

Raising the Bar:

Improving Coverage for
Indigenous Peoples

User - centered Design
Participant Profiles

February 2024



The Trust Project





Andie Sweeden, 26

- Cherokee Nation
- Associate attorney at Pipestem Law
- Tulsa, Oklahoma
- User Type: Avid

Andie values the news because it informs her work as an associate attorney at a Native-owned law firm. She practices federal law and civil litigation, and lobbies on behalf of Indian tribes and organizations. Andie spends time on Capitol Hill, where being on top of the news is important to her job. She likes to stay current on international news.

Types of media/platforms

- Print – Osage News, Cherokee Phoenix
- TV – CNN
- Digital and social media – Indianz.com, Apple News, CBS News app, and unspecified news accounts and individual lawyer accounts on X, formerly Twitter

News journey

Andie starts her day by checking X. From there, she goes through mobile news apps and compares them for reporting consistency. At work, she talks with people about Native and non-Native news topics.

Andie says she receives news through emails from her coworkers on topics that are important to their law firm's work in Washington, D.C. Sometimes her colleagues summarize an issue and give their thoughts, while other times they share a link to a news article. She says she only checks Native news sources when looking for something specific.

Important News to Andie

- Political and legal news, including congressional legislation, that pertains to Indian tribes and organizations.

Trust in news

Andie is skeptical of news that she sees as reported with a bias, such as news that leans to a political side. She says it doesn't feel like it is informing her, but instead trying to force beliefs on her. Andie says she doesn't want to hear a news anchor say "these crazy Republicans" or "these crazy Democrats." Andie says it's more likely for Native news organizations to redeem her trust than non-Native news organizations.

Representation of Native Americans in news

Andie believes journalists now are more culturally sensitive when covering Native communities due to the work of Native journalists. However, she says Native news is rarely covered nationally unless it is a controversial topic, like a court case. When Native communities are included in non-Native news, Andie says they're often portrayed as less developed. She says the news ignores American Indians when it comes to things like political polling, which includes other groups but not American Indians.

Mis/disinformation

Andie sees disinformation about the LGBTQ+ community repeated by members of Congress, and she worries about the fine line between publicly correcting and amplifying mis/disinformation. She also says she's come across more AI-generated images being used to spread fake news, including an anti-Joe Biden campaign featuring a fake photo of the president and the vice president.

"I think the fake videos where they make it seem like people are talking are going to become more prevalent, and that's scary to me."

Trust Indicators®

Best Practices

She gets information on news site ownership from conversations with her colleagues and personal network, but generally does not look for this.

Journalist Expertise

- Andie sometimes looks at journalist bios.
- If she sees byline on a law article is a lawyer, she is more likely to trust it.
- Similarly, she is more likely to trust Native news written by Native people, especially when their bio includes their tribal affiliation, because it is a way she can confirm they are Native.
- She says she “would prefer to get my Native news from Native people.”

Labels

She checks for labels or uses context clues in the headline to infer story type.

References

- If the story is relevant to her work, she will click links to see the sources.
- If something catches her eye as she reads, she will check the reference.

Methods

- Andie is interested in how international stories are reported and whether the people interviewed are local to that region.
- Andie thinks it is important for journalists to spend time in the communities they report on because it gives their reporting better context and framing.

Actionable Feedback

Andie will try to find the journalist’s email if there is a major error, but usually she doesn’t have the time.

News perceptions

Andie reads Native news online, but does not use the comment sections to protect herself from being open to attacks she says can happen in Indian Country if you comment on a Native community you are not a part of.

Andie says non-Native news does not cover American Indians and does not tell the history of Indian removal and other historical moments that shape today’s Native community experiences.

“It’s important for the media to tell these stories. We should be covering the history of boarding schools; we should be covering more of the history of Indian removal. To know where we are now, you have to know the beginning.”

Andie’s recommendations

- She’d like to see news stories provide more background context — including a timeline of historical events or laws that relate to the topic being reported — so that the reader has a nuanced report.
- She recommends that bios for Native journalists include their tribal affiliation or where they grew up as a way to build trust, but also so the public gets clues about how many different tribes there are.



Carol Osife, 51

- Akimel O’odham (Gila River Indian Community)
- Administrative clerk
- Phoenix, Arizona
- User Types:
Opportunistic

For nearly 15 years, Carol, who describes herself as a moderate, took a hiatus from non-Native news because “it was depressing me” and “I had to step away.” But she says she never stopped engaging with Native news, which she finds through social media, friends, family and her monthly tribal newspaper. About five years ago, she cautiously let non-Native news back into her life.

Types of media/platforms

- Print – Gila River Indian News (tribal newspaper)
- TV – 12News KPNX (NBC affiliate), FOX 10 Phoenix
- Digital and social media – Google News for NPR, CNN, the Associated Press and MSNBC, and Facebook for Native news

News journey

There’s no room for negativity in Carol’s morning routine. As soon as she wakes up, she scans through a news app she’s curated with trusted sources, swiping past depressing news. In the evenings, Carol turns to local television news. On occasion, she watches “big news” play out on national cable news, either on her TV or computer.

