



## Procedure for Documenting Indigenous Community Approval to Carry Out NSF CBIKS Research

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**CBIKS** | Center for Braiding Indigenous  
Knowledges and Science

# PROCEDURE FOR DOCUMENTING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY APPROVAL Processes, Procedures, and Templates

Marek-Martinez, O., Atalay, S., NSF CBIKS. (2025). *Procedure for Documenting Indigenous Community Approval to Carry Out NSF CBIKS Research* [Procedure]. National Science Foundation Center for Braiding Indigenous Knowledges and Science, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. <https://doi.org/10.7275/dxma-1667>

This procedure was created for the U.S. National Science Foundation Center for Braiding Indigenous Knowledges and Science (NSF CBIKS), and provides a suggested framework for documenting Indigenous community approval for NSF CBIKS-funded research, including templates for use in documenting approval practices. This procedure is written in accordance with NSF Requirements (NSF PAPPG 24-1, Chapter II.E.10), and expands upon the requirements to include Indigenous communities globally with whom CBIKS partners, providing useful templates that other scholars and communities can use and modify for appropriate use in their community setting. Approvals are documented through a variety of means, including MOUs, Tribal Council Resolutions, financial agreements, approved meeting minutes, or email correspondence with designated Tribal Nation officials. This procedure was adapted from Northern Arizona University's Tribal Consultation Policy and CBIKS has supported development of similar requirements and guidance for research carried out across the entire campus at UMass Amherst.

# PROCEDURE FOR DOCUMENTING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY APPROVAL TO CARRY OUT NSF CBIKS RESEARCH

## PURPOSE

This procedure provides a suggested **framework** for documenting Indigenous community approval for NSF CBIKS-funded research. CBIKS is committed to centering Indigenous self-determination and Indigenous sovereignty in research that is conducted with, by, or for communities and/or governments, which includes CBIKS project leads submitting appropriate documentation and applications for review and decision by those bodies indicated by the Indigenous community/government. This process may or may not include actions by the Indigenous community/government to review and make decisions about permitting research on lands under Indigenous management, stewardship, control, ownership, or as indicated by the Indigenous group.

## SCOPE

This Procedure applies to all CBIKS administration, faculty, staff, and students when working with Indigenous communities via CBIKS-funded research, including Indigenous Research Foundations Projects and Place-Based Studies, or under certain criteria as laid out by Indigenous Communities/governments. This Procedure ensures that project leads have received appropriate approval to carry out proposed research prior to funding being released.

In supporting Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, CBIKS has determined that the following kinds of research activities and/or initiatives will initiate the need for securing approval from Indigenous Community leadership or governments, including department officials:

- » Research and related broader impacts activities that have direct implications to Indigenous Nations, communities, and/or members/citizens.
- » Research and related broader impacts activities that are on Indigenous managed (or as indicated) lands, or that are taking collections or samples from said lands.
- » Research involving Ancestors or their funerary belongings, 'sacred items or items of cultural patrimony' as defined under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act,
- » Any research and related broader impacts activities that involve Five-Finger Earth Surface People or humans that are members/citizens of and living on sovereign Indigenous Nations, communities, organizations' lands.

Please note this list may not be exhaustive, and we recommend that project leads reach out immediately to Indigenous communities/governments to identify the appropriate process for obtaining approval for research/activities on, with, by, for Indigenous communities/governments.

