

New online database showcases tribal governance resources

October 15 2012, by Alexis Blue



Powwow, Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, 2008. Credit: John Rae, Honoring Nations/HPAIED

A new database developed at the University of Arizona is serving as an online resource center for Indigenous people across the nation – and beyond – who are in search of information on Native Nation governance and leadership.

The Indigenous Governance Database, recently launched by the UA's Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management and Policy, pulls together in one central location articles, case studies, videos and other resources focused on governance, sovereignty, leadership, and sustainable economic and community development.

The idea was to create a simple and centralized point of access for Native Nation leaders, key decision-makers, employees, citizens and others in search of information, tools and strategies on how to rebuild their nations and communities.

"The Indigenous Governance Database serves as a 'one-stop shop' for learning about Native Nation building," said Joan Timeche, executive director of the Native Nations Institute, housed in the UA's Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy. "NNI's mission is to help Native Nations shorten their learning curve about what they need to do in order to create or strengthen governance systems capable of building healthy societies that work, and this site represent a major advancement of that mission."

For example, a number of Native Nations across the country are engaged in constitutional and government reform, seeking to replace the basic governance systems imposed on them by the U.S. government with governance systems of their own design, said Ian Record, manager of educational resources for the Native Nations Institute.



Visitors to the Indigenous Governance Database can search a variety of topics related to Native nation governance.

The Native Nations Institute has developed a robust curriculum designed to assist tribes as they work to revise or strengthen these systems, which it regularly teaches live to Native audiences. Record hopes the Indigenous Governance Database will enable the institute to share components of this curriculum with a far greater audience.

"We do executive education with tribal leaders and others on what works and what doesn't work to reclaim control over their affairs," he said.
 "But the thirst for knowledge about building effective governments and

sustainable economies exceeded our abilities to teach live. We needed to find a new way to return the research to them in ways they find useful."

Record said the use of multimedia was one of the major goals for the database, which includes nearly 200 videotaped presentations and interviews featuring tribal leaders, along with full transcriptions and research citations that allow the material to be easily cited by visitors to the site.

Those video resources feature testimony from individuals who have helped to develop innovative solutions to their nations' governance challenges, giving site visitors valuable ideas and guidance they can rely on as they tackle their own nation-building challenges, Record said.

Roy Sampsel, director of Institute for Tribal Government at Portland State University and one of the content contributors to the database, called it the best resource of its kind he's seen.

"I think it will have wide use and will serve as important storage place for this type of information," he said. "It makes everything accessible in one place, and when people realize it's there, the value of the tool will increase in time."

Developed with support from the Bush Foundation and the Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation, the Indigenous Governance Database will be updated regularly with new research and special video features.

Said Record: "This database paints a more balanced picture of what's happening in Indian country today."

Provided by University of Arizona

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