Important news to Carol

- Water rights in Gila River (United States v. Gila Valley Irrigation District, 2017)
- Fraudulent sober-living houses in Phoenix

Trust in news

Carol can trace her distrust of non-Native news back to a traumatic moment as a teenager when she watched a man set himself on fire. A media frenzy followed, and she remembers being pushed for interviews. She agreed to a phone interview with The Arizona Republic, but “they quoted me, and it’s not what I said.”

Carol says she thought a news outlet couldn’t win her trust back, but she has softened her stance in cases where “they were misinformed, believing they had a reliable source.”

Trust Indicators®

Journalist Expertise

Carol is generally indifferent to who reports the news, but she does notice when Arizona journalists advance to national stations.

Methods and References

- Sources are important to Carol, especially if she knows enough about the story to be able to judge if a source is credible. “If they’re just interviewing some random person, I don’t think I would rely on what they’re saying,” she said, “because how does this person know?”
- Carol would only be interested in information about how a story was reported if the topic is one she cares about.

Best Practices

Carol doesn’t pay attention to who owns or funds news, although she thinks it may cause the news to lean one way or another. Carol mostly doesn’t see it as important to her as an individual, but says it might affect her tribe, which is “grander than me, so in a way it does affect me.”

Actionable Feedback

Carol is not likely to report errors unless she is sure she is right. She says sometimes she’ll comment on a post on social media or email the newspaper.

Representation of Native Americans in news

Carol vents her frustrations about news portrayals to her family, but she acknowledges that journalists may not be aware of their own problematic reporting. Carol has been particularly frustrated by general non-Native news coverage of sober-living homes in Phoenix. She says reporters exploited the “drunken Indian” stereotype, diverting attention from the scammers. Eventually they shifted focus, but Carol still can’t shake how quickly the journalists fell back on stereotypes.

Coverage of Natives often lacks proper context and historical knowledge and Carol says one such story made her want to cuss. The story compared obesity rates and health problems between her fellow tribal members in the United States and Mexico without explaining that the people in Mexico “still live off the land.... We don’t, due to water issues.” She says the reporting didn’t explain how water from the Gila River in the United States has been diverted for non-Native farmers’ use, while it has not been in Mexico. Without any backstory, she says it made it seem like “we’re just fat, lazy people.”

Carol feels very strongly that non-Native journalists’ inability to understand and convey sovereignty is feeding misinformation. Although journalists may know the textbook definition, she says sovereignty’s deeper meaning for Native Americans often goes unrecognized. Sovereignty isn’t just a legal term for her community, she says it’s a profound sentiment. “What we feel about sovereignty is not always able to be put on paper,” Carol said.

Sovereignty is something she understands in a spiritual sense, but does not typically have responsibility for defining outside her tribe. As such, Carol struggled to put into words the disconnect over sovereignty between Natives and non-Natives. One word she did think might help was “acknowledgment.” She says a non-Native person doesn’t know how to do that — how to acknowledge that sovereignty goes beyond legal definitions.

Carol’s recommendations

- Carol made one plea to journalists: Take great care to be accurate about culture. She says specifically to “double-check, triple-check your sources because what you write could be insulting.”
 - She also recommends non-Native journalists undergo cultural sensitivity training so they can conduct interviews with more sensitivity and accuracy.
 - She says journalists should remember that while she’s happy for her tribe to share its culture with journalists, not every tribe will feel that way.
-



Daniel Davis, 32

- Mandan/Hidatsa and Oglala Lakota
- Car detailer and student
- Rapid City, South Dakota
- User Type: Disengaged

When Daniel isn't working or studying, he spends his time with his family in community spaces, such as in cultural Native ceremonies. He uses his network of family and friends as a way to understand current events. Daniel feels like he is being lied to about a lot of things by a lot of entities, including the news. "I feel like the system is broken in more ways than one," he said. "It's not just the news, you know?"

Types of media/platforms

- Print — Rapid City Journal and Native Sun News
- Digital & social media — Facebook

News journey

Daniel typically scrolls Facebook for his news. He gets more information on current events from interacting with his partner, his neighbor and colleagues, as well as general interactions with people around town.

"Oftentimes, I guess what will happen is I'll see a lot of people talking about the same thing, and then I will just Google it and try and understand what's going on."

Important news to Daniel

- Politics • Sports

Trust in news

Daniel doesn't trust news media, news outlets or journalists because he feels "a lot of them have their own personal agendas." He worries about companies buying and paying for news. He gave Fox News as one example. Daniel believes a news organization is trustworthy when it is unbiased in its reporting, but says he rarely sees that because, "every news source is usually politically affiliated."

As a result, Daniel says he questioned the reporting on 9/11 after having conversations with friends who believed that it was a conspiracy. He says "a bunch of things didn't seem right... how the towers fell, you know, the jet fuel controversy, and then 'building number seven.'"

Daniel's skepticism extended to tribal news sources. He says they have the potential to be untrustworthy due to corruption in tribal governments and politicians "trying to shame or badmouth" one another.