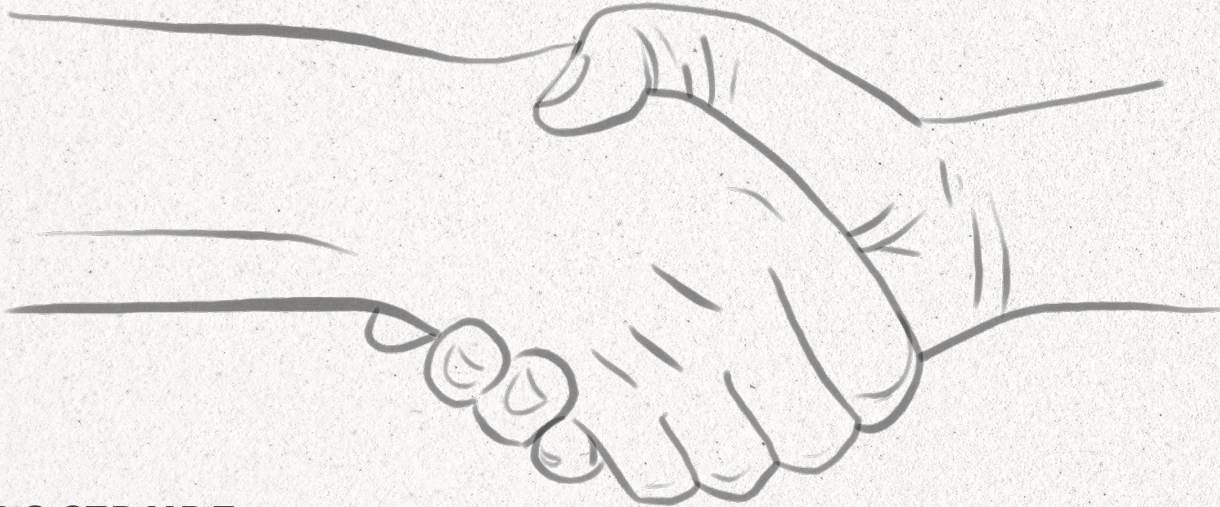
The project lead should ensure compliance with all institutional and Indigenous Community consent and research review policies and procedures outside of this Policy:

- » The Federal Government's Tribal consultation mandates and government-to-government relationship that Native American/Alaska Native/Hawaiian Nations have with U.S. Federal entities for federal "undertakings" on Tribal Lands;
- » Tribal consultation requirements under NSF PAPPG (NSF 24-1) Chapter II.E.10;
- » Other applicable state, federal, and Tribal laws and regulations; and
- » The project lead's university or institutional policies.

# DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

All defined terms are capitalized throughout the document.

**Indigenous Community:** For NSF CBIKS community-based research, an “Indigenous Community” is considered to be a group of Indigenous Peoples who share common heritage and traditions, with ancestral ties to the lands and natural resources where they live, occupy, or from which they have been displaced. This includes a Tribe, a Nation, a First Nation, an Alaskan Native Village, a Native Hawaiian Organization, a Maori Iwi, an Aboriginal Tribe, or other similar collective groups.



## PROCEDURE

To standardize a written process of approval across NSF CBIKS, we provide this outlined procedure and ‘Letter of Approval’ template (see Appendix) as a suggested **framework** for documenting Indigenous community approval for NSF CBIKS-funded projects.

See “Scope” section above for the types of research and activities that require approval and documentation.

## Expectations for Engagement During Project Development

All CBIKS-funded Place-Based Studies should emerge directly from Indigenous Community-communicated priorities and needs. All CBIKS-funded IRF projects should be completed in direct collaboration and partnership with Indigenous Nations and/or communities to ascertain priorities and needs. In these and other projects involving collaboration with Indigenous Communities, CBIKS members shall communicate early, regularly, and in good faith with the Indigenous community partners to develop research designs and proposals. The Project Lead(s) are responsible for ensuring that such collaboration is conducted throughout the project lifecycle. CBIKS encourages Project Lead(s) to maintain partnerships beyond the project lifecycle to maintain collaborative relationships.

We honor each Indigenous community’s right to identify their own processes for interacting with research and researchers. It is the responsibility of the Project Lead(s) to follow community process/protocols and build it into their research proposal process to ensure that Indigenous self-determination is upheld as a central guiding principle.

# REQUIRED WRITTEN APPROVAL FOR CBIKS-SUPPORTED RESEARCH

The Project Lead(s) are responsible for requesting written approval from relevant Indigenous community partners.



**INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY/NATION APPROVAL** may emerge from engagement on individual or community levels, but it must involve Indigenous Community leadership or appointees with authority over relevant departments, programs, or committees, or Tribal Institutional Review Boards (IRB) as applicable. These processes and the resulting 'documentation' will vary and may include Tribal/Indigenous Institutional Research Board permits or approval letters, letters from local governance boards, elected officials, and/or emails from specific Indigenous Community-appointed leadership or representatives.

CBIKS requires that documentation of approval be provided **in written form, either** issued by the governing body or designated department of the Indigenous community partner(s). If the Indigenous community partner has a formal review process, such as a Tribal IRB or research review committee, any CBIKS-funded research must be approved through the formal process.

