

STRIKE WITH US
APR 22-24

Earth Day Climate Strikes Indigenous Leadership Toolkit

by Samantha Arechiga & Thomas Lopez

Introduction

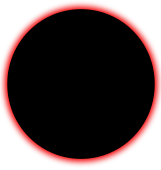
1. The Focus of This Toolkit

The Indigenous Leadership Toolkit is a resource and a guide for non-Indigenous people to use when organizing with Indigenous people and communities – it should be noted that for the purposes of this toolkit, we will be focusing on the Indigenous communities in the Western hemisphere. This toolkit is meant to educate users on language awareness and relationship building, while also highlighting the importance of moving beyond representation or acknowledgement and into offering meaningful leadership roles for Indigenous people.

Due to how this toolkit is meant to educate, it needs to also be recognized that the role of education and raising awareness should not always come from marginalized groups, but a genuine effort on your own part to reflect and unpack the ways in which you have adopted or internalized problematic ideas and habits. The society we live in is one where colonial ideas – like Indigenous erasure and white supremacy – are pervasive; no one person is absolved from internalizing and perpetrating these ideas. Despite all that, we can still all hold ourselves accountable to do better.

2. Language & Terminology

To begin, there needs to be a critical reflection of the language that often accompanies conversations about Indigenous people. When speaking about Indigenous people, you should be putting a lot of intention into the verbs and nouns that are being used to describe us. Where the intention has been missing is in the tendency to use past tense verbs when describing Indigenous people; by using past tense language, you are – whether or intentionally or not – historicizing Indigenous people. The implications of this historicization of Indigenous people looks like the erasure of Indigenous people and groups today; constantly situating us in a historic past takes away from the modernity we carry and the insight we can offer for the future. Examples of this happening are often seen in land acknowledgements that use phrases like “*This land **belonged to**” or “**was the traditional homeland of x, y, z people...** “. An intentional and conscious approach would be “*This land **is the traditional homeland of the x, y,****



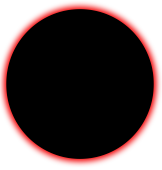
z people”. By using intentional language, we can all better understand our relationship to the land and the relationship between Indigenous people and settlers while also acknowledging the presence of Indigenous people today and our right to territory.

Furthermore, you must also recognize that often times, the words used to describe Indigenous people, groups, or tribes are not names we have given ourselves but rather, names that have placed upon us by colonizers. The power in referring to us by the names we choose to identify with is one that restores autonomy to us by no longer being called culturally inappropriate names. The section after this titled, “Know Your History” will cover different ways to be culturally aware and through this, better able to use the names Indigenous groups have given themselves. Naming goes beyond individual groups and can extend to us as a whole. Always be aware of terms that have had a problematic past; for example, terms like “Indian(s)” should be avoided, as this has a derogatory history and is an example of a term enforced upon us by colonizers.

Lastly, we would like to state the language that is tied to Indigenous people that can mysticize or romanticize us and our practices. The words that often accompany dialogue about Indigenous peoples, our ceremonies, and our worldview are ones that only superficially articulate the beauty in Indigenous practices. After speaking about our realities, we hear a lot of simple understandings like “Wow, that was beautiful,” or other phrases that imply assumptions are made by non-Indigenous people about how we “live in perfect harmony” with nature and/or each other.

These assumptions and romantic phrases are problematic for a number of reasons:

1. Our knowledge is belittled or patronized by not being taken seriously through romanticization and simple responses to the thoughtful things we say.
2. By creating Indigeneity to be something that is just simply romantic and therefore desirable, many non-Indigenous people can see Indigeneity as a mystique that can be claimed. This leads to our erasure.
3. It makes our ceremonies/religious practices/culture/etc. a mystical spectacle for consumption – we will cover this in a later section. This leads to the commodification of Indigenous cultures.
4. It ignores the very real issues and violence Indigenous people have faced, and still do face, for the reality and ideas we carry. Our worldview is not romantic, it carries a lot of trauma that has been dealt in order for us to carry this wisdom.
5. Romantic language can be quick to imply that all Indigenous people are the same; we are very diverse and carry different cultures and languages. There are thousands of different tribes and languages spoken.
6. Indigenous people are not perfect or other-worldly, we are humans who have conflict with ourselves, each other, and the world around us.