"I think the news articles I could trust from Tribal news sources will probably be anything that just has to do with the community. I don't think that they would lie about that."

Trust Indicators®

Journalist Expertise

Daniel does not look to see who the journalist is, but says he will “fact check it and Google” to see if what the journalist is talking about is real.

Labels

- Daniel does not look at labels.
- He assumes everything is “unbiased” until he reads it.

References

Daniel doesn't normally click on hyperlinks within a story unless he is curious.

Methods

Daniel mentioned a journalist interviewing him and some other community members during a cultural ceremony. He says they had? invited her to stay for the ceremony for a positive experience. Daniel sees value in reporters reporting on cultural ceremonies and spending time in Native communities.

Representation of Native Americans in news

Daniel feels that mainstream news is doing the best they can covering Native people and communities. He is understanding about the fact “that not everybody understands the culture.”

However, he feels too many intentionally perpetuate falsehoods about how Natives live or paint them only in a bad light, which makes him “sad because I've read the story and just really feel for the people involved.”

Daniel wishes that Native and non-Native news would balance their coverage of positive and controversial topics in Indian country. He says non-Native news reports mostly negative news, while Tribal news covers only positive things.

Mis/disinformation

Daniel was on Facebook when he saw disinformation about the July 2022 explosion that destroyed the Georgia Guidestones. He says he clicked a link someone shared which took him to a story about how the explosion happened because of secret documents. He says until a friend told him that was fake news, he was “under the impression there was a bunch of crazy stuff in the time capsule.”

“I see that misinformation and disinformation is really like a weapon that can be used as weapons to just sway the public.”

Daniel's recommendations

- He says journalists should do more research about the person, tribe or culture they're reporting on because “the more information that they have before they go in, the better.”
- He says journalists shouldn't group all Natives together.

“Most people will get one image in their head, and it's the Plains Indians. That's not really what Native Americans are.... We all look different, we have different houses and different languages.”



Garry Guice, 61

- Cherokee Nation
- Retired merchant seaman
- Seattle, Washington
- User Type: Engaged

Garry is Native and African American. He's a retired merchant seaman who enjoys spending time with his family. During his years as a fisherman, he built community with those around him in the Seattle region. Garry spoke eagerly of his American Indian identity. Although he did not grow up near a reservation, he's learned a lot about himself and his culture since enrolling in Cherokee Nation.

Types of media/platforms

- Print – Cherokee Phoenix, Puyallup Tribal News
- TV – Fox13 News, KIRO 7 (Cox Media Group), KING5 (Tegna Inc.), CNN and MSNBC News

News journey

Garry watches the news on YouTube when he wakes up in the morning. He says the segments are shorter there which allows him to watch more news platforms. Throughout the day, he reads the news on his phone by going through mobile websites. At the end of the day, he watches the nightly news to catch up on some of the stories he encountered during the day. He picks up the Cherokee Phoenix during his monthly visit to the Native health center, and he receives the Puyallup Tribal News as a monthly subscription.

Important news to Garry

- Domestic policy and war • Tribal land, fishing rights
- Job opportunities • Health • Housing and casinos

Trust in news

Garry feels that news is way more opinionated than it was in previous years, which decreases his level of trust. He prefers journalists to report just facts and not interject their opinion. Garry is more likely to trust a source that corrects errors in stories because it shows transparency.

"If they admit (an error) and then they do a retraction on it, 'OK, I could trust you again because you made a mistake and you're coming back telling me you made a mistake.'"

News perceptions

Garry feels that negativity sells in mainstream news. This upsets him because it influences the way the way land disputes and other issues affecting Native communities are framed. Garry says he hears too much negativity about Natives: " 'Oh, the Natives have all this? Why did they get that? They won't let us put pipelines through their land because they don't want it all torn up.' I hear a lot of that today and it makes me mad because the Native Americans aren't starting anything."

Trust Indicators®

Journalist Expertise

Garry reads the story first. If it's interesting and the journalist's information is linked, he will usually click on it.

References

Sometimes Garry clicks on hyperlinks within a story if it's interesting to him.

Methods

When Garry finds what he believes is an error, he checks it against other news sources. Once he confirms the mistake, he makes a mental note about it and moves on with his day. He does not contact the editor or journalist.

Representation of Native Americans in news

Even though there is not much coverage of Natives in the local news, Garry thinks Washington is one of the better states when it comes to covering Native people. He is mostly frustrated by the lack of reporting on Black Natives, as well as the lack of reporting that includes the historical context behind relations between non-Black Natives and Black Natives.

Garry also mentioned how the rights of Native people and communities are framed as government handouts and freebies, when in reality treaties exist between American governments and various Native tribes and communities to lay out the responsibilities and duties the government owes them. But he says reporters do not provide historical context about why the treaties exist that grant Natives these rights.

Mis/disinformation

When Garry comes across news that appears to be fake he compares it to other news sources. Garry pointed to Fox News as a hub of fake news and mentioned that it is entertainment, not news, but most people do not know that. Garry describes knowing when fake news is afoot because it uses exaggerated language, such as, "the immigrants are flooding the gates right now, coming over the border ... they're coming over in droves."

