

Indigenous Foods Knowledges Network

First Meeting Report

March 1st-2nd, 2018

Hosted by: Althea Walker and the Department of
Environmental Quality at the Gila River Indian
Community



Meeting attendees pose for a group shot at the head gates of one of the irrigation canals at the Gila River Indian Community. Photo by Skyler Anselmo.

Introduction

On March 1st and 2nd, 2018, Althea Walker and Department of Environmental Quality at the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) hosted the first meeting of the Indigenous Foods Knowledges Network. Funded as a four-year Research Coordination Network by the National Science Foundation under the [Navigating the New Arctic Program](#), the initiative brings together Indigenous peoples working at the nexus of food sovereignty, tribal data sovereignty, and Indigenous knowledge to create a “network of networks.” Twenty-three Indigenous and non-Indigenous community leaders and scholars from the Southwest and Arctic participated in the inaugural meeting. The meeting resulted in a list of themes, as well as short and long-term goals.



A word cloud from the most used words in response to the question “What does this network look like 5 years from now? What are the successes of the network?”

Themes

Meeting participants were asked to respond to the question: “In terms of Indigenous food and data sovereignty, what are the key needs in your community or area of work?” After initial responses were collected, they were clustered into themes, which prompted discussion about how to drive an Indigenous-led conversation and actions around food and knowledge sovereignty in both regions.

The themes below summarize the dialogue.

- **Indigenous/Community-Driven and Led Project**
 - Analysis of the discussions revealed that the most frequently used word was “community.” Indigenous communities define who they are, which sets the stage for how and what type of research they want to conduct or knowledge they may want to share. Indigenous led projects, research, and policies may differ from what universities, non-Indigenous governments, and western scientists consider the norm.
- **Community-Centered Indigenous Scholars**
 - Many of the Indigenous scholars who participated in the meeting are active in their communities and conduct community-centered research, focusing their scholarship on questions of interest to communities. Participants expressed the desire to bring together researchers and community leaders with similar commitments through the network.
 - Participants highlighted the need for the RCN to take action. Indigenous scholars could be the catalyst for action, assist in communicating with community members and advocating for community-based research. Community centered Indigenous scholars provide one of the greatest assets to the RCN and therefore need to be central to the project.
- **Indigenous Languages**
 - Participants highlighted the use of Indigenous languages as essential to connecting to food and data sovereignty for themselves and their communities. The predominance of English language and the tendency to use specialized terminology to describe theories in academia and western science creates barriers to understanding for Indigenous community members. People need to be able to explain these concepts and theories to their grandmother, as one participant noted. Investments to preserve and encourage the use of Indigenous languages was seen as essential in efforts toward food and knowledge sovereignty.
- **Access to Indigenous Food, Seeds, Lands, Subsistence Plants and Animals**
 - Farmers worry about the integrity and spirit of the seeds that they cultivate, while hunters in the Arctic are concerned about the health of the animals, as well as access to traditional lands and waters. For example, there was discussion around the concern of beans being grown the right way, reflecting knowledge passed down about how to care for crops. Discussion also centered around challenges to accessing traditional foods. For example, changes in the environment and governance in the Arctic restrict the accessibility of traditional plants and animals. In Arizona, a growing market for tepary beans among non-Indigenous consumers drives up the price, resulting in reduced affordability for GRIC community members.
- **Connecting Youth and Elders**
 - Participants discussed that intergenerational transfer of knowledge is key for ensuring food and data sovereignty. How is the knowledge around cultivating crops or hunting animals being passed on from one generation to the next? Youth and elders therefore need to be part of the RCN in order to facilitate this transfer. The lack of intergenerational transfer of knowledge was a major issue when GRIC reintroduced water into the Gila River for agricultural use. The loss of water in the Gila River for almost a

century resulted in a limited transfer of traditional farming knowledge to future generations; farmers are now working to reclaim and revitalize these practices.

