



U.S. Department of Justice • Office on Violence Against Women

# **NATIVE MEN'S GATHERING:** **Turning Experiences into Actions**

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Summary of Roundtable Discussions Held August 15-16, 2017  
Oneida Nation, Green Bay, WI

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## Background

According to the World Health Organization, violence against women, particularly sexual violence and intimate partner violence, is a major public health problem as well as a violation of women's human rights.<sup>1</sup> Through the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and subsequent legislation, Congress recognized the severity of crimes associated with domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.<sup>2</sup> Since its establishment in 1995, the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) has administered financial and technical assistance to communities across the country. OVW provides federal leadership in developing the national capacity to reduce violence against women, administer justice, and strengthen services to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

OVW administers grant programs designed to develop effective responses to violence against women through activities that include providing direct services, crisis intervention, transitional housing, and legal assistance to victims, and enhancing the responses of law enforcement, prosecution, and courts. The recipients of these funds often work with underserved populations such as elders, persons with disabilities, college students, teens, or culturally and linguistically specific populations.<sup>3</sup>

OVW convened its tribal-focused men's gathering on August 23, 2016. As the first convening of its kind for many participants, it was also the first time many of the men could openly share their experiences at all stages of life and feelings regarding violence against in tribal and Alaskan native communities. At the end of the 2016 gathering, the men had a collective desire to participate in a second roundtable discussion. They stressed the need to continue to collaborate, engage men in this conversation, and incorporate traditional and cultural practices in their work to aide healing in tribal communities. In response, OVW held a second tribal-focused men's gathering on August 15 through 16, 2017.

This report summarizes the session topics and the resulting discussions that occurred over the course of the two-day convening. The report reviews the purpose of the men's gathering, the session topics and questions discussed, and the themes raised during the two-day gathering. The report then highlights the men's recommendations based on these discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. (2016). *Violence Against Women Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Violence Against Women (2016). *About the Office*. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/about-office>

<sup>3</sup> see footnote 2

## The second Native men's gathering: Turning experiences into actions

In 2017, OVW invited American Indian and Alaska Native men to the second annual men's gathering, which was held August 15 and 16, 2017. OVW invited participants from the 2016 gathering, as well as several new participants to stand in for participants from the 2016 gathering who could not attend. The men who attended the second roundtable discussion varied in age from their 20s to mid-60s and represented tribes from Alaska, Arizona, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Washington, as well as different organizations and community groups. The participants share a commitment to create safe and healthy communities, and a desire to help end violence against women, families and children in Tribal and Alaskan Native communities. These men traveled to the Oneida Nation in Wisconsin to describe their work and continue the discussion on what men can do to prevent violence against women.

### Planning session

The primary objective for the second men's gathering was to facilitate a free-flowing, organic conversation based on questions developed by a planning group. The planning group included staff from OVW, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Kauffman & Associates, Inc., and three attendees from the 2016 men's gathering.

During the planning group meeting for the 2017 men's gathering, the facilitators introduced the following questions.

- What is and is not working in your community? How do you know it's working? What did you see, observe, or experience to support this observation?
- What or who helped you learn what you needed to know to do this work?
- How do you provide support to each other locally and nationally? How important is this support?
- What is the work? How do we define it?
- What do we do that we no longer need to do?
- What is the motivation for community change? How do you build sustainable energy?

The planning group informed their discussion based on the recommendations developed during the previous year's roundtable. The following are objectives from the 2016 men's gathering.

- Learn about the common experiences of Native men.
- Hear the messaging Native men received as boys, youth, and young men, and learn how their experiences influenced their values, beliefs, and behaviors toward women.
- Begin understanding how men might use their influence and privilege to impact the safety of the women and children around them.

### Session topics for the 2017 men's gathering

The planning group selected the theme, "Turning Experiences into Actions," for the 2017 gathering. The planning group recommended facilitating session topics with a mix of small and large group discussions. After each break, the men would change tables to participate in different groups and engage in additional conversations with each other. The group formed the agenda around the following topics.

- **Strengths and weaknesses** – This topic explored the work the men do in their communities and how they know their work is succeeding to make change.
- **Support networks** – This topic had the men examine, as a group, who supports them in the work they do.
- **Providing support to each other locally and nationally** – This topic had the men discuss the levels of support they receive inside and outside of their communities.
- **What is "the work"?** – This topic had the men describe the work they do in their communities.
- **Addressing "the work"** – This topic focused on what men no longer need, what motivates them, and how to sustain their work.
- **Our responsibility** – This topic highlighted the importance of men's responsibility to talk about men's violence.
- **Self-reflection: Personal accountability** – This topic provided the men with a period of self-reflection before the close of the meeting.

