

# POLICY BRIEF

## Data Governance for Native Nation Rebuilding

### VERSION 1

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Native nations in the United States are increasingly exercising Indigenous data sovereignty (ID-Sov)— the right of a nation to govern the collection, ownership, and application of its own data. While ID-Sov is the goal, data governance— the ownership, collection, control, analysis, and use of data— provides mechanisms for achieving that goal.



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**NATIVE NATIONS  
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*Strengthening Indigenous Governance*

## A Call to Action for Native Nations, Tribal Citizens, Governments, Organizations, Scholars, and Funders

Native nations in the United States are increasingly exercising Indigenous data sovereignty (ID-Sov)<sup>1</sup>— the right of a nation to govern the collection, ownership, and application of its own data.<sup>2</sup> While ID-Sov is the goal, data governance— the ownership, collection, control, analysis, and use of data<sup>3</sup>— provides the mechanisms for achieving that goal.

### Purpose

This brief serves as an initial primer on Indigenous data governance. It describes the relationship between reclaiming Indigenous data and Native nation rebuilding. This brief extends the ID-Sov conversation to tribal data governance and the implications for how other (non-tribal) entities govern data related to tribes, their citizens, lands, and communities.

### What do we mean by data?

Data are information about a Native nation, its tribal citizens, lands, resources, programs, and communities. Data include information from demographics to educational attainment rates to maps of sacred lands to songs to social media activities. In short, ID-Sov applies broadly as a nation's right to own and control all the information about the nation and its citizens, lands, and communities.

### What is Native Nation Rebuilding?

Native nation rebuilding acknowledges the destructive impact of colonization on tribal governance infrastructure and leadership mechanisms. It refers to the reclamation of Native self-rule and increased self-determination. Rebuilding Native nations means increasing the nation's capacity to make strategic decisions about its affairs and to implement those decisions. It is a comprehensive effort to rebuild tribal societies that work on tribal terms.<sup>4</sup> Data to inform these processes are critical.

1 | Kukutai T. & Taylor J. (Eds.). (2016). *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward An Agenda*. Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press; Rainie, S.C., Schultz J.L., Briggs E., Riggs P., & Palmanteer-Holder N.L. (2017). Data as strategic resource: Self-determination and the data challenge for United States Indigenous nations. *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 8(2). Retrieved from: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/iipj/vol8/iss2/1>. DOI: 10.18584/iipj.2017.8.2.1

2 | Rodriguez-Lonebear D. & Rainie S.C. (2016). US Indigenous Data Sovereignty founding documents. <http://usindigenousdata.arizona.edu/about-us-o>

3 | The Data Governance Institute, 2015; [http://www.datagovernance.com/adg\\_data\\_governance\\_definition/](http://www.datagovernance.com/adg_data_governance_definition/)

4 | See M. Jorgensen (Ed.). (2007). *Rebuilding Native Nations*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.

## Data Governance and Nation Rebuilding

Data governance and nation rebuilding go hand in hand. Tribes need accurate, relevant, and timely data for policy and decision-making. Tribes also need mechanisms to protect and control their information. As tribes rebuild their governance institutions, they increase their capability to govern their data, which in turn, facilitates stronger evidence based decision-making.

ID-Sov is a right; a state to be achieved through data governance (see Image 1). Every tribe is positioned along a spectrum from data dependency to data sovereignty. By implementing mechanisms of data governance, tribes are working toward data sovereignty. Data governance is an on-going and ever changing process. As tribes progress toward ID-Sov they will use mechanisms, such as establishing research review boards, creating data sharing agreements, and building data repositories. Tribes will revisit, revise, and reuse those mechanisms continuously as they work toward ID-Sov. As new data are created in the future, from technological advances or changes in tribal government activities, this process will continue to evolve.

Image 1. Toward Data Sovereignty: The Process of Decolonizing Data



It is important to note that reclaiming ID-Sov occurs within a larger data system whereby other governments, corporations, and entities control tribes' data. Thus the process of Indigenizing data calls for these other entities to incorporate tribal principles into their own data governance practices.

Tribes in the United States are incredibly diverse. As such, data governance strategies are similarly varied. We posit, however, that there are common principles of data governance that support tribes as they work toward ID-Sov. Such principles may include trust, sovereignty, and ownership, among others. What might be some common principles that support ID-Sov in the United States?

### Recommendations

- Identify mechanisms to facilitate tribal data governance, such as ways to strengthen tribal and intertribal institutions for effective data governance.
- Explore the development of tribal-specific principles that tribes can use to govern their data.
- Create common principles of data governance that support tribes' efforts toward data sovereignty for use by tribes, governments, organizations, corporations, and researchers within the United States.
- Develop data governance mechanisms that non-tribal governments, organizations, corporations, and researchers can use to support tribal data sovereignty.

This brief was produced by the Native Nations Institute and has been made available to the US Indigenous Data Sovereignty Network. For more information, contact the Native Nations Institute at [nni@email.arizona.edu](mailto:nni@email.arizona.edu).

### Join the Network!

For more information on the US Indigenous Data Sovereignty Network and to join its community of practice that supports Indigenous data sovereignty through data governance-focused research, policy advocacy, and education, visit [usindigenousdata.arizona.edu](http://usindigenousdata.arizona.edu).

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