- **Need for a Network of Networks**

- Participants listed complementary networks who address similar themes to this RCN. Finding ways to collaborate with these networks could create more resources, connections, and action in the areas of food and data sovereignty. For example, the Tohono O'odham Community Action Network was incredibly helpful in supporting a network of farmers in southern Arizona. In the inaugural meeting, participants expressed joy and positivity with the connections and networking they shared with each other and looked forward to continuing the relationships.

- **Working Across Multiple Scales and Institutions**

- Indigenous people in the southwest and Arctic engage with different institutions across various scales--from global to nation-state to local. Participants commented on the number and size of scales in which Indigenous people are required to engage. This includes navigating the complexities of Indigenous institutions. At the nation-state level, participants discussed the lack of accountability and transparency of data, and sometimes the lack of relevant data, and the need to hold institutions accountable. For example, if Inuit communities cannot see themselves in data that institutions are keeping, then informed decision-making is impossible. Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers can be advocates for Indigenous peoples across the scales and institutions.

- **Indigenous Data and Ethics**

- The term “data” was initially used by the RCN leadership team in the network’s name (i.e. in the welcome packet in appendix) to deliberately connect with national and international conversations on Indigenous data sovereignty. The word data can be off-putting to community members because of unethical behavior in the past by researchers in exploiting Indigenous data or seeing data only as a western concept. Participants questioned: How do you convince community members that data are relevant and important? How can communities with a lack of financial resources collect and use meaningful and relevant data to make decisions?
- The group felt that the term “knowledge” is a broader and more accessible term that may capture more relevant issues and priorities for Indigenous communities. The terminology used in this report reflects this emphasis on knowledge in the group’s discussion.
- In Indigenous contexts, data is a much more expansive category than in Western science. It can include written, oral, and material sources.
- Indigenous communities use data and knowledge to govern and strengthen their communities. Often, non-Indigenous governments and organizations do not understand the broad range of governance styles and data needs across Indigenous nations. Collection of data by non-Indigenous government organizations often fails to capture variables relevant to Indigenous peoples or allow Indigenous oversight of data.
- Another crucial component in Indigenous data discussed by participants was ethics, particularly researchers gathering data from Indigenous communities and peoples. For example, researchers in the Arctic believe it’s acceptable to go to Facebook and mine information. In another example, researchers contacting only one or two individuals in a community. The RCN could work to educate non-Indigenous researchers and share

strategies and resources with Indigenous communities for how to create or strengthen the communities' own ethical protocols for outside researchers. One example would be to create a research review board for researchers who want soil samples.

Meeting Summary

Initial Introductions and Meeting Goals

On the morning of the first day, the meeting opened with a prayer and song from Tim Terry from the Gila River Indian Community. After that the RCN leadership team introduced the project themes and meeting goals. Participants broke into pairs to do introductions in order to get to know each other better and gather why attendees were interested in attending the meeting. The final part of the morning was spent visiting the Huhugam Heritage Center on GRIC lands to become more acquainted with the past, present, and future of the Gila River Indian Community.



Orville Huntington introduces Amy Juan to group. Photo by Skyler Anselmo.

Field Trip

On the first afternoon of the meeting, officials from the GRIC Department of Environmental Quality and the Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project (P-MIP) provided a tour their recent activities and infrastructure development. The development of the P-MIP infrastructure is due to the influx of financial resources to rebuild irrigation and farming infrastructure from the [Arizona Water Settlements Act of 2004](#), which also provides 653,500 acre-feet of water to the community per year. The community has been using the

resources from the water settlement to reintroduce traditional water use and agriculture onto the community, after water was drawn off the Gila River in the early 1900s for use by white farmers upstream in eastern Arizona. The loss of water resulted in the inability to irrigate agricultural fields, and thus led to widespread poverty and the need to find other sources of food and money.



The group explores the area around one of the canals and headgates constructed by the Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project. Photo by Colleen Strawhacker.

