

Best Practices' suggestions:

Respect and patience

- The more respectful you are of community members and traditions, the more you will be respected.
- Elders play a significant role in communities. The experience and wisdom they have gained throughout their lifetime, along with their historical knowledge of the community, are considered valuable in decision-making processes. What the Elders share they share in a traditional manner as they are the sources of traditional cultural knowledge.
- It is customary in many Indigenous communities to show respect by allowing elders to speak first, not interrupting, and allowing time for opinions and thoughts to be expressed. Elders often offer their teaching or advice in ways that are indirect, such as through storytelling.
- It is disrespectful to openly argue or disagree with an elder.
- Be honest and clear about your role and expectations and be willing to adapt to meet the needs of the community. Show respect by being open to other ways of thinking and behaving.
- Listen and observe more than you speak. Learn to be comfortable with silence or long pauses in conversation by observing community members' typical length of time between turns at talking. Listening to Elders conversations provides unique perspectives.
- It is acceptable to admit limited knowledge of Alaskan Native cultures, and invite people to educate you about specific cultural protocols in their community.
- Be open to allow things to proceed according to the idea that "things happen when they are supposed to happen."
- Respect confidentiality and the right of the community to control information, data, and public information about services provided to the tribe. NEVER use any information gained by working in the community for personal presentations, case studies, research, and so on, without the expressed written consent of the community.

Communication Styles

Nonverbal Messages

- Alaskan Native people communicate a great deal through non-verbal gestures. Careful observation is necessary to avoid misinterpretation of non-verbal behavior.
- Alaskan Native people may look down to show respect or deference to elders, or ignoring an individual to show disagreement or displeasure.
- A gentle handshake is often seen as a sign of respect, not weakness.
- Avoid jargon. An AI/AN community member may nod their head politely, but not understand what you are saying.
- During formal interviews, it may be best to offer general invitations to speak, then remain quiet, sit back, and listen. Allow the person to tell their story before engaging in a specific line of questioning.

Humor

- Alaska Native people may convey truths or difficult messages through humor, and might cover great pain with smiles or jokes. It is important to listen closely to humor, as it may be seen as invasive to ask for too much direct clarification about sensitive topics.
- It is a common conception that “laughter is good medicine” and is a way to cope. The use of humor and teasing to show affection or offer corrective advice is also common.

Storytelling

- Getting messages across through telling a story (traditional teachings and personal stories) is very common and sometimes in contrast with the “get to the point” frame of mind in non-Alaskan Native society.

Self Awareness

- You are being observed at all times, so avoid making assumptions and be conscious that you are laying the groundwork for others to follow.
- Adapt your tone of voice, volume, and speed of speech patterns to that of local community members to fit their manner of communication style.
- Preferred body language, posture, and concept of personal space depend on community norms and the nature of the personal relationship. Observe others and allow them to create the space and initiate or ask for any physical contact.

- You may experience people expressing their mistrust, frustration, or disappointment from other situations that are outside of your control. Learn not to take it personally.
- Males and females typically have very distinct social rules for behavior in every day interactions. Common behaviors to be aware of as they relate to gender issues are eye contact, style of dress, physical touch, personal space, decision making, and the influence of male and/or female elders.
- Casual conversation is important to establish rapport, so be genuine and use self-disclosure (e.g., where you are from, general information about children or spouse, personal interests).

Showing appreciation

- Reciprocity: when parties involved in a transaction, each gives something and each gets something; there is an exchange.
- It is polite to offer a gift (no matter how small) to the Indigenous sea ice experts. It shows how appreciative you are that they are taking time from their daily subsistence activities to exchange valuable sea ice information. Some examples of gifts are: Celestial Seasoning Tea, Elk or Buffalo jerky or sausage (hunters enjoy tasting other types of meat they can't get in Alaska) or Native Botanicals such as sweet grass braids or sage bundles (Mark Parsons will be giving sage bundles, so that gift is taken)
- Gifts should be given at the end of any gathering or event.
- Sharing food is a way of welcoming visitors, similar to offering a handshake. Food is usually offered at community meetings and other gatherings as a way to build relationships.

Eskimo vs. Inuit

- In Alaska, Eskimo is the preferred term over Inuit
- Using the term Inuit as a blanket term for all arctic people in Alaska is offensive.
- Eskimo is commonly used as it includes both Yupik and Inupiat. The Yupik peoples are Eskimo, but not Inuit.
- If they are Yupik, call them Yupik. Inupiat if they are Inupiat. Cup'ik if they are Cup'ik and so on. Learn how the community refers to itself as a group of people (e.g. community name).
- It is important to remember that most Alaska Natives do not refer to themselves as "Indians."

Saying 'hello' and 'thank you' in Yup'ik

- to say 'hello' – Waqaa (wah ca)
- to say 'thank you' – Quayana (co yana)
- sound clips of Yup'ik words and phrases:
- <http://www.timeforkids.com/destination/alaska/native-lingo>
- http://www.nativeamericacalling.com/nac_nwotd_archives.php#yupik

Etiquette Don'ts

- Avoid intrusive questions early in conversation.
- Do not interrupt others during conversation or interject during pauses or long silences.
- Do not stand too close to others and/or talk too loud or fast.
- Be careful not to impose your personal values, morals, or beliefs.
- Be careful about telling stories of distant AI/AN relatives in your genealogy as an attempt to establish rapport unless you have maintained a connection with that AI/AN community.
- Do not take pictures without permission.