



FOUR DIRECTIONS MUTUAL AID

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS RESILIENCE & RESURGENCE

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WHY PRIORITIZE INDIGENOUS NEEDS DURING COVID-19?

Even though every community of people is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, this is the most important time to prioritize the needs of Indigenous nations and communities. Here are three critical reasons to ensure focus on Indigenous nations and communities:

1. **ACKNOWLEDGE AND ADDRESS HISTORIC DISPARITIES:** Indigenous communities face daily pandemics of colonialism, cultural assimilation, environmental degradation, and eurocentric white supremacy. These structures have left even the most resilient Indigenous communities with indefensible levels of poverty, disease, addiction, suicide, and joblessness. The past use of viral pandemics as tools for Indigenous erasure must also be acknowledged and resisted. One way we can do this now, is to actively support the physical safety and wellness of Indigenous communities so the ability to defend and advance cultural, economic, and political sovereignty is invigorated.
2. **PROTECT INDIGENOUS ELDERS AND THEIR KNOWLEDGE:** Indigenous elders are essential to passing on language, oral history, stories, and ways of being to the younger generations. COVID-19 has the capacity to inflict multi-generational harm on Indigenous nations if elders are affected. Sudden or unexpected loss of elders and their collective knowledge and experience may take centuries to overcome. Prioritizing the needs of Indigenous elders is an act of cultural respect.
3. **FACE THE ONGOING STRUCTURES OF COLONIALISM IN OUR OWN WORK:** Indigenous people are those who have creation stories of this land, not arrival stories. Every person not Indigenous to this land benefits from the colonial system of land theft and genocide that has made this modern life possible. Moments of crisis like the COVID19 pandemic, provide each of us an opportunity to recognize and reassess how we want to relate with others. If we continue to ignore or tokenize the Natural Rights of Indigenous Peoples on their own lands, we remain collaborators with the colonial project of land theft and genocide that requires the complete disappearance of Indigenous peoples. Or we can choose to build relationships and projects that honor the natural rights, needs, and leadership of Indigenous Peoples and meet their requests during this crisis, and beyond.

WHAT IS CULTURAL COMPETENCY?

Cultural competency is the ability to work with others who hold different cultural beliefs, experiences, and understandings than you. On Turtle Island (North America), cultural competency begins with creating healthier relationships with this land's Indigenous Peoples. Developing cultural competence is a practical and necessary step towards reconciliation. Cultural competency often includes:

1. **BEING AWARE OF ONE'S OWN WORLDVIEW**, and willingness to leave those biases, needs, or desires at the door. This includes understanding cultural appropriation and settler spiritual seeking.
2. **HAVING AN OPEN MIND** and positive, humble attitude towards cultural differences, perspectives, and approaches one might encounter. Understand there is not just one "Native American" culture.

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3. **WILLINGNESS TO GAIN KNOWLEDGE** of respective Indigenous nation's cultures, customs, histories, and worldviews. This includes learning about the treaties and relationships that affect the Indigenous nation/s on whose land one resides.
4. **GROWING CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS** to act in a culturally safe and appropriate way. Examples include: demonstrating respect for Indigenous culture and traditional leadership in one's interactions, willingness to accept constructive criticism, and willingness to engage in long-term trust building relationships.

FOUR DIRECTIONS SOLIDARITY PRINCIPALS

These positions and principals include ones used by Four Directions over 15 years ago as well as those used by others. Check out <https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/allyship/> for more.

OUR POSITIONING:

- **Indigenous people** have creation stories of a place. Any people that lived in a place prior to colonial contact are Indigenous to that place.
- **Settlers** have stories of arrival and settlement to a place. All people not indigenous to North America who are living on this continent are settlers on stolen land.
- **All settlers do not benefit equally** from the settler-colonial state, nor did all settlers emigrate here of their own free will. In this complex network, access to power in the structure of settler colonialism is related to one's privilege in white supremacy and complicity with colonial systems.
- We acknowledge that **settlers are not entitled to live on this land**. We believe settler domination of Indigenous Life in all territories of the so-called "Americas" must end. All decisions regarding human interaction with this land base, including who lives on it, are rightfully those of the indigenous nations.
- Decolonization and assertions of Indigenous independence are radical movements **that necessarily implicate and unsettle everyone**. The status quo of colonial dominance cannot be maintained.

SOLIDARITY PRINCIPALS:

- **ALLIES CANNOT BE SELF-DEFINED**; they must be recognized by the people they seek to ally with.
- **DEFER TO AND RESPECT** Indigenous leadership, decision-making and priorities. Follow their lead.
- **MAKE SPACE** – Suppress enthusiasm for your own ideologies, beliefs, ideas and solutions. You are not here to "save" Indigenous people but to be allies in a struggle for survival and resurgence.
- **PATIENCE** – Work patiently at the speed of Indigenous leadership, reflection and decision-making.
- **INTEGRITY** – Always do what you say you are going to do. Always. Work with integrity. When given a task, do it to the best of your ability. When you mess up, apologize earnestly.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY** – Be accountable and transparent to the communities you serve, including traditional Elders and warriors who are the customary leaders or defenders of the people.
- **COMMUNICATION** – Expand opportunities for Indigenous people to speak for themselves.