



# Good Data, Stronger Tribes: Understanding data shortcomings for Native Americans

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9/30/2025



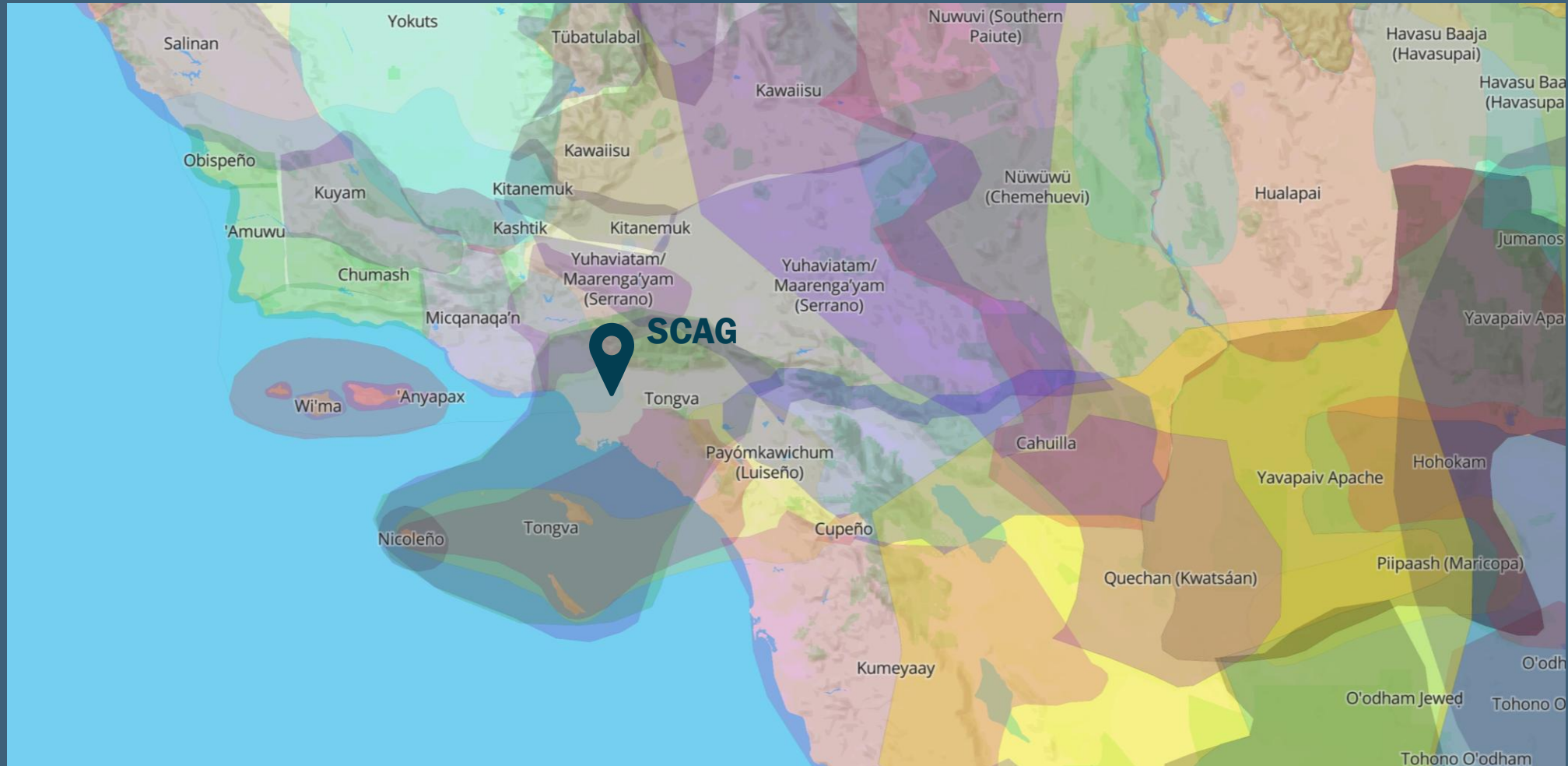
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# Housekeeping

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1. Meeting length: 1.5 hours
2. This meeting is being recorded
3. All participant lines will be muted
4. At the end, there will be a Q&A session
5. If you have a question during the presentation, please type it into the chat box or press the "raise hand" function
6. We will log all questions and then voice a selection at the end of the presentation
7. Closed captioning can be turned on by clicking "Show captions" on the Zoom ribbon
8. A recording of this webinar and the PowerPoint slides will be available on the SCAG website. We will send a link to everyone who has registered after the event
9. Please fill out our survey at the end to help us improve future Toolbox Tuesdays!