STRIKE WITH US
APR 22-24

Ways to avoid this is to engage in meaningful dialogue with us – actually seek to understand the knowledge we have; take our wisdom as seriously and as factual as Western science – you would not respond to a scientific analysis in the same romantic ways Indigenous people are responded to; understand the historic depth of Indigenous people and acknowledge the ways we have been criminalized for our practices; respect Indigenous people by not appropriating our cultures or making claims to Indigeneity. By having awareness of problematic language, you can be more intentional when reaching out to Indigenous people. This helps to create stronger relationships that come from a place of authenticity and effort rather than a place of not knowing better and a lack of effort to use resources like these along with your own reflections to educate yourself and grow.

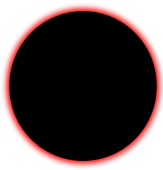


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Know Your History 5

Online Resources 5

Land Acknowledgement 6

Identifying In-Person Community Resources & Local Organizations 7

Outreach & Relationship Building 7

Identifying Leadership 7

Creating & Maintaining the Relationship 8

Leadership vs. Representation 8

Definitions of Leadership & Representation 8

What’s the Difference? 9

Why is it Important to Have Both? 9

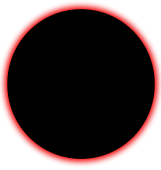
Moving Beyond Prayer 10

Rural & Urban Communities 11

History of Dislocation & Relocation 11

Importance of Involving Both Rural & Urban Communities 12

Conclusion 12



Knowing Your History

1. Online Resources & Books

To remain inclusive, empathetic and understanding toward other people's lived experiences, it's important to make a conscious effort to go out of your way to learn about cultures beyond your own. Oftentimes, the responsibility of educating those who seek this truth, is put on the onwness of Indigenous people and People of Color (POC). While it's helpful to seek out people, whether friends, family or professionals, to help you learn about other people's cultures and customs, it's important to understand that much of this work can be done by you personally.. It is each of our responsibilities to take ownership in actively seeking education, conversations and other resources to help us gain a deep understanding of culture, and culture beyond whiteness.

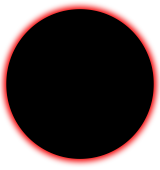
Seek out online resources and dive deep within these materials to learn about Indigenous ways of being and how our communities prior to colonization and in modern-day times. Learn about the ways in which colonization has directly impacted our ways of being and how the implications of colonization and capitalism still impact Indigenous communities today.

As you learn, it is crucial that you remain conscious of the understanding that Indigenous people still exist and that many of our cultures and traditions passed down through generations are actively practiced and celebrated today. Present day communities, tribes, and Indigenous people living both in rural and urban areas are alive and well and our cultures are not "things of the past."

Consider the following book recommendations, books written by Indigenous people, to aid in your understanding and growth.

Book recommendations:

1. ["All the Real Indians Died Off"](#) by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
2. [An African American and Latinx History of the United States](#) by Paul Ortiz
3. [An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States](#) by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
4. [Braiding Sweetgrass](#) by Robin Wall
5. [Ceremony](#) by Leslie Marmon Silko
6. [Colonial Entanglement](#) by Jean Dennison
7. [God is Red: A Native View of Religion, 30th Anniversary Edition](#) by Vine Deloria Jr
8. [I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism](#) by Lee Maracle
9. [Lakota Woman](#) by Mary Crow Dog
10. [Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science](#) by Kim TallBear
11. [Onigamiising](#) by Linda LeGarde Grover



STRIKE WITH US
APR 22-24

12. [Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance](#) by Nick Estes
13. [Why Indigenous Literatures Matters](#) by Daniel Heath Justice
14. [Whereas: Poems](#) by Layli Long Soldier
15. [The Round House](#) by Louise Erdrich
16. [There, There](#) by Tommy Orange

It is important to remain aware of the fact that much of the literature accessible to the masses and mainstream media about Indigenous communities has not always been written by us, which is why it's also especially important to seek out literature written by Indigenous people. Information about Indigenous people that has not been written by us must be taken with a grain of salt, and the content you read should be fact checked by people with a direct lineage to and historical knowledge of the culture, traditions, customs, tribe, and communities discussed.

