governments, and white settlers disrupted Native lifeways and kinship systems, and caused generational harm through war, broken treaties, forced assimilation, and genocide. Despite the intentional, significant destruction of our many individual cultures, we still remain, and we are healing.

While kinship values and practices vary across Native nations and cultures, many reflect the importance of **being a good relative** and contributing to society. An example of this type of contribution is civic participation—getting involved with local Tribal governance. Today, we’re seeing a need and an increased desire for Tribal citizens to be more involved with their nation’s government.

Across Indian Country, we’re witnessing a surge in innovation, strength, leadership, and healing. Even with this positive momentum, all of our nations still have work to do. Every Tribal citizen can play a role in helping strengthen their nation. Elected leaders are asking citizens to get involved by providing input on important initiatives, participating in the decision-making process, and helping identify solutions to problems. While we elect individuals to be responsible for leading our nations, each of us as citizens have the power to create positive change in our communities.

Dr. Twyla Baker (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation) sums it up well: “There is no one individual who can fix everything for us—it’s going to take everyone. Casting all this pressure on singular human beings, no matter how amazing they are, isn’t fair and absolves us of our responsibility. Ask yourself where you could be helping.”

Being a Good Relative

Being good relatives means building kinship through trust, mutual respect, and mindful listening. We seek understanding and honor different viewpoints and life experiences. We are welcoming and inclusive.

UNDERSTANDING OUR HISTORY *(continued)*

Education is one key way to increase civic participation within Native nations. Colonization disrupted our traditional Indigenous structures and has reduced our people's shared knowledge about traditional forms of governance, cultural values and practices, all of which can inform how our Tribal governments could function today. Education can inspire and empower Tribal citizens to more actively participate in their community. We hope this guide inspires you to develop and implement your own plan for engaging your people in the governance of their nation. By doing this, you're taking an important step toward better outcomes for your community.

Levi Brown:

*Reaching out,
communicating with each
other, providing knowledge—
these things give your people
their power back and help
unravel historical trauma.*



WHAT IS TRIBAL CIVICS AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

According to *Merriam-Webster*, 'civics' is "a social science dealing with the rights and duties of citizens." If you took a civics class in high school, you probably learned about state and federal governmental systems, laws, policies, and procedures. You probably also learned about your rights and duties as a citizen.

Nancy Deere-Turney:

"Native Americans were civically engaged before the term was coined or trending. Four hundred years ago, you would have seen our people working to ensure that the whole community was fed, sheltered, and protected."

The purpose of a civics education is to develop informed citizens who can engage in civic life effectively, ultimately strengthening and upholding a democracy. Civic engagement can also be defined as the process of working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference (Civic Responsibility and Higher Education, Thomas Ehrlich). Civic engagement promotes improved quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.

From an Indigenous perspective, the concepts of civics, civic engagement, and democracy reflect Indigenous practices and values, such as reciprocity, relationships, and responsibility. Prior to colonization and the influence of individualism, community care and contribution were encouraged. Indigenous people knew the importance of contributing to their community; practices that improved social well-being, cohesion, collaboration, consensus building, and positive decision-making were widespread. It is time to revive and strengthen these practices to rebuild our Native nations in a positive way for the next seven generations.

Civic engagement is foundational to a future where Native nations thrive on their own terms; where Tribal citizens are informed and empowered to contribute to their communities.

A plan for engaging citizens in Tribal civics may include a Native nation's history, cultural values and practices, the development of their Tribal government systems, policies, laws, and Tribal citizens rights, roles, and responsibilities. Tribal citizens

WHAT IS TRIBAL CIVICS AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

(continued)

equipped with this knowledge are better prepared to make informed decisions, contribute to important conversations and initiatives, take action when called upon, and ultimately have a stronger sense of identity.

A Tribal civics project can provide Tribal citizens with information and tools to nurture and improve their political systems. It can help Tribal citizens feel more confident in their Tribal government and increase trust and accountability. After participating in a Tribal civics project, citizens will better understand the governmental resources available to them and how they can help strengthen their nation.