### Opening and welcome

The gathering began with a traditional opening offered by Gene Red Hail of Oneida Nation. Gene Red Hail introduced Jamison King, a prevention coordinator for Oneida Family Services, and Kirby Metoxen, the newly elected tribal leader for Oneida Nation. Both men offered remarks and a welcome to the Oneida Nation. Gene Red Hail then sang a traditional song, after which OVW staff and the facilitators from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court judges introduced themselves.

The facilitators for the workshop were Sarah Curtiss, Program Director for Men as Peacemakers in Duluth, MN, and David Cournoyer, an independent consultant from Plain Depth Consulting in Saint Paul, MN. They explained the purpose of the gathering, which was

“to help you bring your voices, your perspectives, your physicality together to provide some guidance to others looking for answers, and ourselves to look for more answers.” The men participating in the gathering then introduced themselves.

## **Themes from Day 1**

The foundation of the 2017 tribal-focused men’s gathering was the participants’ desire to continue the ground work laid during the 2016 men’s gathering. Through open dialogue, personal stories, and cultural influences, the men committed to take action and hold each other accountable to end violence against women. Participants were reignited with fire and passion about the opportunity to take part in this national convening to discuss men’s role in addressing violence against women.

The following sections discuss themes that emerged during Day 1, comprising:

- successes and challenges within the communities,
- a system designed to fail, and
- support networks.

### **Successes and challenges within the communities**

The conversation began by highlighting what is and is not working within the men’s respective communities to eliminate violence against women in tribal communities.

#### **Successes within the communities**

The men acknowledged four beneficial practices in their communities that support their efforts:

- having a safe place for men to have open conversations and share their support for each other,
- building each other up through positive messages,
- emphasizing the importance of culture through ceremony, and
- establishing connections in the community.

#### *Having a safe place*

The men acknowledged that having a safe place for men to go to in their communities was beneficial. For example, the lodge is a place where men can feel comfortable discussing what is going on in their lives and the challenges they face. Specifically, they can openly express themselves and support each other, which creates a starting point for making changes and receiving recognition for their changes.

#### *Building each other up*

The idea of receiving recognition for changes led to a second success: building each other up through positive messages. “We live in a society where lifting someone up, telling another man, ‘I support you and love you,’ is something you don’t see.”

### *Emphasizing the importance of culture*

Emphasizing the importance of culture was unanimously mentioned as a practice that works in tribal communities. Through ceremony, the participants and others in the communities are reclaiming their traditional roles and shedding their European identities. Through ceremonies, fathers are becoming more active and are no longer physically harming their wives and children. “When we find our identity, we find that balance.”

### *Establishing connections in the community*

On further discussion of what is working in tribal communities, men discussed the importance of being in the community and establishing a connection. One participant, said, “The understanding that you can’t bring a victim into an office and expect him or her to actually open up. It’s going out, being with the people, being with our people.”

### **Challenges within the communities**

On the other side, the men discussed several practices that are not working within their communities. Two specific challenges include:

- a lack of cultural or traditional components to address addiction, and
- a lack of available, culturally relevant models and tools to address violence against women.

### *A lack of cultural or traditional components to address addiction*

Participants discussed how programs developed for mainstream populations that lack cultural or traditional components do not work by themselves to address chemical issues, drug addiction, or alcoholism.

### *A lack of available, culturally relevant models and tools to address violence against women*

Another area in need of improvement is the lack of available, culturally relevant models and tools for addressing violence against women. The men expressed how difficult it is being taught tools that focus “on people not like us,” and how tribal community members interpret the messaging in these models differently. Emphasizing this point, a participant said, “We need more models and messages that are focused on Native-specific and have a cultural lens and Native lens to it, because we’re totally different from everyone out there.”

### **A system designed to fail**

Another theme that surfaced during the gathering was frustration with government systems and the perception that they are designed to fail Native people. The men expressed their feelings regarding the system and the challenges it can pose for tribal communities. “We talked a little bit about that in our group... because it’s a major problem. We have to justify how to help ourselves from a system that constantly is oppressing us,” said a participant.