Garry's recommendations

- Garry sees knowledge of sovereignty as foundational. He recommends reporters become familiar with sovereignty and its historical context.
 - Garry would like to see sovereignty incorporated into the ethics of journalism, as well as training for those who report on Native communities.
 - Garry would like to see more Native journalists report on racism within Indian Country, such as Nations that participated in slavery and the impact that has today on people who are Black and mixed race.
-



Iris Gay, 68

- Oglala Lakota
- Retired
- Oglala Lakota reservation, South Dakota
- User Type: Once opportunistic, but now disengaged

Iris is an elder who lives on the Oglala Lakota reservation. Television news serves as her primary connection to the outside world. She says she's aware that it's biased, "but we have no choice." Iris sees divisions between Native and non-Native people and doesn't like how media perpetuates an "us versus them" narrative.

Types of media/platforms

- Print and digital – Native Sun News Today, Lakota Times
 - TV – local stations in Rapid City and Sioux Falls
 - Radio – local stations

News journey

Iris starts her mornings watching the local Rapid City news. In the evenings, she sometimes watches a newscast on a Sioux Falls station. She might switch over to national news after the soaps are over. While she used to regularly look up Native news online, she doesn't do it as often now because she doesn't have the time. She buys the local Native newspapers, but rarely has time to read them.

Important news to Iris

- How other tribes are successful, particularly with casinos
 - Native-produced news

Trust in news

Iris sees Native news organizations as more trustworthy because they "don't put their two cents in when they write their articles." She thinks the local non-Native newspaper writes accurate obituaries but that's about it. Overall, she sees non-Native news as lacking a desire to cover important Native topics. When they do report on a Native story, she says the coverage lacks context.

"They go down on the rez and talk to a bunch of Native people. They get lots of recording, but then they only show not even half a minute of coverage. They don't show the important parts. Just what they think is important."

Representation of Native Americans in news

Iris says local non-Native news focuses too much on the negative, "plastering it all over." They show Natives on drugs and alcohol or involved in some sort of crime. She wishes they would show more Native American accomplishments, such as successful economic ventures.

Trust Indicators®

Best Practices

- Iris is mildly interested in who's behind the news.
- She says she knows who funds Fox News: "The Republicans."

Journalist Expertise

Iris says she would probably blame the reporter, not the organization, if they did something to hurt her trust.

Actionable Feedback

Iris says she encounters errors in the news but she's not one to complain.

Labels

- Iris doesn't differentiate between news and opinion, or other types of content. "I'm just naive in that area," she said. "I probably think it's all true."
- Iris says she notices when Fox News inserts what she considers racism into the news.

Methods/References

- Iris would be interested to know what it takes to report on complex news topics.
- She rarely double-checks information in the news.

Mis/disinformation

Iris criticized the news media for what she called biased coverage of the 2020 Native American protests at Mount Rushmore during former President Donald Trump's visit, emphasizing the rally's insensitivity to Native history. She says the news media perpetuated the controversy with one-sided coverage that didn't focus on why the Natives were protesting.

"They just tried to make them look bad. That's misinformation to everybody."

Iris's recommendations

- She suggests non-Native news organizations work with a local Native who can give them feedback on their coverage of a tribal issue.



Jade Begay, 32

- Diné (Navajo) and Tesuque Pueblo
- Indigenous rights and climate justice organizer, advocate, policy expert, narrative strategist
- Tesuque Pueblo reservation, New Mexico
- User Type: Avid

Jade is an Indigenous rights and climate justice organizer who works as a narrative strategist to help share Native cultures with a wider audience through stories that maintain their cultural integrity. She serves on the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council and has partnered with organizations such as United Nations' Universal Access Project, the Women's Earth and Climate Action Network, and Allied Media Projects, as well as tribal nations from the Arctic to the Amazon.

Types of media/platforms

- Radio – NPR, Native America Calling, and local news radio in Santa Fe and Albuquerque
- Digital and social media – The New York Times, The Hill, ICT News, Democracy Now!, Politico, and X, formerly known as Twitter

News journey

Every day she starts with local radio, followed by national and international news. She looks through the headlines of outlets she trusts, partly driven by her work on Indigenous rights and environmental justice. She also checks Native websites and social media feeds for the most recent news about Indian Country.

"Being Indigenous is political, our citizenship is political. Knowing what's going on in the news is important to my existence, and what is infringing upon my existence or playing a part in the liberation and the protection of my existence."

Important news to Jade

- Climate and environmental justice • Her Native pueblo community
- Domestic and international climate and environmental issues
- Data on Native people and communities

Trust in news

Jade says she primarily listens to progressive news coverage, but her trust in news is relative and depends on format and depth of reporting. "I think I trust people; I trust sources, I trust specific writers to do due diligence," she said. "It's hard to say that I just trust progressive news or whatever outlet."

Representation of Native Americans in news

Overall, Jade feels there is a lack of respect and seriousness in the news about Native topics and Native people as experts. She says that leads pollsters and other data collectors to discount Native people's political perspectives, which she feels erases them from mainstream coverage.