2. Land Acknowledgment

While land acknowledgment should not be the only way to involve Indigenous communities in land protection, actions, events and protesting, it's a crucial element for repairing the harmful effects of colonization that have led to the erasure of Indigenous people and it is important in recognizing our relationship to the land. Land acknowledgement is, "a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories." [Northwestern](#)

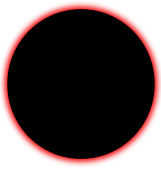
In many Indigenous cultures, land acknowledgements take place far beyond events and actions. It's simply a way of life, something that is stated regularly in many social settings, before ceremony/prayer and at community gatherings. Consider making land acknowledgments a regular part of your work as a climate activist.

In order to voice the appropriate land acknowledgement or to invite someone to provide one, it's crucial to know the name, history and modern-day existence of the territory and people whose land you're occupying, and what tribal communities are responsible for stewarding the land. Resources such as the [Native Land Map](#) can help you identify the land that you occupy.

Consider the following statements when giving land acknowledgements.

Land acknowledgement examples:

- "I live in Denver, Colorado on occupied Ute, Arapahoe, and Cheyenne land."



STRIKE WITH US
APR 22-24

- “This land we call Chicago is the traditional homeland of the Three Fires Confederacy: the Anishinaabe, the Ojibwa, and the Potawatomi, it is also the home of the Sac, Fox, Miami, and Peoria.”
- “I would like us to recognize that the city of Los Angeles which we find ourselves in is a result of the colonization of Tongva territory. They are the traditional stewards of this land.”

3. Identify In-Person Community Resources & Local Organizations

In addition to online resources and books, reach out to your local community organizations and people beyond your social circles who can help provide context and perspective for your education. A simple Google search can help you understand what local Indigenous organizations exist in your area and how you can involve yourself in those communities. These organizations can also help direct you to people and communities that may not have an online presence and who can help provide Indigenous leadership in your efforts.

It is helpful to seek out wisdom from elders and youth leadership within Indigenous communities when you have questions or want deeper understanding about any culture. Please consider prefacing this outreach with the following questions and statements to ensure the person you're seeking insight from has the capacity to educate you within this space.

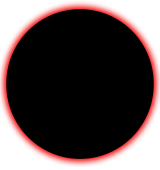
1. “I’m seeking to gain a deeper understanding of Lakota traditions and ceremony, do you have the capacity to sit with me to help me understand more about the Lakota people?”
2. I want to acknowledge the work you are doing, I’m really interested in learning more about your ideas in relation to environmental justice, would you be able to tell me more about how you *see/relate* to [topic]?

When seeking out input from others, please consider compensating these individuals for their time and skills. Oftentimes, people are willing to do this work for free, however, like any consultative service, the organizers, activists and educators in these spaces have dedicated their time, energy and resources to learn this knowledge and will be taking time away from other means of earning income to help educate you.

Outreach & Relationship Building

1. Identify Leadership

It's important that you identify the leadership structure for the respective Indigenous group you plan to work with. Depending on the tribe(s) near you, there may be specific protocols you must submit to. Here are some questions you'll need to get answered.



STRIKE WITH US
APR 22-24

1. Does the tribe follow hereditary or tribal government leadership?
2. Does the tribe have a history of social or climate resistance?
3. Are they matrilineal or patrilineal?
4. Is there a youth group leading actions or community events?

2. Creating & Maintaining the Relationship

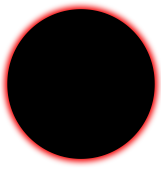
You must approach Indigenous communities prior to the planning process. Asking us to show up two weeks before an action or event to acknowledge land and pray is not appropriate. We should be able to show up in whatever way we deem acceptable. For centuries white culture has told us how we should be represented, but we have far evolved beyond that. Remember, Indigenous leadership and Indigenous representation are two different things. We want Indigenous leadership, which means giving us the space needed at the planning tables to decide how we will be represented.

Different tribes have different ways to respectfully ask for help. Often times you must take some sort of offering to the head of the tribe or village. Offerings come in many different forms; money, tobacco, water, corn, fruit, meat etc. It is important you find out what traditional medicines are offered for the specific peoples you are requesting from. Emails and text messages are effective, but not traditional. You want to earn the respect from Indigenous tribes to begin creating authentic bridges of solidarity. Go to them in person and give them these offerings and make your request. This is the best way to ensure a respectful and authentic relationship. This process may be timely, but time is a colonial construct that wasn't created with Indigenous way of life in mind. Go in with an open mind, and an open heart and be ready for Indigenous people to agree or disagree.