Participants emphasized the need for more resources to be able to help their families. They also expressed a need to be allowed to be who they are and not be ashamed of themselves. One participant did not hesitate to express his frustrations. “Just let us be Indian. Just let us be people in the true sense of Indian, not the white-washed history.” This frustration was fueled by personal stories from men who have watched their loved ones’ rapists get away

without justice. “I had the guy’s picture and address in my hand with the officer who just did the interview and has the evidence. We went to the house, collected the evidence at the house. That kid’s still not been picked up...Is there an investigator sent to it? No. No. Our [government] systems are constantly failing us, so that broken glass is a system that doesn’t support our traditional cultural lifeways.”

Participants further expressed their frustrations at how they are constantly being told they are broken and need to fix themselves, but are offered little to no support from the government systems to do so. “If we are going to have funding and support, let it be real support, and not all these caveats put on it. Putting it on us isn’t going to make the change,” said a participant. Overall, participants feel misunderstood by the government. Another participant, who is a domestic violence prevention coordinator from the Nambe Pueblo stated, “When we talk about these changes, we talk about these challenges. They [the federal government] will never understand what we’re talking about, and that’s hard.”

### **Support networks**

At the end of Day 1, the men discussed how their support networks taught them what they needed to know for the work they do. They also discussed who and what motivates them. Several participants discussed men attending the gathering who had been working in the area of violence against women for many years. The men praised these pioneers for their accomplishments and their leadership. They also mentioned family as motivators for their efforts. One participant said, “My three children are my motivation. One in three Native women are sexually assaulted. Realizing this helped shape how I look at the issue of violence against women. It made it real for me.” Self-examination was also mentioned during the discussion. Men acknowledged that self-examination is a difficult, but a necessary and humbling process. “If I don’t respect myself, I can’t teach respect. I can’t teach love if I don’t love myself.” Further, the men also mentioned re-education classes, fear of failure, and community advocates as motivators.

### **Wrap up of Day 1**

After completing the first day, many of the men continued their conversations while heading to the Oneida Nation lodge to participate in a sweat ceremony. The men used the topics from the gathering as the focal point of the ceremony. This spiritual ceremony helped rejuvenate the men, giving them a stronger sense of purpose to continue to do the work in their communities and allowing them time to establish new bonds.

### **Themes from Day 2**

The following themes emerged during Day 2, each of which is further detailed in the following sections:

- men’s responsibility to join the conversation,
- motivation and sustainability, and
- negative community influences.

### **Men's responsibility to join the conversation**

Another theme discussed during the gathering was the men's responsibility to talk about violence against women and actively do something about it. A common belief from the participants was that the responsibility starts with teaching youth and being role models. A participant, said, "Us, as men, our responsibility is so huge, and partly because other men, other uncles, other fathers aren't filling these roles to educate these young—this next generation—of their importance and their value and their sacredness." The men acknowledged that teaching other men, holding each other accountable, and speaking out when they see something wrong are also part of a man's responsibility to his community. One participant talked about sharing stories with men and women to show that people can change. A men's domestic violence facilitator from the Oneida Nation described his conversation with those women. "We shared with the women and gave them hope and let them know that men can change. Men can change."

### **Motivation and sustainability**

During the final session, the men split into groups to discuss their motivations for community change, how they build sustainable energy, and what they no longer need as individuals and communities.

The topic of motivation centered around identity, creativity, and encouragement. Participants mentioned that finding the motivation to continue this work is not always easy, but it can be fun. To find motivation, they discussed reflecting on their own identities to become being comfortable with oneself, know oneself, and understand what their experiences have taught them. When trying to motivate others and teach about violence against women, taking creative approaches and "making use of what you got," as a participant stated, may be necessary. When teaching, men need to be able to connect with people in the community to encourage them to pursue change.

When the participants discussed building sustainable energy, they consistently mentioned the importance of self-care. As leaders in the work to end violence against women, counselors, volunteers, trainers, and other advocates are constantly trying to help improve others' lives, listening to their stories and problems, and helping them get to rehab, which can weigh on someone emotionally. Self-care allows those leaders to recharge their energy to keep doing their work. A participant stated, "You can't provide support to others if you are not also taking care of yourself." One participant described his view of sustainable energy from a spiritual vantage point: "So far as sustainable energy, it's within all of us. It's within our belief, our creator. It's the grounding that we have as American people to this part of the earth, this western hemisphere."

