

United States Indigenous Data Sovereignty Network

INDIGENOUS DATA GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES

Preamble

Indigenous data, whether collected by national governments and institutions or gathered by Indigenous Peoples themselves, are integral for: decision-making; the exercise of collective rights to self-determination; the affirmation and application of Indigenous epistemologies; and fulfilling responsibilities to Indigenous Peoples, nations, communities, and human, spiritual, and non-human relations. Indigenous data include knowledge and information on and about Indigenous Peoples in any format, including cultural heritage embedded in languages, knowledges, practices, technologies, natural resources, waters, and territories. Indigenous data sovereignty asserts the rights of Indigenous Peoples and nations to govern the meaning, collection, ownership, and application of these data about their peoples, lands, cultural practices, and resources. Indigenous data governance enacts Indigenous data sovereignty, providing mechanisms for ensuring Indigenous Peoples' rights and interests are reflected in data policies and practices.

Indigenous Peoples in modern nation-states are often a small segment of the overall society. In national statistics and other data collection efforts, their information is obscured due to small sample sizes which results in pervasive invisibility. Often, Indigenous Peoples are subsumed under aggregated terms such as "Other." As a result, Indigenous communities and nations find themselves "statistically erased" from national reporting. Settler colonial nation-states must acknowledge this distorted reporting and commit to new standards for data collection, analysis, and dissemination that effectively and meaningfully identify Indigenous Peoples, nations, and communities.

Indigenous rights to self-governance and control of Indigenous data have been reaffirmed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); federal and state recognition of tribal sovereignty; the CARE Principles of Indigenous Data Governance (Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, and Ethics); and the Nagoya Protocol. In response, key funders in the United States are incorporating these frameworks into their proposal guidelines and addressing Indigenous data as a core ethical concern at all stages of research. Nevertheless, non-tribal data entities often exclude Indigenous Peoples and nations from data policy, practice, and agenda-setting contexts. Current data practices and the growth of data movements, such as open data, open science, and secondary use of data, often perpetuate longstanding power differentials that support settler-colonial goals over the rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples and nations.

Given the well-documented historical imbalance of power and authority in favor of settler governments, and the exponential growth of data and its uses, there is a need for principles that support Indigenous data governance. The principles presented were first drafted by the participants of the "Policy Forum: The Governance of Indigenous Data" in May 2017, then shared at Indigenous and mainstream data, policy, and governance gatherings for feedback and input over two years, and finalized in 2019. The principles serve three purposes: (1) to inform and advance ethics, policy, guidelines, and practices for the collection, governance, use, and archiving of Indigenous Peoples' data in the United States; (2) to guide how governments, agencies and other institutions engage with Indigenous data in ways that benefit and do not harm Indigenous Peoples; and (3) to inspire Indigenous Peoples and nations to assert greater control over Indigenous data by developing culturally-specific and tribally-specific principles.

USIDSN Indigenous Data Governance Principles

1. Inherent sovereignty

The inherent sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples and their nations are the foundation of Indigenous Peoples' ownership, control, and access with respect to data, information, and knowledge about their communities, peoples, lands, resources, and genetic information.

1.1 For effective decision-making

Increasing informational demands requires accurate and timely data for decision-making across all levels of society and governments. Indigenous Peoples communities, nations and societies are no different in this regard.

1.2 For control

Given the historical exploitation and commodification of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, data, and information, it is imperative that Indigenous Peoples exercise their sovereign rights to control data about their communities, peoples, lands, resources, and genetic information, no matter the age or source. External entities must acknowledge and facilitate Indigenous control of Indigenous data.

1.3 For access to disaggregated data

Indigenous Peoples in the United States face myriad data issues, among them being statistical erasure and misclassification. Data producers must acknowledge the historical legacy of statistical erasure of Indigenous Peoples and commit to reporting, collecting, and making accessible disaggregated data that effectively identifies these Indigenous Peoples, nations, communities.

2. Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous data governance honors Indigenous Knowledge systems, asserting the collective nature of such knowledge; providing the basis for relationships among humans and non-human worlds; and defining obligations and ways of knowing.

2.1 For governance of data

Indigenous data governance mechanisms must align with Indigenous Knowledge Systems that define relational obligations and ethical behavior; ways of knowing; and when, how and with whom knowledge is shared.

2.2 For data self-determination

Indigenous Knowledge Systems provide the foundation for (1) defining and determining what constitutes data, (2) the validity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of acquiring and transmitting data, and (3) what data are necessary for Indigenous Peoples, nations, and communities to govern their peoples, lands, and resources.

3. Ethics

Indigenous Peoples, nations, and communities must determine what ethical behavior looks like across Indigenous data lifecycles (design, collection, access, analysis, reporting, storage, protection, use, and reuse of Indigenous data) and throughout data ecosystems (digital infrastructures, analytics, and applications).

3.1 For collective benefit

Indigenous Peoples, nations, and communities must determine the ethical frameworks to maximize benefits and minimize harms associated with their data.

3.2 To protect and honor

Data must be used in ways that align with Indigenous cultures, values, and beliefs (1) to advance self-determination, (2) to protect the rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples and non-humans who reside in their territory, (3) to uphold traditional roles and responsibilities for transmission of knowledge and data, and (4) to leverage opportunities for Indigenous Peoples. Data must not be used to perpetuate a deficit perspective of Indigenous Peoples.

3.3 For future use

Indigenous ethical frameworks should guide governance of data with considerations for the potential future use of data, including weighing future benefits and harms. Inclusion of provenance or source information in metadata (which describes the data) must be required, thus making clear responsibilities for the use, analysis, and modification of data to enhance Indigenous control and protection of sensitive information.

4. Intergenerational collective well-being

Indigenous values concerning the collective well-being of Indigenous nations and their peoples must be reflected in Indigenous data lifecycles and across data ecosystems.

4.1 For past, present, and future generations

Indigenous data must align with Indigenous values and governance mechanisms that strengthen the collective well-being of Indigenous Peoples and nations across multiple generations (past, present, future).

4.2 For planning and development

Indigenous Peoples' definitions of well-being must guide the creation and governance of data for economic, social, cultural, and other development efforts that impact Indigenous Peoples.

5. Relationships

Relationships with Indigenous Peoples, nations, and communities form the foundation for equitable data governance that serves the rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples.

5.1 For respect

In the collection, governance, use, and archiving of Indigenous Peoples' data, the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and other data actors must be founded on mutual respect that recognizes historical factors that have affected relationships.

5.2 For responsibility

Data actors must be responsible for the impact of their actions and behaviors in relation to Indigenous Peoples and nations and seek guidance and consent from Indigenous Knowledge holders and leaders.

5.3 For reciprocity

Reciprocity reaffirms the need for data collection, governance, use, and archiving that benefits all stakeholders. Indigenous Peoples and nations must determine what reciprocal benefits can come from data.

5.4 For accountability

Establishing open, transparent and respectful relationships between Indigenous Peoples and other data actors will improve accountability in the collection, governance, use and archiving of this data.

Suggested Citation

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