In June 2023, the U.S. Interior Department placed a 20-year mining ban on Navajo Nation land in Chaco Canyon because it is ancestral to Diné and Pueblo peoples. Jade says both Native and non-Native press are not taking time to properly cover this dispute or "really sit with, 'why is this happening?'" She says the conflict is downplayed as "the Natives are fighting."

"I just found myself in a situation with Navajo Times where they were reporting pretty biased information and content about their (own) administration. They seemed a little compromised, and to me that felt pretty disappointing."

Trust Indicators®

Labels

- Jade says she looks at labels.
- She tries to avoid engaging with any paid content, especially if she sees oil and gas corporations are involved.
- She listens for information about who sponsors the radio programs she listens to and sometimes seeks out that information in print.

Journalist Expertise

- Jade looks at the byline first when she reads or listens to a news story.
- She uses the byline to check out a journalist's prior coverage to see if she feels they report in a biased way or with a lack of knowledge.

References

- Jades will click on hyperlinks immediately as she reads.
- She uses those hyperlinks to vet the experts being cited or to start a search on Google.

Local

Jade stresses the importance of local journalism because it shows how something like climate change affects the people in that particular community.

Methods

Jade once called someone in her personal network to verify if a New York Times reporter on a podcast about Guam spent time in the community. She kept listening after she confirmed they had.

Diverse Voices

- Jade wants to see journalists who report about Native issues cite more Native experts and Native data.
- She also wants Native news organizations to diversify the voices they include. She mentioned one “very biased” interview on Native America Calling that “was very Navajo centered” and could have been balanced out by including Pueblo voices.

Actionable Feedback

- When Jade saw a reporter get Indigenous data incorrect, she told the reporter, who then made a correction.
- When Jade saw incorrect information about a Navajo Nation consultation meeting in a story, she sent a fact sheet to reporters.

Mis/disinformation

Jade says she thinks people are susceptible to fake news because they're discouraged from using critical thinking. She says this is a national problem, but the local Chaco Canyon conflict is a “microcosm” of it. She says mis/disinformation has been widespread among both Natives and non-Natives since the federal Department's ban.

The Department's decision means Navajo Nation citizens who had been receiving royalties would no longer get them as the oil and gas companies were no longer mining. Jade says that led to protests, where “their whole narrative was that the (Department) and the Pueblos were stealing their land ... and they were going to displace them and take their profits.”

“That narrative, that there was a ploy to take their land and disenfranchise them ... was being spun by obviously the right and paid for by oil and gas. We (Jade and community members) were able to track down Fox News articles paid for by oil and gas.”

Daniel's recommendations

- Jade suggests Native youth programs to provide young people journalism training.
- She wants to see news organizations hire more Native people and invest in training them.

“How can we get more Native journalists into these outlets and respected ... upping the bar in that way? I'm not that interested (in) non-Native people writing about Native people.”



Jerry Dunbar, 72

- Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo (Tigua)
- Elder and traditional potter
- Santa Fe, New Mexico
- User Type: Opportunistic

Jerry left his 9-to-5 job to work full-time as a traditional Pueblo craftsman. He keeps up with the news at home and abroad because what happens globally impacts the United States. He trusts foreign press more than domestic news because he says he can rely on the BBC and Spanish-language TV news to fully cover stories and not “gloss” over issues.

“American news media are not as specific or clear about what they’re talking about.”

Types of media/platforms

- TV – KOB 4, PBS, NBC, Telemundo and Univision
- Digital and social media – ICT News on YouTube, BBC, Google News

News journey

Jerry starts his day at dawn to practice his pueblo’s spiritual traditions. He then scrolls through Google News on his phone or tablet, clicking on headlines that pique his interest. At 5 p.m. he watches television news – local first, then national, then back to local. He’s disappointed by the lack of Native journalists he sees.

Jerry takes notes, sometimes written and sometimes mental, while watching the news. After, he’ll do a search on Google to learn more about a topic. He wants to get a broad take by seeing how other news outlets cover a story.

Important news to Jerry

- Land and water rights
- Treaty rights

Representation of Native Americans in news

Jerry says coverage of Native issues by non-Native outlets is fleeting and doesn’t consider the long-term consequences of issues. He says the news media sees Native Americans as stuck in pre-contact times even though “we’ve moved on. We know our land better than they do.” He says the news media also doesn’t “see us as individual people and individual tribal groups” and he isn’t sure that can be changed anymore outside of a classroom.

Jerry says most non-Native journalists report from a Eurocentric mentality, so their journalism lacks cultural knowledge and complexity. He says he’s continually disappointed that national news takes a narrow view of New Mexico, painting the state as a violent place rather than one with its own cultural offerings.

“They don’t understand that the Native people have been here since time immemorial; they don’t realize that we all have different languages, different ceremonies.”

Trust Indicators®

Best Practices

- Jerry has let local news stations know about errors, but he says he wouldn't bother contacting national news organizations because he doesn't think they would pay attention.
- When he's curious, Jerry uses Google to try to determine the funding behind reporting, especially if it's unclear. He appreciates PBS's funding transparency.