A Tribal civics project is important because it:

- **Revitalizes Indigenous Knowledge:** When we return to who we were and unburden ourselves from systems of governance that do not reflect our knowledge and values, we can begin our healing journey. Using our traditional knowledge and culture in our governance helps build citizens' confidence in our systems, inspires active public engagement, and brings about informed decision making for all. Centering this knowledge reminds people about the strong influence that Indigenous wisdom has had on everything from farming practices to modern-day governmental structures. Revitalizing Indigenous governance knowledge helps ensure that our people continue to thrive into the future.
- **Restores Hope and Pride:** When we learn about the knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors and relatives we feel pride in our Indigenous identity and hope for the Indigenous future we can build for our children.
- **Teaches Us to Be Good Relatives:** Kinship is a foundational value that Indigenous people hold sacred. Being a good relative means contributing to your family and community. It looks like working to make life better for everyone. Learning civics can encourage us to do things like attending

Les LaFountain:

"Democracy is something we all need to be involved in; democracy is something that is embedded in Native societies; we need to understand the concept of democracy from an Indigenous point of view."

WHAT IS TRIBAL CIVICS AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

(continued)

council meetings, asking questions of our leaders, and holding each other accountable—all things that make our communities stronger for the greater good.

- **Encourages the Seven Generation Mindset:** Tribal civics can help us restore and center our ancestral teachings so we can pass them on to future generations, plan for a sustainable future, and inspire future generations to become leaders within their nations.
- **Strengthens Tribal Sovereignty:** Tribal civics can help support and protect Tribal sovereignty. The more we understand our history and where our people came from, the better equipped we are to advocate for ourselves and design systems that are truly by us and for us.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is for Indigenous youth, educators, knowledge keepers, grassroots and elected leaders; it's for anyone who aspires to create and implement a Tribal civics engagement plan for their nation. You can use it alone, or you can partner with other like-minded community members.

This guide offers ideas and suggestions, but it's ultimately up to you to decide what to include. Tribal civics should never take a one-size-fits-all approach! Our Native nations are diverse; it's okay if your Tribal civics project looks different than another nation's project.

Dr. Valentina Merdanian:
"We are giving you a variety of ingredients, and it is up to you what kind of stew you want to make!"

We've incorporated content from Levi Brown's Leech Lake Civics Course throughout this guide. Seeing real-life examples from another Native nation can help you understand how to apply this content toward the creation of your own civics project.

Before you begin this journey, do some self-reflection. Set your intentions for this work. Here are some questions to get you started:

- Why is creating and implementing a Tribal civics project important to me? Why now?
- What do I hope to gain from this experience? What do I hope my community gains from this experience?
- What do I already know about my nation's culture, values, history, and traditional forms of governance? Who do I know who might have resources on these subject areas?
- What potential roadblocks might I encounter, and how can these be resolved?
- When I encounter challenges in other areas, where do I turn for strength and solutions? How can I apply this approach in this context?
- What is the potential impact of a learning experience like this on my community?

IDENTIFYING LEADERS AND CHAMPIONS FOR THIS INITIATIVE

Motivated and effective leaders help initiatives succeed. Developing a Tribal civics engagement program requires time, persistence, and strong leadership. You can identify a single leader or form a committee to help champion your program. When thinking about who can lead this effort in your Native nation, consider the following groups:

- **Community Members:** Community members who'd be a good fit for a Tribal civics initiative include individuals who are invested in and passionate about community-wide change grounded in Indigenous values. You may want to consider someone from your community who is already a respected leader, possibly at the grassroots level. It's important that this person is seen as someone who is unbiased and trusted by the community. Tribal civics is not the same as politics; choosing a neutral leader will help reinforce that point.
- **Tribal Government Officials:** Tribal leaders or employees who are knowledgeable about particular governance-related topics are a great choice to help with a Tribal civics initiative. Tap into the knowledge of Tribal administrators who oversee particular departments: they may have a wealth of resources that can help inform your plan.
- **Tribal College and University Staff, Students, or Faculty:** Tribal colleges are a great place to find people who are interested in learning and sharing about their Native nation's history, culture, traditions, and governance.
- **Historical or Cultural Department Employees:** If a Native nation has a historical preservation office (or something similar), an employee of this department might be a great choice to lead this initiative. They probably have access to resources to inform content for the course, too.
- **Indigenous Language Educators or Cultural Knowledge Keepers:** There are more community efforts taking place to revitalize Indigenous languages and cultural practices. For some Native nations, there are formal programs established. The knowledge carried by Indigenous language revitalizers and cultural knowledge keepers could be beneficial to a Tribal civics engagement program.