### **Negative community influences**

One of the last themes discussed during the gathering was identifying what these men and their communities need to be rid of and areas that hurt or hinder them. Participants mentioned that they should no longer judge each other. Instead, they should focus on each other's positive contributions within their communities. A participant said, "We don't need to catch people doing things wrong and judging them. We need to catch people doing things

right and honoring the things they are doing right or the changes they are trying to make.” One idea that resonated with the entire group was the notion of excuses. Participants agreed that it was necessary for individuals and communities to stop making excuses. Lastly, the men felt that the tribe and elders, specifically, need to stop telling their own people that they are not Native if they do not act a certain way, especially regarding tribal youth. Specifically, the participants said they need to “stop telling kids they aren’t Native if they don’t speak the language or participate in the cultural dances.” It is the communities’ responsibility to empower the youth and teach them the tribal traditions and ceremonies.

## Recommendations

Similar to the 2016 tribal men’s gathering, the experiences and emotions shared during the 2017 gathering sparked a desire for the men to take more action and a desire to hold another gathering. It is evident that this type of gathering is necessary for men to come together and share the stories of the work being done in their communities and any personal issues they may be facing; brainstorm together about the needs in their communities; and, most importantly, bond through a common goal to end violence against women. The participants expressed gratitude for OVW bringing them together a second time and strongly suggested holding another meeting in 2018.

At the beginning of the second day of the gathering, the men reflected on the first day and highlighted the reoccurring themes they heard. These themes shaped the closing discussions of the gathering, which centered around the following recommended actions for moving forward.

- **Develop a men’s coalition** – The men’s coalition would comprise men and Native men’s programs that work to address domestic violence and sexual assault to provide services for communities and align these services with the community’s cultural understandings.
- **Incorporate tribal youth in the discussion** – It is important that youth, specifically boys, be brought into the discussion because they are the future. These boys will become the men who carry on the work that has been started. They will lead the programs and continue education on prevention of violence in the community.
- **Develop a listserv of men’s programs and contacts** – The listserv could start with the gathering’s attendees and their programs to serve as the foundation for building a network of men working to end violence against women.
- **Find multiple funding sources** – It is necessary to find multiple tribal and non-tribal funding sources to help continue the work being done. Ideally, funding sources would be proposed and awarded with limited restrictions.

## Appendix 1: Participants

### Facilitators

David Cournoyer  
Sarah Curtiss

### Tribal Community Members

John-Andrew Arndt, Belleville, IL  
Johon Atkinson, Metlakatla, AK  
Raymond Beans, De Pere, WI  
Don Chapin, Newport, OR \*  
Paul Crane, Emmonak, AK  
Robert Flores, Tucson, AZ  
Daniel Goombi, Holton, KS  
Harvey Herne, Akwesasne, NY  
Rod Kaskalla, Santa Fe, NM  
Eric Lewis, Window Rock, AZ  
Marlin Mousseau, Seymour, WI  
Jeremy NeVilles-Sorell, Duluth, MN \*  
Craig Ninham, Green Bay, WI  
Robert Okitkun, Kotlik, AK  
Jarvis Perez, Metlakatla, AZ  
Raymond Povijua, Ohkay Owingeh, NM  
David Powless, West Allis, WI  
Monte Randall, Okmulgee, OK  
Gene Red Hail, Oneida, WI \*  
Hehaka Wanbli Red Hail, De Pere, WI  
Roy Red Hail, Oneida, WI  
August Scalpcane, Lame Deer, MT  
Aldo Seoane, Rapid City, SD  
Maurice Smith, Milwaukee, WI  
Leonard Stevens, Oneida, WI  
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Jonathan Collins, Writer

\*Asterisks denote planning group members who participated in the 2016 men's gathering.

## Appendix 2: Agenda

### 2017 Native Men's Gathering: Turning Experiences into Actions

#### *Day One*

- 8:30 a.m. Traditional opening/welcome
- 9:00 a.m. Introductions (small table discussion)
- 10:00 a.m. Report back of introduction discussions
- 10:15 a.m. BREAK
- 10:30 a.m. Strengths and weaknesses (small table discussion)
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH
- 1:30 p.m. Support network (small table discussion)
- 3:00 p.m. BREAK
- 3:15 p.m. How do you provide support to each other locally and nationally?  
(large group discussion)
- 4:15 p.m. Wrap up
- 5:00 p.m. Adjourn

#### *Day Two*

- 8:30 a.m. Welcome back (large group discussion) What
- 9:00 a.m. is "the work"? (large group discussion)
- 10:15 a.m. BREAK
- 10:30 a.m. Addressing "the work"
- 12:00 p.m. LUNCH
- 1:30 p.m. Our responsibility (small group discussion)
- 3:00 p.m. BREAK
- 3:15 p.m. Self-reflection: personal accountability
- 4:15 p.m. Wrap up/adjourn