With the water settlement and upgrades to the irrigation infrastructure, more community members will be able to farm within the seven districts of the GRIC. The GRIC canals are being rebuilt on the same waterways as the prehispanic Hohokam canals, reflecting the Hohokam's successful use of irrigation for agriculture for two millennia. In addition to the reintroduction of farming, the group discussed the importance of the rehabilitation of the riparian habitat along the Gila River, mentioning the interesting connection between cattails - used for basket weaving - not being strong enough near the casino and hotel (which are not irrigated via P-MIP water and largely grown in 'artificial' environments) and hoping to support a riverine ecosystem via the canals to grow them.

With a population of about 12,500 people living in the community and 22,000 enrolled in the tribe, there are many barriers to transition back to agriculture, including the loss of some knowledge of traditional agricultural practices and the pressures of the market economy posed by the needs of Phoenix residents to

the north. Despite these barriers, the water settlement has stimulated an increase in agricultural development and the adoption of some traditional crops, supported by the production of cash crops. For example, the Buttons of Ramona Farms use cash crops - alfalfa and wheat - to support the cultivation of traditional foods, including tepary beans.

Due to the development of this infrastructure and their success in securing the water settlement, GRIC is seen as a model for other tribes and Indigenous organizations in the U.S. Southwest for regaining water rights and reintroducing knowledge and practices around traditional agriculture. Many of the attendees discussed the complexity around this, including the use of water from the Central Arizona Project (CAP) Canal, which provides water that is quite different in quality from the middle Gila River. Attendees also expressed the importance of Colorado River water for other communities and the need to balance these needs.

Day Two Discussion

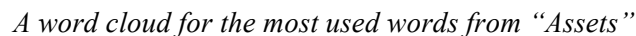
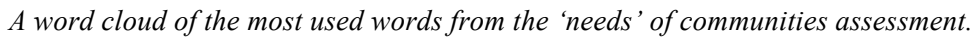
The second and final day of the meeting featured three initial presentations on the background of the Gila River Indian Community (Althea Walker), data sovereignty (Stephanie Rainie), and food sovereignty (Tristan Reader) to present some frameworks for the group to consider in regard to these topics.

Needs and Assets

After the presentations, participants split up into small groups to discuss needs and assets. Participants were asked to respond to the questions: “In terms of Indigenous food and data sovereignty, what are the key needs in your community or area of work?” Based on the themes that emerged from the needs assessment, they were then asked: “What assets can you offer to the group to address these themes?” Each individual wrote responses which were then discussed in small groups, which identified some broader themes. The next two word clouds shows the dominant words used from both the ‘needs’ and ‘assets’ discussion.