IDENTIFYING LEADERS AND CHAMPIONS FOR THIS INITIATIVE *(continued)*

One example of how an engagement program might be organized is that of Levi Brown's Leech Lake Civics Course. Levi chose to venture out on his own; he is the sole creator and presenter of his course. He developed his presentation on his own time and does not get paid to deliver the course content to his community. Levi was also strategic about when to launch his course. He felt that it would be better received if he was no longer an employee of his nation. He thinks this made a difference in the reception of his course content. This does not mean Tribal employees cannot deliver a project like this for their own nation. We encourage you to consider the impact that Tribal politics may have on the reception of your own civics initiative.

If you form a group to develop and deliver a Tribal civics project, you may have a need for multiple roles, such as researcher, curriculum developer, content creator, presenter/facilitator, etc. Each of these roles will require different skill sets and characteristics.

For instance, it could be effective if the presenter/facilitator (the person delivering the content) has great facilitation skills, feels comfortable presenting in front of an audience, can handle sensitive issues, etc. Regardless of what your criteria may be for each role, it's important to identify what you are looking for before you develop your plan.

If you are going to lead this initiative solo, you can skip this next paragraph.

Take some time to brainstorm names of individuals you know in your community who might be a good fit to help lead this initiative. Grab a pen and notebook to jot down their names; feel free to use the suggested role categories above to help guide your process. Once you've identified your list of prospects, begin reaching out to them to gauge their interest in helping lead a Tribal civics initiative.

Rebecca Crooks-Stratton:

"Community organizing is most effective when the people trust the reputation, credibility, and expertise of those leading the initiative."

CONTENT AND TOPICS

A **Tribal civics initiative** is a formal or informal learning opportunity for Tribal citizens to learn about their people's history, cultural values and practices, traditional forms of governance, and current governmental structure and administration.

If you choose to develop a formal course, you might decide to integrate it into a K-12 school system, Tribal College and University (TCU) curriculum, Tribal government, or any institution where this knowledge would be most beneficial.

If you create something more informal, you might consider sharing knowledge through virtual or in-person workshops at local community meetings or gatherings.

Before jumping into the specific topics you might cover in your initiative, we're going to introduce you to the overall strategy Levi used to guide his course. Levi sees 'truth telling' as an important element of a successful civics course. He opens up his course by asking participants to answer an important question, "Do the people of your nation have positive or negative views of their government?" Levi shares that we have to be honest about the current state of our Tribal governments. The purpose of the question is not to cast blame, but to identify existing challenges and ways to move through them together. He creates space for participants to air their grievances, including offering one-on-one sessions. While Levi works hard to create space for folks to share their thoughts, he also doesn't want participants to get stuck in negativity. He actively encourages them to envision creating positive changes in the future.

Tribal Civics Initiative

A Tribal civics initiative is a formal or informal opportunity for citizens to learn about their history, cultural values & practices, traditional forms of governance, and current governmental structure & administration.

Here's a list of topics that you might consider researching and including in your Tribal civics project. This list is by no means comprehensive. If another topic feels like a fit with the needs of your nation, add it! We encourage you to customize all of your content to fit your nation. We'll explain how to gather relevant knowledge in the next section.

CONTENT AND TOPICS *(continued)*

- **Cultural Values and Practices:** Ground the content in your nation's traditional Indigenous knowledge by including creation stories, ceremonial teachings, and cultural values. Consider incorporating Indigenous language to support this aspect of your curriculum. For instance, Levi incorporated the Anishinaabe concept of Mino Bimaadiziwin as a core value of his people.
- **History of Your Native Nation and Traditional Tribal Governance:** Prior to colonization, your Native nation had its own systems in place. Consider including content about your people's traditional governance structures, societal roles, leadership practices, and processes for decision making. Ask yourself the following:
 - What did life look like for my people prior to colonization?
 - What were our unwritten rules? Or natural law?
 - How did our leaders make decisions?
 - What were the various roles and responsibilities of each Tribal citizen?
- **The Impacts of Colonization:** Before you can understand the context for your nation's current reality, it's critical to examine how colonization disrupted Tribal governance and how it may still have an impact on your nation today.
 - Think about the impacts that local, state, and federal governments had on your Native nation. Consider the role religious institutions and individual settlers in your region played in carrying out colonization.
 - Consider highlighting specific laws and policies that impacted your Native nation. For instance, for many nations, the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934 had a significant impact on governance structures. The IRA caused many nations to adopt boilerplate constitutions based on the US federal government structure. Many nations still use these boilerplates today. If this is the case for your nation, you may consider including the IRA in your content.
 - You may want to highlight specific Treaties and Treaty rights that have either been broken or need to continue to be upheld and protected.