Leadership vs. Representation

1. Definitions of Leadership & Representation

Leadership and representation are both important and necessary in their own ways. Representation has been used and is still needed for the power it has in its ability to give audiences a multitude of identities and experiences to relate to. It is a stepping stone for opportunities because of how we see representations as possibilities for ourselves; representation is the potential to feel empowered- for example, children of color seeing themselves in portrayals of superheroes. Representation in movement spaces plays a part in strengthening the ability to mobilize for the way it shows that there are people from all backgrounds present and that this fight is one for them- rather than strictly for the hegemony. This is precisely why intersectional and marginalized representations are valuable- it sends a



message that there is space where we matter. The intention behind representation should not be to market a cause to a more “diverse” audience, but instead to show that everyone (especially marginalized groups) has a place in organizing and in movement spaces.

Leadership is the act of empowerment that representations hold the potential for, this is why leadership roles are also very important. Leadership puts trust into the knowledge we carry by giving us room to shape the meaning of the movement. It is important in this context because the systems that are in place now have enforced the narrative that marginalized groups should not lead, but instead be led. Similar to representation, it gives us the ability to be the change, and inspire other people like us. Lastly, it is important to note that leadership comes along with powerful decision-making positions. Both representation and leadership are ways for movement spaces, organizations, etc., to be accountable to giving platforms to those who are also deserving of being seen *and* heard.

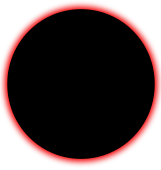
2. What’s the Difference?

While both leadership and representation are important, we must examine their differences and understand the ways it can be problematic to only have representation of marginalized groups without actually offering them the opportunity to hold decision making positions or positions where they have the space to be not only heard, but listened to. If you want to practice the values of representations, then representations need to be accompanied by leadership that is offered to the groups you say you want to uplift.

What does this difference look like in practice? It looks like reaching out in an authentic manner to say, “I see the work you are doing, and you have valuable contributions to make that we would like to honor.” The difference in leadership and representation makes the difference in whether or not organizations/companies/etc. are being genuine in their efforts to include us. It does not feel good for marginalized people to realize that we are only being included or merely represented to hit a “diversity quota” and be left to feel as though our voices and ideas do not matter as much as our looks do.

3. Why is it Important to Have Both?

Like other marginalized groups, Indigenous people have unique, intersectional, and powerful perspectives that have not had a place within the hegemony and its structures. The experiences we bring into a space widens the range of understanding of both people and ideas, which then leads to a larger amount of possibilities for creativity and problem solving. It is also important because you are giving us the room to say what solutions are needed instead of an outside group imposing “solutions” on us. Not to mention, Indigenous people have



historically had the autonomy to tell our own narrative taken away from us. With that being said, leadership extended to Indigenous people is restorative.

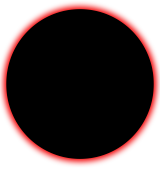
Our ways of knowing are valuable, and should be treated as so by giving us leadership opportunities to implement them and understand the solutions we have to offer. Climate change directly and disproportionately impacts Indigenous communities. It is necessary we become leaders in reversing or confronting the damage done to us. Indigenous leadership also allows us to connect with Indigenous people who are in the organizing space and even those who could potentially join the space, and not only this, but it adds to the many different realities that exist in the movement. When we have many different leaders, we also have many different perspectives to learn from.

4. Moving Beyond Prayer

After understanding the differences between leadership and representation, we can reflect on how Indigenous leadership and autonomy has been used as a token. When you do this, you can move past two dimensional “leadership” that tokenizes us towards leadership with substance and influence. In past actions Indigenous people’s leadership has been restricted to solely leading prayer, ceremony, land acknowledgements, and other processes of the like. Although this leadership may attempt to give us autonomy, it is restricting us to be the “Indigenous people only being allowed to lead ‘Indigenous-people-things’ ”. Instances like these send the wrong message and can be problematized for being “empty” or symbolic means of assigning us leadership positions. You should seek to go beyond only offering us to lead the prayer and then pushing us to the side to instead keeping Indigenous voices as part of the center, or heart, of the leadership team.