Labels

Jerry says he distinguishes paid content from news usually by a label at the end of the story. He assumes all paid content includes a label.

Journalist Expertise

- Jerry is likely to look at information about the journalist only if it's hyperlinked in the story.
- He says he carefully considers the reporter when it comes to certain topics, such as gun rights or mass shootings, to see if they have experience reporting on them.

References

After he reads the news, Jerry says he checks hyperlinked sources to see the data firsthand to figure out if anything has been left out.

News perceptions

Jerry says non-Native journalists don't understand what sovereignty means to Native Americans. If a journalist did understand sovereignty, he says, "They would be more knowledgeable about what our water rights are, land rights and rights to traditional education." He says there wouldn't be "all these issues with the boarding schools. No one would have been killing the Indians to save the man."

Jerry favors local and national news stations with "non-Anglo" anchors and reporters because while "some of my best friends are Anglos ... non-Anglos interview and report from a different set of values." He says he watches NBC News because it has a Black anchor and KOB 4 because they have more non-Anglo and women journalists. "They're trying to reflect the diversity of the state," he said. "For me, that's important because we all don't fit into this little cookie cutter."

Jerry's recommendations

- Jerry suggests that journalists start with a tribe's origin story to understand sovereignty.
 - He recommends, "Learn the area you're in. Learn the people that you're with, and get to understand them."
-



Jim Gray, 61

- Osage Nation
- Consultant
- Osage Reservation, Oklahoma
- User Type: Avid

Jim, a strong advocate for free press laws, was the publisher of the Native American Times from 1995 to 2004. As a former chief of the Osage Nation, Jim frequently makes headlines. Jim established Osage Nation's first free press law. Jim is a news junkie with a purpose: as an Indian Country leader, he needs to stay current.

"They (news media) may not be interested in knowing the accurate history of how the Osage arrived here and what we're doing now. But by God, we need to know that story from start to finish. And we need to be able to repeat it verbatim."

Types of media/platforms

- Print — Osage News, Tulsa World (specifically reporter Lenzy Krehbiel-Burton)
- TV — CNN & MSNBC
- Digital and social media — The New York Times, The Washington Post, NPR, as well as X and Facebook (specifically to follow: Osage News, Cherokee Phoenix, Indianz.com, ICT News, KOSU public radio, and journalists Mark Trahant and Allison-Herrera)

News journey

First thing in the morning, Jim gets coffee and scrolls through social media on his computer looking for news that matters to the Osage Nation, Oklahoma tribes and Indian Country. He says without social media, many stories would "never come his way." He also has the TV on silent — in case something catches his eye. Jim sticks with news sources and journalists that he's trusted for years because he knows their track record and reputation.

Important news to Jim

- *McGirt v. Oklahoma* — In July 2020, the Supreme Court ruled that Oklahoma cannot prosecute American Indians for crimes on tribal lands.
- Senate Bill 397 — a 2023 Oklahoma bill that will restrict materials accessed in public and school libraries beginning July 2024.
- The October 2023 release of the *Killers of the Flower Moon* movie.
 - Legal challenges to the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Representation of Native Americans in news

Jim says he's cautious with his criticism because he "wears many hats" and, as a political leader, he doesn't want to be on the press's bad side — a hostile relationship doesn't benefit the tribes.

In general, he says reporters do not cover Indian Country. When they do cover it in Oklahoma, he says they tend to use one Native leader as a voice for all. He says the press lack designated reporters covering tribes and that reporting is done by a revolving door of journalists.

Trust Indicators®

Best Practices

- Jim wants to see evidence that news ownership doesn't influence coverage.
- Correcting mistakes and being transparent is important to Jim. He wants journalists to get it right and admit their mistakes.

Mis/disinformation

Jim has seen a lot of controversial coverage, most of which includes misinformation. He says in some cases pervasive misinformation leads to the perception that Natives are “a bunch of Indians,” like “we're not even people.” Jim also accuses reporters of aligning themselves with anti-Native leaders, perpetuating their disinformation campaigns.

In 2020, the McGirt ruling upheld Indian Country domain for most of eastern Oklahoma, meaning those tribes remain under federal jurisdiction rather than state jurisdiction. That's a positive news story for tribal rights and sovereignty, but Jim says non-Native news promoted fearmongering by saying convicted felons would be released from prisons when in fact they were transferred to federal prisons.

News perceptions

Jim thinks Native news media is the antidote for the news void in Native American coverage. Yet out of the hundreds of tribal newspapers, Jim says only three operate freely and independently. Given a chance, he thinks tribal members would prefer a free press system. Jim says that when the Muscogee (Creek) Nation repealed its press freedom act in 2018, tribal members took notice.

“The evidence was overwhelmingly clear. Once people got a taste of independent journalism coming in their mailbox every month, they grew to like it and demand it.”