Dr. Valentina Merdanian

"Coming to a shared account of our past is essential to sharing equally the burden of the work of the future."

CONTENT AND TOPICS *(continued)*

When developing his course, Levi researched treaty rights specifically for Leech Lake. He also looked at federal laws that impacted his nation, such as the 1889 Nelson Act (led to 68% of land lost for Leech Lake). He also highlighted prominent figures from his nation who contributed to history, influenced policy, and/or ignited movements, such as Dennis Banks, co-founder of the American Indian Movement.

- **Today's Tribal Government:** After learning about your nation's history and the impact that colonization and local, state, federal policies had on your governance, it's important to also explore your current system of government. Some suggested topics to cover are:
 - Tribal Constitution
 - Current Governmental Structure
 - Administration and Programs
 - Elected Tribal Leadership Roles and Responsibilities
 - Tribal Citizen Roles and Responsibilities
 - Intergovernmental Agreements
 - Social Challenges
 - Assets and Strengths



GATHERING KNOWLEDGE

In the section above, we reviewed the types of information you should consider researching. This section will outline how to gather the information and resources you'll need. As you prepare to gather the information you'll use to develop your content, it's important to consider any Indigenous protocols practiced by your people. In many Indigenous cultures, sharing and exchanging knowledge is a sacred process. The knowledge keeper and learner have a reciprocal relationship. Make sure to acknowledge this exchange and to follow your community's protocols. This may include giving an offering to an elder or knowledge keeper. You might learn that sacred knowledge and practices can only be shared during certain times of the year or in certain settings. It's also possible that certain topics shouldn't be shared publicly. Don't ignore these important protocols. And if you are unaware about your people's protocols, we encourage you to ask someone who might know.

Roger White Owl

"Start with the history of your Tribal nation—not just what's in the textbooks—but by talking with community elders. Get the history of your tribe."

When it comes to gathering information, investigate whether there are any formal processes related to doing research in your Native nation. For example, you may be required to inform your elected Tribal leadership about your plans for this initiative. These examples may not apply to your project, but it is important to be informed about these types of requirements.

You will want to consider how you are going to store and categorize the information you're gathering. We strongly recommend you set up a system to do this ahead of time.

This could range from a simple spreadsheet to something more complex such as an application or platform. Either way, you will want to have a plan in place. You will also want to record the sources for all of the information you gather.

There are a number of ways to gather the information you need for your civics project. First, consider talking with knowledge keepers or any of the individuals listed below. If you decide to conduct interviews, create an interview guide that includes a list of questions you want to ask. You may also want to invest in a recorder or use your phone to record the interview, with permission from the interviewee. Documenting the interview responses is critical; it allows you to refer back to the information as you develop your content.

GATHERING KNOWLEDGE *(continued)*

Second, hit the books! Search for books that focus on your Native nation's history, culture, and language. If your community has a Tribal College or University, consider starting there. You might also have Native authors from your community who've written books that are relevant to your project.

Third, social media is also a great place to look. There are many inspiring Native creators putting out content on civics-related topics. You might find documentaries, podcasts, short videos, etc. to inform your project or include in your workshop/course/training.

Lastly, consider gathering information by learning in a more traditional setting, such as a ceremony, sweat lodge, or cultural gathering. In the past, this is where we received most of our education when it came to our history, stories, cultural practices, language, etc. This type of setting provides a great opportunity to learn from knowledge keepers. Levi shared that he did most of his learning at the lodge by talking to community members about Leech Lake topics and current issues. He also gained a great deal of knowledge through his various roles and jobs working for Leech Lake and in other capacities.

The resources you find to develop your program will be unique to your nation. Here's a generalized list of suggested people, places, and organizations to approach when gathering information for your content.

