

# United South and Eastern Tribes National Conference

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

October 23, 2023

- Good morning, everyone. We—myself and my Census Bureau colleagues—are honored to join you today.
- Thank you to the United South and Eastern Tribes for inviting me to address you at your national conference.
- I want to especially thank:
  - The Honorable Kirk Francis, Sr., chief of the Penobscot Indian Nation and president of USET's Board of Directors.
  - Mr. Kitcki Carroll, executive director of USET.
  - You, the leadership of each of the 33 tribal nations that comprise USET's membership.
- I also wish to recognize our host, the Oneida Indian Nation, and the Honorable Ray Halbritter who serves as the Oneida Indian Nation Representative.
- I'll begin my remarks with something I say whenever we have the privilege of meeting with tribal leaders and tribal representatives:
  - Our work together is of the highest priority.
  - We seek to strengthen our nation-to-nation relationships.
  - That is why we are here.
- Now, this is important because we're public servants, and that includes serving all tribal nations.
- We serve you. And, no, we are not perfect at it, but we do aspire to learn from past experience... and to improve.
- We know that communities and tribes rely on data from the Census Bureau to understand who they are, their challenges, their accomplishments, and their needs.
- This promotes informed decision-making and leads to greater knowledge and better decisions in areas such as economic development, infrastructure, public health, and education.
- Now, we conducted a decennial census in 2020.
- And during that tragic period, we all faced unprecedented challenges.
- We learned a great deal about working with diverse communities, especially tribal nations.
- We heard from our partners throughout Indian Country.
- We appreciated the tribes' valuable feedback, especially the critical feedback that indicated where we needed improvement or even where we need to rethink our approach altogether.
- And we'll continue to seek your feedback as well as your ideas to help address concerns.

## TRIBAL RELATIONS SPECIALIST PROGRAM

- Now, we listened to Indian country partners who said our nation-to-nation relationship requires *ongoing* communication...it requires active, continuous engagement throughout the decade, not just before a decennial census.
- In response, we've established a new Tribal Relations Program.
- Starting 2022, the program features the first time the Census Bureau has ever had full-time specialists dedicated to tribal relations between decennial censuses.



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- Our four tribal relations specialists—three of whom are here—are all enrolled tribal citizens.
- They meet with tribal leaders, officers, and urban Indian partners across Indian Country.
- Allow me to introduce them to you: Charles Tippeconic, Shadana Sultan, and Bernadece Boda.
- These wonderful people allow us to have more ears on the ground to listen to your concerns.
- They help us to work with you better understand your needs and concerns, and ultimately to provide tribal nations and American Indian and Alaska Native individuals with better, more relevant data....your data.
- Some of the work they're doing includes:
  - Building and growing our partnerships with tribal governments.
  - Assisting with our geographic programs that include tribal boundaries, including trust lands, which can affect data tabulations that may be important to your communities.
  - Connecting tribal nations and tribal communities to data products and services for community planning.
  - Providing tribal cultural awareness training to Census Bureau staff, especially to our Field staff.
  - Interacting with tribal nations to explore permissions to access tribal lands for surveys and the decennial census.
  - Seeking input on planning the upcoming 2030 Census; this includes projects on rural address issues and tribal administrative records for improving data quality.
  - Spreading the word to the people of Indian Country—especially on tribal lands—about employment opportunities at the Census Bureau; these can range from professional positions to local “work from home” part-time jobs.
  - Convening forums for tribal nations to connect with each other and share how they use and benefit from Census Bureau products or programs.
- The work of our tribal relations specialists is already beginning to bear fruit.
- For example, this year we had the highest ever response by tribal nations to our Boundary and Annexation Survey.
- This is an annual survey we conduct to make sure we have the most up-to-date information about the legal boundaries of all governments, which includes tribal nations.
- Our Geography Division staff is working hard to improve the quality of boundary data all over the country.
- The tribal relations specialists assist them by following up individually with tribes—
  - To answer your questions about how to respond.
  - To make sure that we were sending the survey to the right tribal contact.
  - To relay the importance of responding.
- Ultimately, we expect results of these efforts will be more accurate tribal boundaries.

