

Achieving Equity and Representation for Indigenous Peoples in Arctic Research

Key Messages

- Indigenous Peoples across the Arctic share the challenges of inequity and lack of representation in research.
- These disproportionate burdens come from a history of colonization and continued systemic pressures present in institutions and countries.
- Researchers can advance Arctic research and policy aims by showing respect, listening, using Indigenous protocol, financially supporting Indigenous research and leadership, and sharing decision-making.

“We must all work together, for the next generations.”

*Trimble Gilbert (Gwich'in), Arctic Village, AK
Traditional Chief, Reverend and Honorary Doctorate,
June 2014 ReAC¹ Camp*

Call to Action

This is an invitation to Arctic Indigenous communities to add your own stories - narratives of history, research, culture and leadership - to the volumes of academic literature on observations and studies in the Arctic region. This is also a call to non-Indigenous researchers and others working in the Arctic to make space for other voices to be heard. I hope this call is a catalyst for a broader discussion on the critical importance of equity, food security, and Indigenous ways of living and knowing in Arctic research and policy.²

Arctic Indigenous Peoples

Some four million people live in the circumpolar Arctic, a region that spans eight countries - Canada, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and the United States. Temperatures across this region are rising at twice the global rate. Approximately 10 percent of the Arctic population are the Indigenous Peoples who have been the caretakers, observers, researchers, and an integral part of this important social-environmental system for thousands of years. On the front lines of climate change, Arctic Indigenous Peoples are living now with wide-

reaching and drastic environmental, economic, and social change; the bulk of these changes are not of our own making.

Our Contributions

Climate solutions require contributions from both people and institutions: Arctic researchers and policies, governments, communities and organizations, the University, the public and private sector, and individuals and leadership at all levels. Indigenous Peoples leading these efforts, grounded in our cultural values and understanding of the Arctic environment, will lead to a broader, deeper and stronger Arctic observation system. Indigenous Peoples are critical to providing a deeper understanding through local observations, while we also have the need and expectation to use and gather data. We are not solely working on gathering data/observations for research, but also to use for critical decision making, including policy and management decisions, which determine our community safety, food security, and livelihoods.

Ongoing Challenges

We also face barriers related to inequity, lack of representation, and limited resources. These are exacerbated by remote geography, extreme weather, a lack of connectivity, and now an environment in flux. Researchers and others working in the Arctic must recognize that the ongoing influence of colonization and other systemic factors limit equity. Unjust legislation, assimilation policies, and lack of resources have

¹ *Reaching Arctic Communities Facing Climate Change*

² *The work presented here is from my own point of view and is not meant to be comprehensive. The use of the word “we”*

generally references the shared history of Alaska Native people with whom I identify and is not intended to represent all Alaska Native peoples.

worked to break the close bond that Indigenous Peoples have with the lands, waters, and animals, and hinder our ability to continue to observe and interact with our local ecosystems.

A Path Toward Balance and Increased Equity

Meaningful collaboration requires an ongoing commitment by everyone to build and maintain relationships and to work to achieve the following.

Correct the imbalance - Help address the power imbalance felt by Indigenous Peoples in academic spaces and policy discussions, by recognizing and using Indigenous protocol. Look for ways to have smaller group discussions with multi-step processes. Hold meetings that are led and convened by Indigenous Peoples in a place where we have a connection to the land.

Provide resources - Provide abundant resources in an equitable way that uplifts Indigenous Peoples and knowledge holders to participate in research and policy. Create new and different funding structures that build capacity in Indigenous communities.

Evolve institutions - Ensuring that underserved voices are heard from Indigenous Peoples and other people of color requires disruption of existing institutions and coordinating bodies. Working together with diverse perspectives and leadership across all levels of an organization can change the power balance and support resourcing. Listening to these voices can help set priorities within those structures so that they reflect the reality of the Arctic.

Actions Toward Partnership

Start from a place of personal reflection. Acknowledge the lack of understanding around equity and the systemic issues that need to be addressed in order for different knowledge systems to be valued equally. Further understand or explore your historical or current privilege and take action to extend or create a balanced space. Take personal responsibility to learn, read, research, and gain a better understanding of the Indigenous Peoples and cultures you engage with, and challenge your apparent or subtle assumptions about us.

Follow personal reflection with tangible action. Use this greater understanding to enhance engagement, partnerships, and co-production of knowledge with Indigenous Peoples. We, all people, must work to achieve these key steps:

- Commit to meaningful exchanges in different types of engagement. Shift modes of thinking with new approaches - listen more, honor time for reflection and balanced dialogue.
- Provide extra information, support, and resources in your relationships and activities with Indigenous Peoples.
- Create space for Indigenous Peoples to gather, lead, and be part of the decision-making process. This should happen at all stages of any research project.
- Recognize that Indigenous Peoples work across different management and policy making processes, in addition to internal governance structures, and intentionally collaborate.
- Inform developing research by seeking existing knowledge from Indigenous communities that has been documented, synthesized, and is held by Indigenous sources and organizations.
- Promote understanding of the tremendous value that different types of knowledge bring to a problem and the role these perspectives have in creating solutions.

Arctic residents and especially Indigenous Peoples have intimate knowledge of and are directly affected by climate change impacts. We must build trust and relationships based on respect and understanding of different worldviews and systems of knowledge. Working together, we can make real progress.

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The Center for Arctic Policy Studies (CAPS) at the University of Alaska makes knowledge concerning rapid environmental and social changes in the Arctic accessible to decision-makers, the public, and scholars.

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