Tribal Citizens:

- Elders and knowledge keepers
- Tribal historians

Tribal Government:

- Elected Tribal leaders
- Tribal administrators
- Tribal departments and programs

GATHERING KNOWLEDGE *(continued)*

Tribal Colleges and Universities:

- Professors who teach Tribal governance, history, culture, language, etc.
- Students, especially those studying Indigenous studies, culture, language, etc.
- Tribal College librarians

Nonprofit Organizations and Governmental Agencies:

- [American Indian Higher Education Consortium](#)
- [Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development](#)
- [Indian Land Tenure Foundation](#)
- [National Congress of American Indians](#)
- [National Indian Law Library](#)
- [National Museum of the American Indian](#)
- [Native American Journalists Association](#)
- [Native American Rights Fund](#)
- [Native Governance Center](#)
- [Native Nations Institute](#)
- [Tribal Historic Preservation Offices](#)
- [United States National Archives](#)

Written Publications, such as articles and books:

- [First Nations Development Institute - Recommended Book List](#)

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Teaching cultural and language knowledge is good medicine. Sharing knowledge with others is honorable. We encourage you to reflect on the traditional teaching processes of your people when deciding how to deliver your content:

- Where do knowledge keepers typically share their teachings?
- Does learning about Indigenous knowledge happen in ceremony? Around the sacred fire? In the lodge? While cooking with your aunts? When visiting relatives?

Consider these learning and teaching practices as you develop your approaches to teaching and sharing knowledge. Engaging and understanding your audience is an important component of successful content delivery. As Indigenous people, we often learn more effectively through conversations, practicing or modeling certain cultural activities, and integrating movement as a part of learning. For this reason, we suggest that your content delivery plan feature a variety of approaches, such as lecturing, group discussion, and hands-on activities. You may want to consider holding your classes or workshop at a meaningful location, such as in a traditional dwelling or outdoors in nature.

To increase learning and participant engagement, consider integrating some of these tools and materials into your teaching:

- PowerPoint or Google Slides (be sure to keep your text short)
- Include relevant graphics to impart knowledge visually (Canva.com is a great place to create them for free)
- Video or audio recordings
- Printed resources (booklets, brochures, etc.)
- Mock scenarios
- Quizzes and polls (online platforms such as Mentimeter or Kahoot! can be engaging)
- Storytelling: incorporate personal, familial, communal stories throughout

SHARING KNOWLEDGE *(continued)*

Levi intentionally incorporated personal stories into his course to encourage participant engagement. Your audience will be much more likely to understand and process your content if it feels relatable. For example, Levi shared photos of his grandparents and talked about their different experiences growing up: one went to boarding school, and the other did not. He explained how their experiences shaped who they are and how they interact within their community. Levi also incorporated humor into his presentation via the Mentimeter tool. He'd ask the participants a survey question via Mentimeter and highlight any funny responses. Humor is good medicine, so don't forget to include it in your project!

You'll also want to consider the format of your initiative. Ask yourself the following:

- How many hours will it be?
- Will it consist of one session or multiple sessions?
- Who is your target audience? Youth, adults, elders? How many participants?
- Will your course be more formal, such as a class at a local Tribal College? Or do you plan to host a workshop at the local community center?
- Will you be presenting in-person or virtually?

Hosting an educational experience virtually may make the most sense for your community. There are a number of resources available online to help with creating a virtual event. Here is a great [Virtual Engagement Toolkit](#) by the Urban Indian Health Institute that can be helpful if you plan to develop a virtual Tribal civics project.

For context, the Leech Lake Civics Course is a three hour, one-time session. The course is now required for all Tribal employees, thanks to a new law passed by the Leech Lake Tribal Council. Levi likes to limit his group size to no more than 20 participants: the small format gives him ample time to interact with and hear from each participant. His original course is open to Tribal employees only, but he's currently working to create a similar course at the Leech Lake Tribal College. His nation's Gaming Division has asked him to create a similar course focused on civics and economic development.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE *(continued)*

Levi's recipe for success:

- **Vary your content.** Try to provide a mix of stories and facts; give participants enough to think about to continue the conversation with others; spark their interest
- **Don't focus your presentation on specific issues that may be contentious.** Instead of dwelling on the past, focus on the present and the future!
- **Engaging civically in our nation is collective work.** We're working as a community, not individuals with independent agendas.
- **Celebrate wins together.** Support each other when things go wrong.
- **Listen to participants, and ensure the agenda stays on track.** Respectfully move on as needed. Offer time to talk with folks one-on-one outside the session.
- **Focus on real stories of success.** Do not glamorize our struggles; humanize our situation.
- **Use humor.** These topics and conversations can be heavy. Humor is good medicine.