**INSTITUTIONAL APPROVAL** from the project lead's academic institution may be additionally required for the kinds of research activities or community initiatives planned with a partnered Indigenous Community/Nation. The project lead is responsible for compliance with their institution/organization's policies for required Tribal/Indigenous consultation. This includes compliance with any university policies regarding research with Indigenous Communities, community-based research, or human subjects research. If conducting interviews or any type of qualitative or quantitative research involving human subjects, it is required to reach out to the Institutional Review Board.

# APPROVAL PROCESS

The approval process includes the two steps below. Prior to these steps (as explained above in Expectations for Engagement), the Project Leads should engage in robust relationship building and co-development of project design and should proceed according to the processes/protocols laid out by their Indigenous Community Partners.

## STEP ONE

Before any research begins or funds can be released, share the outlined CBIKS Hub Informational Letter (revise as appropriate for each project) to introduce CBIKS to appropriate leadership within the Indigenous Community, government, and/or leadership. Conversations with department directors or other public representatives should also be followed up with a copy of the CBIKS Hub Informational Handout- Public document.

## STEP TWO

After conversations and agreements about the project, request a signed letter or email of approval from appropriate leadership of the Indigenous community partner(s) government or Research Review board. Leadership in the Indigenous community may use the provided Letter for Approval from Indigenous Community/Nation (or use the email version) template, another culturally appropriate format, or the format required by the Indigenous Community/Nation to document their knowledge and approval of the proposed CBIKS project.

*Please note that qualitative research reviews (such as an IRB review) by the Indigenous community/Nation may take a different process and may require a more formal submission of documentation of the project and partners from the community/Nation.*



A student offers tobacco to an elder to ask permission to collaborate on a project.



# APPENDIX

## CBIKS Templates for Documenting Approval

CBIKS has created templates to document approval of research/activities on, with, by, for Indigenous lands and members/citizens as part of NSF CBIKS supported research. Each community/Nation may have their own process and terminology for approval. The following templates are suggested starting points for conversations about research with a community/Nation.

# CBIKS HUB INFORMATIONAL LETTER

[DATE]

To: Indigenous Community Leader or designated representative

[ADDRESS]

[EMAIL]

Dear Honorable [LEADERSHIP/DESIGNATED INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE],

The NSF Center for Braiding Indigenous Knowledges and Science (NSF CBIKS) is a National Science Foundation (NSF) Science and Technology Center established in 2023 with the mission of providing a foundational scientific understanding of how to effectively and ethically braid Indigenous Knowledge with Western science to address climate change, protection and care of cultural places, and food security challenges at local, regional, and global levels. Our eight Regional Research Hubs carry out place-specific research developed with, by, and for partnered Indigenous communities.

NSF CBIKS is one of the sponsors of our proposed collaborative research. I am writing to request written confirmation of your approval for our project titled “[PROJECT/STUDY TITLE]” through the CBIKS [HUB LOCATION] Regional Research Hub.

Please find the following information for your consideration:

- » CBIKS Project Lead(s): [PROJECT LEAD(S)]
- » Indigenous Community point of contact: [COMMUNITY CONTACT]
- » Project Summary or Scope of Work: [SOW]
- » Description of impact to Indigenous Community resources or interests: [IMPACT]
- » Timeline: [TIMELINE]

NSF CBIKS values each community’s right to identify their own processes for interacting with research and researchers and wishes to ensure that self-determination remains a central guiding principle of our relationships with communities. To abide by the NSF requirements for Tribal Nation approval, Indigenous Community Leadership or an authorized designee must provide written approval for this work. If Leadership wishes to appoint an alternate liaison to act on behalf of the community, NSF CBIKS requests that this designation is documented in writing.

Please find attached to this letter information about NSF CBIKS and our partnership through NSF CBIKS for your review. Also included is a suggested template letter of approval that can be modified and placed on community letterhead (if applicable) and dated, signed, and returned to me so that we may move forward with our research activities.

Thank you for your consideration of this request for documented approval. Please contact me with any questions or additional information you require.