## IMPORTANCE OF TRIBAL DATA

- Now, I'll talk a little about tribal data.
- We know that your data are used widely, such as for governance, and for public health and economic planning.
- That's why we're so committed to producing the quality data your tribal communities rely on and deserve.
- Our tribal relations specialists are a valuable resource to help you to understand how to navigate your data, and help you accomplish your goals.
- So, please feel free to consult them...They are here to benefit tribes.

- I also want to mention our plans to engage American Indian and Alaska Native stakeholders in the design of new statistical products to meet your needs.
- Through past listening sessions with data users, we know there are many topics that can't be studied by single surveys, censuses, or data sources alone.
- These topics include things like climate extremes, broadband deployment, the gig economy.
- We are implementing a really different approach.
- Historically, we have churned out statistics from our censuses and surveys produce, often in the form of tables.
- Instead, we want start by finding out the information *you* need for your planning and governance.
- We want that to guide the development of our statistical products.
- We will conduct outreach to explore statistical products specifically with the AIAN community in mind, including tribes, researchers, and federal partners.
- We'll be using the tribal listening sessions as the starting point to gather AIAN stakeholder feedback on informational needs.
- Through such engagement, we'll leverage existing data assets and methods to yield the first-ever statistical products designed *specifically* tailored to AIAN community interests.
- By the way, this effort is call *Statistical Products First* because of the starting point on the products that users need.
- So please bee on the lookout for it.
- As we better understand your informational needs over time, we can leverage our incredible data infrastructure and rich expertise to meet those needs.
- Because our new approach depends on in-depth, ongoing dialogue with our data users—including the AIAN community—it's also a step towards increased data equity and access.
- In fact, this strategy is just one as part of our larger, ongoing effort to continuously engage with tribes.

## RECENT DATA RELEASES

- Next, I want to mention a few recent data releases that may be of interest to you.
- One is the 2020 Census Detailed Demographic and Housing Characteristics File A, or Detailed DHC-A.
- Released in late September, it's a rich treasure trove of data for detailed racial and ethnic groups and AIAN tribes and villages.
- It provides population counts for 300 detailed race and ethnic groups, and 1,187 AIAN tribes and villages.
- In fact, today, I'm joined by my colleague Nicholas Jones who will tell you more about this important dataset and how you can use it.
- And last June, we released the 2017–2021 American Community Survey AIAN tables that feature socioeconomic and housing characteristics for tribes.
- This includes important characteristics like educational attainment, occupational status, and poverty status for specific population groups for tribes.

## CENSUS/BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

- I also want to mention that the Census Bureau and the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs have revised our previous Memorandum of Understanding.
- This agreement improves data sharing between the agencies on geographic boundaries for American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages.
- We know that updated boundaries are highly relevant to tribes.

### 2030 CENSUS

- And finally, we've begun preparing for the 2030 Census.
- But let's be clear—we can't plan and complete the census alone.
- We need to hear your voices, your ideas, your participation.
- You see, your feedback leads to better, more inclusive data... data that can help your people.
- We look forward to future tribal consultations on the 2030 Census.
- If your tribal nation would like to host one our 2030 Tribal Consultation sessions, please let us know and we will get with your staff for future planning.
- It's only through our collaboration on a nation-to-nation basis that we can better meet your needs by producing more timely, useful statistics on the people of Indian country.
- Providing tribes with their data is incredibly important to us.

### CONCLUSION

- In closing, we look forward to a continued partnership with you.
- While I have talked about specific data products and data collections, I'm really here to tell you my staff are absolutely committed to a strong, ongoing working relationship.
- This relationship is generational.
- Career staff serve for decades at the Census Bureau.
- They work on large, difficult projects to produce the best possible data to inform a generation of policy and programs in service to communities and tribal nations like yours.
- I have staff who have worked for 40 years on these programs; I have staff that have just started their careers and will see the next 40.
- Data we collected decades ago are still being used to inform where we started; data we're collecting today hint at where we're going.
- We're confident that by working together over time, staying committed to collaboration and excellence, we can better meet your needs and produce useful statistics about the American Indian and Alaska Native population.
- Census staff, including our tribal relations specialists, are out in Indian Country and updating tribes on the latest released AIAN data products and on our new Statistical Product First Initiative.
- We invite your tribe to reach out to us to give you and your staff a presentation on any census data products we have released or soon to be released.
- I look forward to our discussion and do have other census data experts here with me to help with questions or clarifications.
- Thank you again for inviting me to speak to you.