Regardless of the format you choose, it's important to gather feedback from your participants. The next section will focus on reflection, input, and feedback.



MAKING TIME FOR REFLECTION

Gathering input from your potential participants is an important part of the planning process. It can help participants play an active role in their own learning. You may consider asking community members the following as you build your content:

- What do you want to learn more about when it comes to our nation's history, culture, values, and governance?
- Would you prefer to learn in-person or virtually?
- What type of learning format or knowledge sharing mode works best for you?
- Are you familiar with any existing resources that might help support the development of this content?

You can gather this information via informal conversations with family and community members, conducting a more structured interview, creating and disseminating a survey, or polling people on social media. See below for more tips on approaches.

In addition, you can also learn a lot by gathering feedback after your participants complete their learning. Hearing from them directly can help you determine how to improve and make the experience even more accessible and engaging for next time. Some potential questions you can ask are:

- What did you enjoy most? What did you enjoy least?
- What did you learn about your nation's history, culture, government, etc?
- How do you plan to use your learning?
- Did your experience empower you to engage more in your community?
- What would you like to learn more about?
- What recommendations do you have to improve the civics project you participated in?

MAKING TIME FOR REFLECTION *(continued)*

The type of Tribal civics initiative you develop (informal or formal) will influence your approach to gathering feedback. Below are a few suggested approaches:

- **Surveys:** Put together a few survey questions for attendees. Keep the survey short and to the point so folks don't feel overwhelmed. Think about what you want to get out of the survey, and build some questions around those objectives. Your survey can take the form of a printed handout, or it can live online. Consider using Google Forms to create your online survey.
- **Hosting community meetings or talking circles:** Inviting community members to gather (and possibly share a meal or engage in a cultural activity) while providing their reflections on their experience can be a great way to learn more about the impact of your training. For an example of hosting a meeting to gather input from community members, check out the Urban Indian Health Institute's [video](#) on Indigenous evaluation.
- **Engaging participants on social media:** Consider posting a short poll or survey online and asking participants to share their ideas.

Levi enjoys receiving feedback in real time. He uses an online interactive presentation software called Mentimeter to ask participants questions at the end of his course. It is anonymous, which encourages participants to answer honestly. Conducting surveys in real time instead of after the session(s) also can increase the number of completed surveys.

The Indigenous evaluation resources listed below are likely most useful for those creating formal courses. However, if you're leading a more casual course, you still might find inspiration from these tips and strategies.

- [AIHEC Indigenous Evaluation Framework](#)
- [Urban Indian Health Institute - Indigenous Evaluation](#)

IMPLEMENT AND REFINE YOUR TRIBAL CIVICS PROJECT

Now that you have gathered knowledge and created content for your Tribal civics engagement program, it's time to implement it! Congratulations on all of the work you've put in to get to this point! You will want to create a checklist to make sure you have completed all preparations for your first session. Make sure you have all needed materials and resources to conduct a successful civics gathering. Make sure to do a run-thru of your content and presentation, and test out your technology ahead of time. Always prepare some back-up plans just in case technology fails you.

When it comes time to present, don't forget to have fun. Take notes on your experience and gather feedback from participants so you can improve for next time. Some questions to consider asking yourself after your first pilot are:

- What worked well?
- What could have gone better?
- What information gaps did I notice?
- What other changes would I make next time?

Make sure to express gratitude to your participants for attending and encourage them to continue learning. Regardless of how your first experience goes, know that you are creating something powerful. It takes time, so be patient and gentle with yourself. Increasing civic engagement doesn't happen overnight. If you feel pressure from the community to do more than you're currently able, tell yourself that you're doing the best you can. As Levi puts it "This work takes time. Your community may not support the project immediately. That does not mean you failed. Creating change takes time."

Celebrate the fact that you did it! Launching your Tribal civics program is a huge step, and you'll continue to build on your experience. You can only go up from here.

IN CLOSING

Momentum around revitalizing traditional Indigenous knowledge and governance practices is growing across Indian Country. By teaching our community members about Tribal civics, we're helping create a positive future for our people. Launching a Tribal civics project is about empowering our fellow citizens and grounding ourselves in sacred knowledge. We hope you feel inspired to create your own civics engagement program designed for your people, by your people.