Jim's recommendations

- He says media should understand that “when you get it wrong, bad things happen in the short and long term, but when you get it right, everybody wins.”
- He recommends that journalists challenge institutions, by covering stories like the McGirt ruling from more perspectives than those advanced by the state. He says journalists should maintain a clearer distance between themselves and governments, and be willing to make state officials mad. He says it “is uncomfortable, it creates awkward conversations, (but) if there was ever a time we need journalists to do that, it is now.”
- He cautions journalists to watch out for the erosion of tribal sovereignty, which is the inherent right that makes each nation its own. Without the upholding of that right, he says, “everything is threatened ... nobody benefits from an impoverished tribe.”



Marita Hinds, 62

- Tesuque Pueblo
- Director of education of the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture
- Tesuque Pueblo Reservation, New Mexico
- User Type: Engaged

Marita is the director of education at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She is Tesuque Pueblo and currently lives on the reservation, where she once served as an elementary school administrator. She is also a board director for the Santa Fe Opera and an active member of the Santa Fe arts and education community.

Types of media/platforms

- Print – Rapid City Journal and Native Sun News
- Digital & social media – Facebook

News journey

Marita starts her day by listening to local TV news. At 7 a.m., she watches a national morning show. During her workday she listens to local radio and NPR, usually making sure to tune into local Native radio programming at 11 a.m. She plays the evening news as she transitions from work to tasks around her home. At the end of the night, she tunes into local news and a late night show, if they have an interesting guest.

Important news to Marita

- Human interest stories and art
 - Climate change
- Land issues, such as the 2023 federal deal to protect the Chaco Region from development
- Missing and murdered Native women and children

Trust in news

Marita is more likely to trust news when it uses reputable scholars and experts. She says she also trusts local coverage from ABC News, CBS and NBC News more than CNN or Fox News when the stations happen to cover something locally, but she thinks that's partly "because I've heard so much criticism about" those networks, which she says has "swayed me to not watch."

Mis/disinformation

Marita says a local magazine covers the annual Santa Fe Indian Market. One year, she noticed other Native people sharing misinformation on social media about a magazine model not being Native because she did not "look" Native: She wasn't "dark" enough. Marita says she went on social media to try to explain that the magazine does say inside that the model is Native and provides the model's tribal affiliation. "We should be celebrating that this beautiful Native woman was on the cover of this magazine," she said.

Trust Indicators®

Best Practices

Because of her job, Marita says it's "second nature" to look at who is funding what. After watching any special programming on PBS, she looks through the donor list.

Methods

She sees a difference in reporting by journalists who spend two weeks covering an issue versus those who cover issues for months or years.

Actionable Feedback

Marita and her team at the museum sent a correction after an article about a museum exhibit didn't name some of the sponsors or mention where the funding came from.

Journalist Expertise

Marita looks at the who the writer is, especially if it is a local story.

"There are some people who are affiliated with (the Santa Fe New Mexican) that are pretty reputable to the community, and they've been doing it here for years. They have that integrity of, you know, doing a good story ... getting the correct information."

Representation of Native Americans in news

Marita says the way in which Native people are portrayed in the news has changed in the last 50 years – it's particularly powerful to see more Native journalists in print and broadcast news. To Marita, the larger numbers of Native journalists improves coverage of Native topics and inspires Native youth to become involved in journalism.

Marita says journalists are still not speaking to a diverse enough cast of voices. She says they're also not sharing success stories or talking to community members, including women working to better the community.

One topic Marita says is not being represented in Native or non-Native news is missing and murdered Indigenous women. She recalled a lack of reporting about girls who went missing from her pueblo and were later found murdered.

"There's a lot of oil fracking and oil drilling up in the Four Corners, which is the Navajo reservation, where there's oil and there's a Native community. To me, there's a link there, you know, because women have gone missing there ... I don't know if this made national news."

Marita's recommendations

- Journalists should create a safe space where people do not feel forced to comment on something or to respond to every question. She says that will help build trust.
 - People should be allowed to see how they are quoted in a story before it's published to make sure their quote is used in the context that they meant it.
 - Journalists should speak to more than just tribal government sources when reporting on Native communities. She says "our own stories need to be told by us."
-

Types of media/platforms

- Print – O’odham Action News (tribal paper)
 - TV – Local news in Scottsdale, Arizona
 - Radio – NPR
- Digital – Morning Brew (newsletter), The Young Turks (podcast), ICT News

News journey

At the start of her day, Stephanie reads a newsletter she receives via email on her phone. After, she listens to The Young Turks podcast and transitions to NPR. Throughout the day, she checks the ICT News website and her tribe’s newspaper.



Stephanie Honeycutt, 59

- Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community
- Customer service assistant
- Scottsdale, Arizona
- User Type: Opportunistic

Stephanie is a customer service assistant who has worked for her nation as an administrative professional. She wants her tribal council to be more accountable to the community. Stephanie is vocal at council meetings about her feelings on what she expects them to share in the tribal newspaper.

Important news to Stephanie

- Police misconduct
- Land and water issues

Trust in news

Stephanie yearns for truth in news, but says she’s aware biased reporting exists so she uses critical thinking to try to understand other sides of a given story. She’s particularly leery of cable networks like Fox News and Newsmax.