The following are ways to move beyond prayer and are things to keep in mind or questions to ask yourself when involving Indigenous people:

1. When asking Indigenous people to lead a ceremony, land acknowledgment, etc., are you hoping that we bring with us are feathers or other items that indicate our Indigeneity?
2. ‘What ideas and opinions does this person have that I really appreciate and want to make room for?’
3. Do not assign us a role completely, ask if we are comfortable filling whatever role you may suggest, or ask us what we would like to do/where we can step in.
4. Are you only interested in Indigenous people leading things that are specific to us, or are you giving us positions where we can lead on more broad parts? (For example, messaging or demands).



STRIKE WITH US
APR 22-24

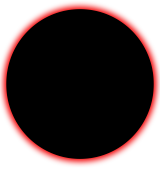
Practicing mindfulness like this helps to create relationships and extend opportunities in ways that hold not only our Indigeneity, but also our whole selves as valuable. Part of moving beyond prayer is that you also realize that prayer, for many of us, is more than just a symbolic practice that can be thrown in before an action. Our prayer is honoring all our relations- to the land, our human relatives, and our animal and plant relatives. It is part of many of our worldviews to have the land be intertwined with spirituality. We need to acknowledge this and respect prayer for what it means rather than for what it looks like, as many of our medicines become commodified from tokenizing our prayer.

Rural & Urban Communities

1. History of Dislocation & Relocation

Coming full circle, before you can truly understand us, you have to know our history. We're often asked if all Indigenous people live on reservations. The answer is no. Many natives have been living off reservations for generations. But, why? The answers lie in this country's deep roots in the dislocation and relation of Indigenous peoples. In order to understand that we have to start at the beginning...

- A. **The Doctrine of Discovery (Manifest Destiny):** The Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny were key tools used during the 1800's by European colonizers to obtain and maintain stolen Indigenous lands. Through "God's instructions" religious followers had a moral and religious obligation to take land and resources from the Indigenous peoples who (in the eyes of the church and colonizers) were unfit caretakers. By any and all means necessary, these people were to be removed allowing european settlers to move in. Several tribes were murdered through severe acts of genocide however, many fought and survived. Once white settlers knew killing these people was not an option, they looked into signing treaties to "peacefully" relocate the people to plots of land decided by the church or governing bodies. This is where you see historically traumatic events such as [The Trail of Tears](#). **Did you know Indigenous people are the only group of people in America that are forced to prove who they are in order to be acknowledged? This is a process known as [Blood Quantum](#). This process is also used when purifying dog and horse breeds to "perfection." This came from the ideology to [Kill the Indian and Save the Man](#).
- B. **The Indian Relocation Act:** The ideology behind Manifest Destiny continued for a century; and let's be honest continues today, as seen in the Global South. Most major cities in the US were founded on the principles of forcing Indigenous people out so white settlers could move in. This led to the [Indian Relocation Act](#) of 1956. The Indian Relocation Act (aka Public Law 959) was US legislation which encouraged Indigenous people in America to leave their reservations and traditional lands to assimilate into



STRIKE WITH US
APR 22-24

western society. Part of this policy terminated the tribal status of numerous Indigenous groups and played a significant role in increasing the population of urban Indigenous people. We live in both rural and urban settings, neither is superior to the other and both carry strong viewpoints that can help and uplift our movement.

2. Importance of Involving Both Urban and Rural Communities

It's important that you are reaching out to both urban and rural Indigenous people. Living in the city as an Indigenous person is a struggle that is relatable to non-Indigenous people, especially our siblings in the POC communities. Having this voice present will allow other marginalized people to connect with us on a deeper level.

It's equally as important to include our siblings living on reservations and in rural communities. Most people don't understand the struggles that come with living on reservations. These voices are often overlooked and ignored by people living in urban settings and seen as someone else's problem. This goes back to knowing the history between local government and tribes. Acknowledging our painful past is the start of healing and moving forward.

Conclusion

Indigenous communities look different across the world. No group does things exactly the same. Knowing these differences is key to understanding and working authentically with Indigenous communities. Each tribe has their own language, dialect, spiritual beliefs, commerce, gaming, clothing, styles and overall society norms. We exist independently in this modern world. We are not relics of the past or historical implications. We are living, integral parts of this place many of you now call home. A new century is here and with it a new way of thinking about and seeing each other. Indigenous people are here to stay; if you can't respect our existence you can expect our resistance.