

Indigenous Knowledge and NIH Research



Kathy Etz, Ph.D.

Senior Advisor For Tribal Affairs to the Principal Deputy Director, NIH
TCAC Meeting, February 25, Bethesda, MD



- Indigenous knowledge is valid and valued.
- Culture is always a part of research and thus research cannot be culturally neutral.

-NCAI

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

- Western science is time oriented, outcome driven, goal oriented, hierarchical and linear in scope, and reductionist by nature. The primary methodology is to compartmentalize the phenomenon under study, isolate it from outside influences, then make inferences from mathematical equations.
- Indigenous knowledge is more process driven, reciprocal, fluid in nature, relational, personal, vast (cosmic), interconnected, and unconstrained.

Alison Ball, 2011

Indigenous Knowledge

- Knowledge specific to place, usually transmitted orally, and rooted in the experience of multiple generations.
- Determined by a community's land, environment, region, culture and language.
- Usually described as holistic, involving body, mind, feelings and spirit.
- May be expressed in symbols, arts, ceremonial and everyday practices, narratives and, especially, in relationships.
- Held collectively by all members of a community,
 - some members may have particular responsibility for its transmission.
- Includes preserved knowledge created by, and received from, past generations and innovations and new knowledge transmitted to subsequent generations.



Source: Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada

Aspects of Indigenous Knowledge

- Set of traditional tools used for medicinal and healing purposes
- Way of being in or seeing the world



How Do Indigenous Ways of Knowing Currently Inform NIH Funded AI/AN Research?



Research Questions – Examples

- Focus on Wellness/Resilience
- Focus on the whole body, body in relation to spirit and place
- Questions of etiology often incorporate:
 - Exploration of how traditional beliefs and practices relate to health outcomes
 - Spirituality
 - Constructs reflecting intergenerational transmission of trauma
 - Community factors



Intervention Research Program

Content Examples

- Selection of Intervention Strategies
 - Culturally Congruent
 - Culturally Adapted
 - Community Created
- Integrate traditional healing practices
 - Talking Circles
 - Drumming
 - Equine Therapy
 - Canoe Journey



Research Strategy and Research Methods – Examples

■ Strategy

- Community Based Participatory Research
- Tribal Resolutions and Community Letters of Support

■ Methods

- Alternatives to the Randomized Clinical Trial
- Mixed Methods
 - Congruent with oral traditions

IWK & Funding Opportunity Announcements – Selected Examples

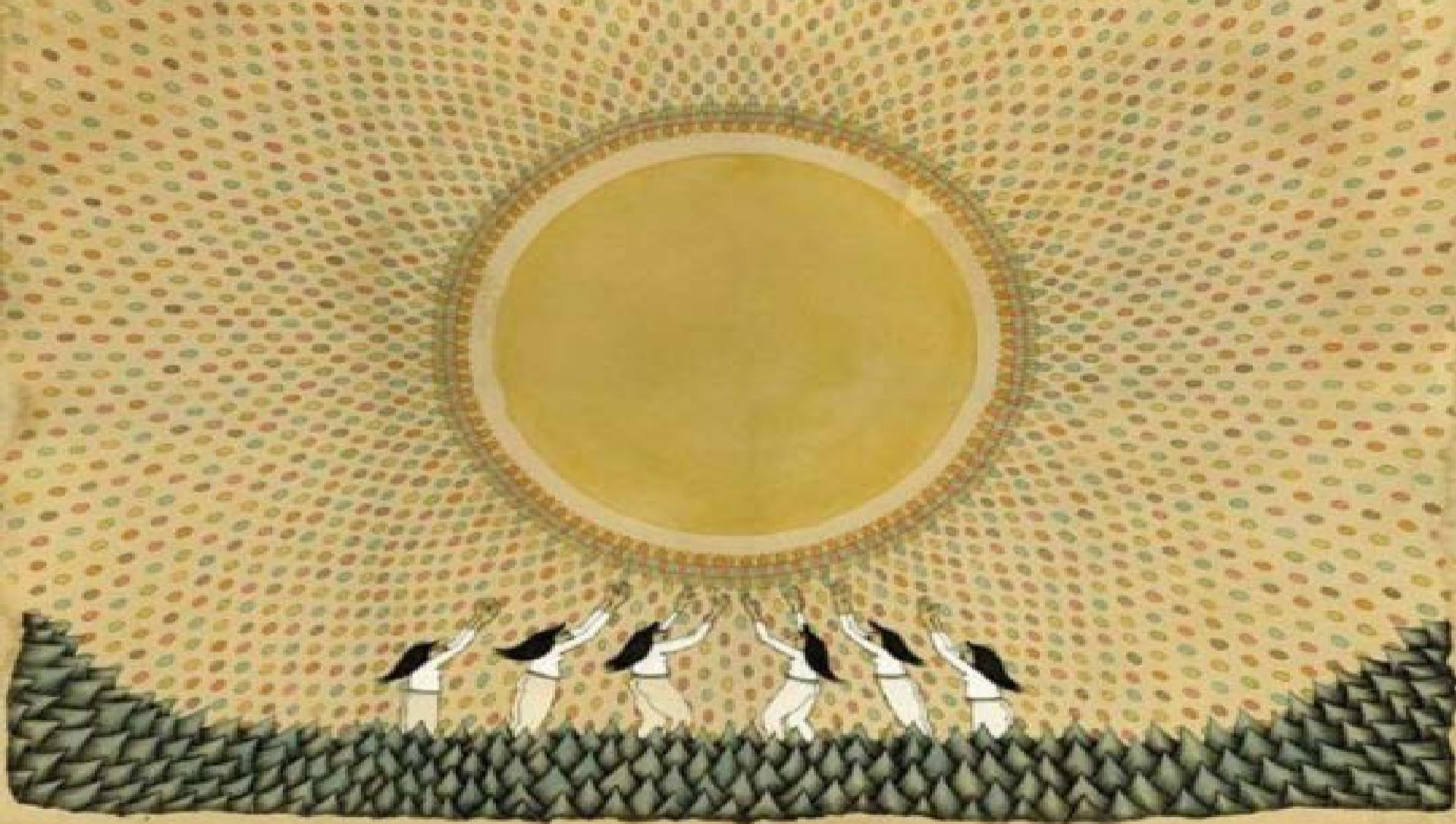
■ NARCH

- Award to Tribe or Tribal organization
- One objective is to explore how cultural assets relate to maintaining strength and resiliency factors



■ Native Intervention FOA

- Focus on community
- Emphasis on research methodologies more consistent with IWK



The whole is greater than the sum of its parts