Stephanie says she is more likely to trust news when coverage is well-researched and credible experts are quoted, such as a story about cholesterol that quotes an expert from a nutrition center. She is less likely to trust news if she hears lies or information she doesn’t agree with because she doesn’t “want that kind of influence. It’s like propaganda.”

Trust Indicators®

Best Practices

- Stephanie likes when NPR programming states who is funding it.
- She says she likes when The Young Turks mentions the owner of a newspaper or magazine or other source of information they're using.

Journalist Expertise

Stephanie likes to know information about the journalist. She listens for the names of journalists mentioned on the podcasts and radio shows that she listens to.

Methods

Stephanie likes when a story is clear about how it was reported, which she says helps build trust and credibility because it provides context.

Local

Stephanie, along with others in her tribe, spoke with a reporter from The Arizona Republic about her tribal government's misuse of gaming revenue. She says the story never made the news because the journalist relocated for another job.

Actionable Feedback

Stephanie says she'll comment on a social media post if she sees incorrect information.

Representation of Native Americans in news

Stephanie says representation is better than it was decades ago, but she still doesn't think there is enough context on land issues or racist team mascots. She believes this is because the news media doesn't care about Native people, and generally she says non-Native people want Native resources and Native land.

Stephanie feels that, due to an overrepresentation of negative news about Native people, her tribal paper avoids reporting bad things that happen in the community. For instance, they didn't report the police burning down a house and they didn't report when changes were made to how casino funds were being distributed. "It's not real if everything is good," Stephanie said. "I think people should know about things that are not good. I think we all have a right to know."

Mis/disinformation

Stephanie sees mis/disinformation as a danger to the world, especially during a health crisis like COVID-19, where news spread in her community through word of mouth and social media that the virus was a hoax.

Stephanie's recommendations

- Stephanie would like Native and non-Native news to figure out how to provide more coverage about Native people and communities across the United States.

Native press freedom and trust

In our 2023 user-centered design project, The Trust Project and the Indigenous Media Freedom Alliance interviewed 25 participants across Indian Country, from Oklahoma to Washington. The participants spoke to us about how they use news, when they decide to trust it and what their hopes are for news.

In your working group, please use these empathy interviews to design ideas that might better respond to the needs and wants of one specific person, whose profile you have received separately: Stephanie Honeycutt. Please read about the second person, Jim Gray, but do not design for him.

Where Native research participants get their news

Participants get their news from a variety of platforms. They get it from tribal newspapers, like the Cherokee Phoenix and Gila River Indian News, from local broadcasters like KPNX 12News (Phoenix) and News on 6 (Tulsa), as well as from national outlets like CNN and Fox News.

Accuracy and Sensitivity in Native news

Best Practices: Accuracy and Sensitivity

Danyelle (Oglala Lakota), a curator in New Mexico, trusts Native news perspectives across Indian Country because “there are so few of us. I know the person reporting.” Danyelle says the Native journalists tend to pay more attention to accuracy. “They’re going to make sure that everyone’s tribal affiliation is correct,” she said. “They’ll be in there asking for spellings, or if something is in a Native language, they’ll put the right accents where they need to go. Mainstream news, absolutely not.”

Iris (Oglala Lakota), a retiree in South Dakota, says Native news outlets are more effective at reporting on Native issues because they genuinely immerse themselves into the communities they report on, in contrast to non-Native news outlets that typically use the same community members to grab a soundbite here and there.

Michael (Osage), a speech pathologist in Oklahoma, values fact-based reporting from Native news media and believes they cover local Native topics more effectively, and with more context, than local non-Native outlets. “It looks like clean reporting,” he said, “You present the facts without a stance.”

Michael says Native journalists are also able to cover all aspects of a tribe, including its culture, because they’re sensitive to cultural and political issues — “They know ... when it gets too personal that (a certain detail) doesn’t need to be shared. You have to be dialed in to know that.”

Accountability in Native news

Kathryn (Cherokee), a communications director in Seattle, says Native news media needs to be careful about misinformation. She gave an example about how a national independent Native news organization spread misinformation from an alleged health expert that incorrectly told Native people they should not take the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine.

Olivia (Osage), a Native activist in Oklahoma, says it is disappointing to see instances in which tribal reporters' journalistic integrity has been compromised. However, she says she knows that in some cases, they could be fired for reporting the facts or the tribal government could defund the news. Given a chance, she thinks tribal members would prefer a free press system.

Rachel, Cherokee (Anigiduwagi), a communications director in Seattle, says she notices that reporting in tribal and independent Native news media is not always objective. In one tribal newspaper, Rachel said, "the way in which they were talking about the candidates made me feel like they actually really favored one candidate."

Stephanie (Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community) thinks her tribal paper in Arizona intentionally avoids reporting bad things that happen in the community, partly because of the over-representation of negative reporting about Native people in non-Native news.

"We need to have some kind of a news outlet that reports bad news," Stephanie said. "It's not real if everything is good. I think people should know about things that are not good. I think we all have a right to know."