All of us have a role to play in shaping the future of our nation and engaging in our community. Knowledge is power: creating a Tribal civics project can empower your people to identify solutions to problems facing their nation and beyond.

We are always learning, and the content of your initiative will continue to evolve and grow. We wish you all the best on your Tribal civics journey!

Wayne Ducheneaux

"As we relearn the Indigenous knowledge and wisdom of our people, and heal ourselves, we are creating a roadmap to heal the world. This project is an important part of that process."



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CHECKLIST FOR CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING A TRIBAL CIVICS COURSE

Planning Phase

- ☐ Start with Self-Reflection:
 - Why is creating and implementing a Tribal civics project important to you?
 - Why is it needed now?
- ☐ Decide whether you will be leading this initiative solo or if you would like to create a Tribal civics project team.
- ☐ Brainstorm and contact a list of potential people in your nation who could help lead and support this initiative.
- ☐ Conduct a meeting with your team, if applicable:
 - Develop a plan for your research, creation, and implementation phases.

Research Phase

- ☐ Review potential topics to include in your nation's Tribal civics project.
- ☐ Assess what information and knowledge you already possess.
- ☐ Identify what other information you need to develop the content of your Tribal civics' education program.
- ☐ Identify resources you might be able to use to inform your content.
- ☐ Set up your research documents to capture notes and information.
- ☐ Decide on how you want to gather information (interviews, books, cultural gatherings, etc.).
- ☐ Begin learning and collecting your information.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES *(continued)*

CHECKLIST FOR CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING A TRIBAL CIVICS COURSE

Creation Phase

- ☐ Decide on the type of format you are going to use for your course or workshop.
- ☐ Develop your learning materials and surveys using whatever format works best, such as PowerPoint, graphics, video or audio recordings, printed resources, etc.
- ☐ Consider how you want to gather input and feedback from participants.

Implementation Phase

- ☐ Prepare for your first class/workshop/session.
- ☐ Make sure you have all needed materials.
- ☐ Do a run-thru of your content and delivery.
- ☐ Test out any technology ahead of time and prepare backup plans.
- ☐ Pilot your session, take notes of your experience, and gather feedback from participants to help improve your Tribal civics project.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES *(continued)*

Other Resources

These resources are not specific to civic engagement but may be useful to you as you gather information.

Native Governance Center Resources

- Videos
 - [Who We Are: Native Governance Center](#)
 - [Native Civics: Commitment to Community](#)
 - [Rebuilding Nations: The Next Generation](#)
 - [What is Tribal Sovereignty?](#)
 - [What Do Tribal Governments Do?](#)
 - [Why Do Treaties Matter?](#)
 - [Native Treaties: Making Relations](#)
 - [Sovereign Nations: Giving Visibility](#)
 - [Building an Indigenized Future: Seventh Generation Philosophy](#)
- Guides, Handouts, and Reports
 - [Native Nations Listening Tour Report](#)
 - [Indigenous Wealth Guide](#)

Native Nation Rebuilding Resources

- [Principles of Native Nation Rebuilding \(handout\)](#)
- [Rebuilding Native Nations: Strategies for Governance and Development \(book\)](#)
- [Reclaiming Indigenous Governance \(book\)](#)

CREDITS

Native Governance Center is grateful to the following individuals for their contribution to this guide.

- Eloy Bida, artist (pages: cover, 4, 7, 10, 16, 22, 26)
- Levi Brown, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (quotes, pages: 4, 7)
- Dr. Twyla Baker, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation (quotes, page: 6)
- Dr. Valentina Merdanian, Oglala Lakota Nation (quotes, pages: 11, 15)
- Les La Fountain, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa (quotes, page: 9)
- Rebecca Crooks-Stratton, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (quotes, page: 13)
- Roger White Owl, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation (quotes, page: 17)
- Nancy Deere-Turney, Muscogee (Creek) Nation (quotes, page: 8)





Native Governance Center is a Native-led nonprofit organization serving Native nations in Mni Sota Makoce, North Dakota, and South Dakota. We support Native leaders through our leadership development and Tribal governance support programs. We believe that strengthening governance is a direct pathway toward improving quality of life for Native people.



NATIVE GOVERNANCE
CENTER

Supporting Tribes. Empowering Leaders.

www.nativegov.org