Sincerely,

[PROJECT LEAD & CONTACT INFORMATION]

# CBIKS HUB INFORMATIONAL HANDOUT - PUBLIC

## [HUB LOCATION] REGIONAL RESEARCH HUB

Co-leads: [NAME 1] & [NAME 2]

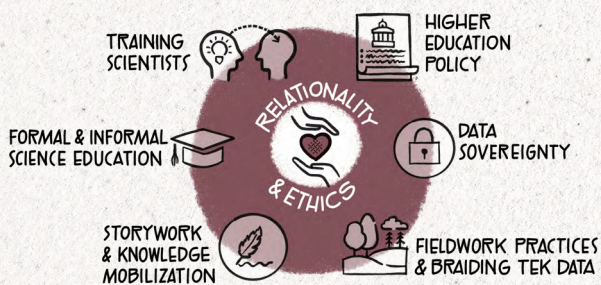
### OVERVIEW

The NSF Center for Braiding Indigenous Knowledges and Science (NSF CBIKS) is a National Science Foundation (NSF) Science and Technology Center established in 2023, with a central office at UMass Amherst. CBIKS aims to provide a foundational scientific understanding of how to effectively and ethically braid Indigenous Knowledge with Western science to address climate change, protection and care of cultural places, and food security challenges at local, regional, and global levels. The CBIKS team is made up of nearly one hundred scholars from around the globe, the majority of whom are Indigenous scientists.

CBIKS is co-led by five Co-Principal investigators: Dr. Sonya Atalay (Anishinaabe-Ojibwe, UMass Amherst/MIT); Dr. Bonnie Newsom (Penobscot, University of Maine); Dr. Ora Marek-Martinez (Diné/Nimiipuu, Northern Arizona University); Dr. Anna Antoniou (UMass Amherst); and Dr. Jonathan Woodruff (UMass Amherst). CBIKS research centers the needs and priorities of Indigenous communities. We carry out community-based research with, by, and for our community partners. Our team members have long-standing partnerships with numerous Indigenous communities, and we hope to be able to establish further relationships – we know such relationships take time and must grow at the pace of trust.

CBIKS has eight Regional Research Hubs that focus on place-specific research with local Indigenous community partners. Hubs conduct Indigenous Research Foundations Projects and Place-Based Studies.

- » Indigenous Research Foundations Projects (IRFs) lay the groundwork for combining Indigenous and Western scientific practices. These projects use unique Indigenous methods and community-driven research plans.
- » Place-Based Studies explore questions that connect climate change, protection and care of cultural places, and food systems. Unlike traditional Western science, which often separates these areas, many Indigenous perspectives recognize their interconnectedness.



The Transforming Science Co-Laboratories bring together interdisciplinary scholars to advance NSF CBIKS's meta-level research agenda on how to effectively and ethically braid Indigenous knowledges and Western science. Their focus is two-fold: developing a robust understanding of the processes, methods, and protocols of braiding knowledges using the Indigenous Research Circle framework (pictured below) and exploring best practices for community-based participation research with Indigenous communities.

Each Co-Laboratory addresses a distinct theme within the Indigenous Research Circle. They learn alongside Hubs to build research portfolios in their specific thematic area. This work includes creating guidance documents, facilitating cross-institutional and cross-cultural dialogues, and producing impactful scholarship that advances knowledge in each Co-Laboratory's thematic area.

# LETTER FOR APPROVAL FROM INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY/NATION

[DATE]

Dear [PROJECT LEAD] and NSF Center for Braiding Indigenous Knowledges and Science,

The [COMMUNITY] is writing to give approval for [PROJECT LEAD(s)]'s Project titled “[PROJECT/STUDY TITLE]” through the [HUB LOCATION] Regional Research Hub.

[COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES CAN INCLUDE DETAILS OF THE KIND OF MECHANISMS THAT ARE IN PLACE (EXISTING MOUs, MOAs, COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS), THE CONSENT PROCESS, ETC.]

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to [INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY CONTACT INFO – individual or office].

Sincerely,

[SIGNATORY & SIGNATORY CONTACT INFORMATION]

Cc: NSF CBIKS Science Review Circle (Zoe Gardner zgardner@umass.edu)

The [COMMUNITY] is writing to give approval for [PROJECT LEAD(s)]'s IRF Project/Place-Based Study titled “[PROJECT/STUDY TITLE]” through the [HUB LOCATION] Regional Research Hub.

[COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES CAN INCLUDE DETAILS OF THE KIND OF MECHANISMS THAT ARE IN PLACE (EXISTING MOUs, MOAs, COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS), CONSENT PROCESS, ETC.]

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to [INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY CONTACT INFO – INDIVIDUAL OR OFFICE].

Sincerely,

[SIGNATORY & SIGNATORY CONTACT INFORMATION]