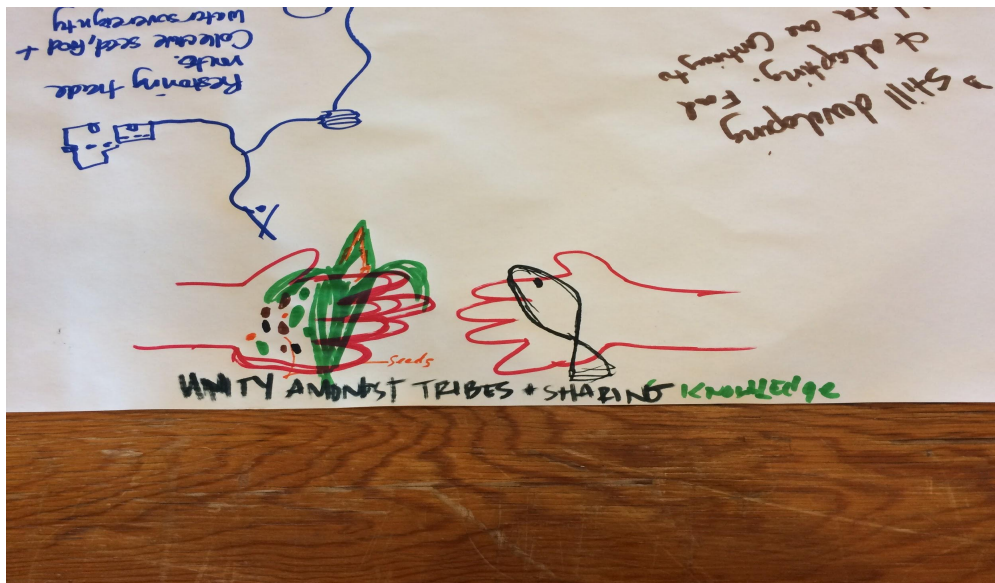


Network Team Member, Mary Beth Jäger, reads off contributions from meeting participants. Photo by Skyler Anselmo.



Vision for the Network Brainstorming Process

After breaking for lunch, the meeting participants gathered around a large table covered with paper and markers. They were encouraged to draw or outline their vision of what they would like to see as outcomes of the network over the next four years. This process allowed for informal conversations among members of the group to get to know each other better. People shared their contributions with the whole group, which led to a genuine discussion on the network's next steps and overall vision. The photos and word cloud on the previous page documents the process.



Next Steps

Participants expressed some ideas for next steps for the Indigenous Foods Knowledges Network. The RCN leadership team (Strawhacker, Rainie, Jäger, Johnson, Reader, and Ferguson) gathered those ideas, which are listed below, and have started to implement them.

Short-Term Goals (1 – 2 months):

- Set up an email list to connect the group and begin to develop a 'network of networks.' A Google Group has been established and team members added to share information.
- Identify a steering committee with 5-6 representations from both the U.S. Southwest and the Arctic (partially done).
- Encourage teleconferences for sharing current activities with volunteers to present at each teleconference.

Medium-Term Goals (3 – 4 months):

- Establish a project website. This will be set up via the ELOKA project in the coming months.

- Establish a plan for future in person meetings. This meeting included an opportunity to learn about the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) Water Rights Settlement and to view the tribe's water distribution system based ancient Hohokam canal-based water distribution system. The hope is that other meetings will offer similar opportunities for network members to learn from their Indigenous hosts by visiting field sites and hearing from elders, youth, and community leaders.

Meeting Attendees

For the first meeting, invitees were targeted from both regions and from a variety of institutional affiliations, career stages, advisors and archivists from national Indigenous organizations, and affiliates from local Indigenous organizations.

Name	Tribal or Indigenous Affiliation	Organization
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Althea Walker		Gila River Indian Community
Amy Juan	Tohono O'odham	Sovereign Remedies LLC
Anita Kora	Inuit	Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (Canada)
Ashleigh Thompson	Red Lake Ojibwe	University of Arizona doctoral scholar
Carolina Behe		Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska
Carrie Joseph	Hopi	University of Arizona doctoral scholar
Colleen Strawhacker		National Snow and Ice Data Center
Dan Ferguson		University of Arizona faculty
Jamie Wilson	Navajo	University of Arizona doctoral scholar
Janene Yazzie	Diné (Navajo)	Little Colorado River Watershed Chapters Association
Jay Johnson		University of Kansas faculty NSF RCN: Facilitating Indigenous Research, Science, and Te
Lydia Jennings	Pascua Yaqui Tribe	University of Arizona doctoral scholar
Lynn Lane		Community Health Nutrition, Gila River Indian Community
Mary Beth Jager	Citizen Potawatomi	University of Arizona staff
Michael Johnson	Hopi	University of Arizona doctoral scholar
Noor Johnson		National Snow and Ice Data Center
Orville Huntington	Athabaskan	Tanana Chiefs Conference
Ramona Button	Tohono O'odham	Ramona Farms, Gila River Indian Community
Scot Nickels		Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
Stephanie Rainie	Ahtna Athabaskan	University of Arizona faculty
Tristan Reader		University of Arizona faculty
Velvet Button	Tohono O'odham	Ramona Farms, Gila River Indian Community

Victoria Walsey	Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation	University of Kansas
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