# Land Acknowledgement



# Agenda

- # 1**      **Overview of SCAG's Inclusive Economic Recovery Strategy**
- # 2**      **Welcome Robert Maxim**
- # 3**      **Good Data, Stronger Tribes:  
Understanding data shortcomings  
for Native Americans**
- # 4**      **Questions?**
- # 5**      **Wrap Up**

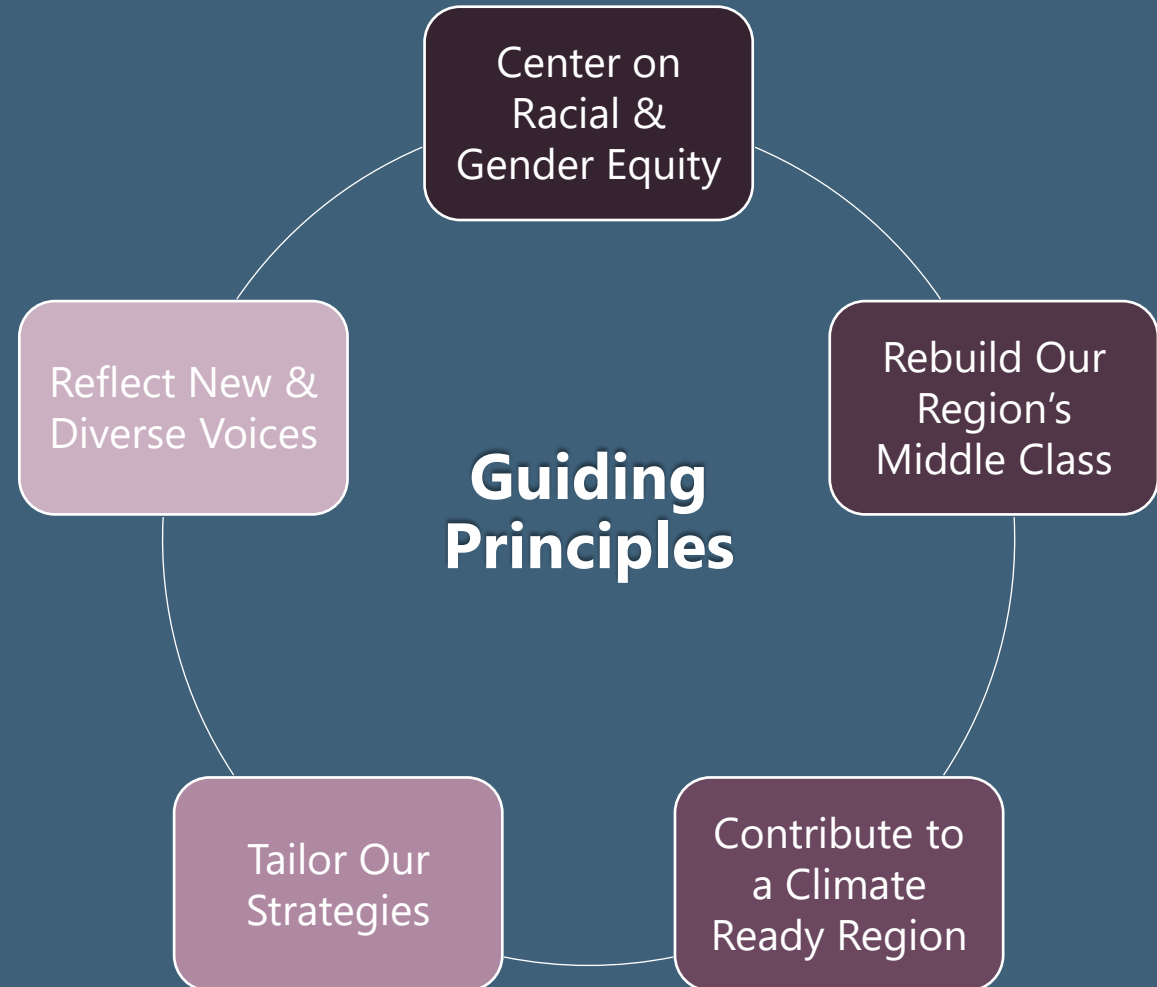
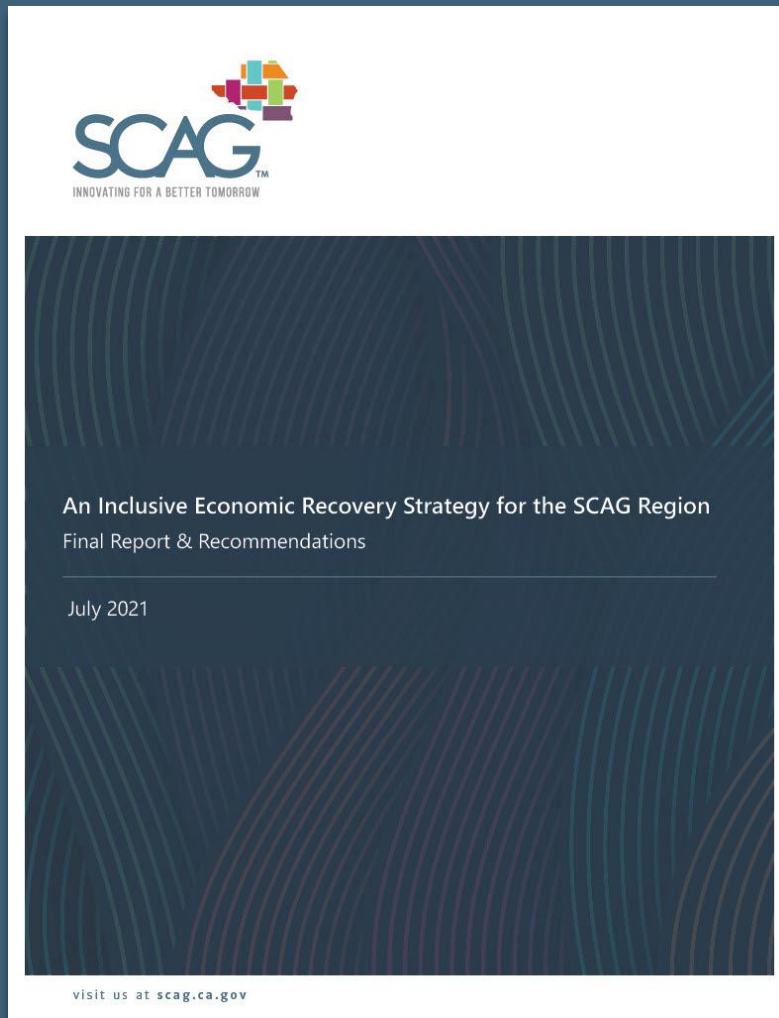
# POLL

What county are you located in?

What type of organization do you represent?

How familiar are you with data related to Native American communities?

# Inclusive Economic Recovery Strategy (IERS)



# Building an Inclusive Economy: SCAG's Inclusive Economic Recovery Strategy

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmRZESV75W4>



# Recent IERS Grant Work Products







# WELCOME ROBERT MAXIM

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Robert Maxim (*Mashpee Wampanoag*) leads Brookings Metro's work on Tribal economies.





# Good data, stronger Tribes: Understanding data shortcomings for Native Americans

Robert Maxim  
Brookings Metro

*Toolbox Tuesdays*  
*September 2025*

**1**

Background and primer on Indigenous terminology

**2**

Findings from Brookings-SCAG Tribal data needs project

**3**

Ideas for action from Brookings-SCAG Tribal data needs project

**4**

Best practices for Tribal and Native American data

**1**

Background and primer on Indigenous terminology

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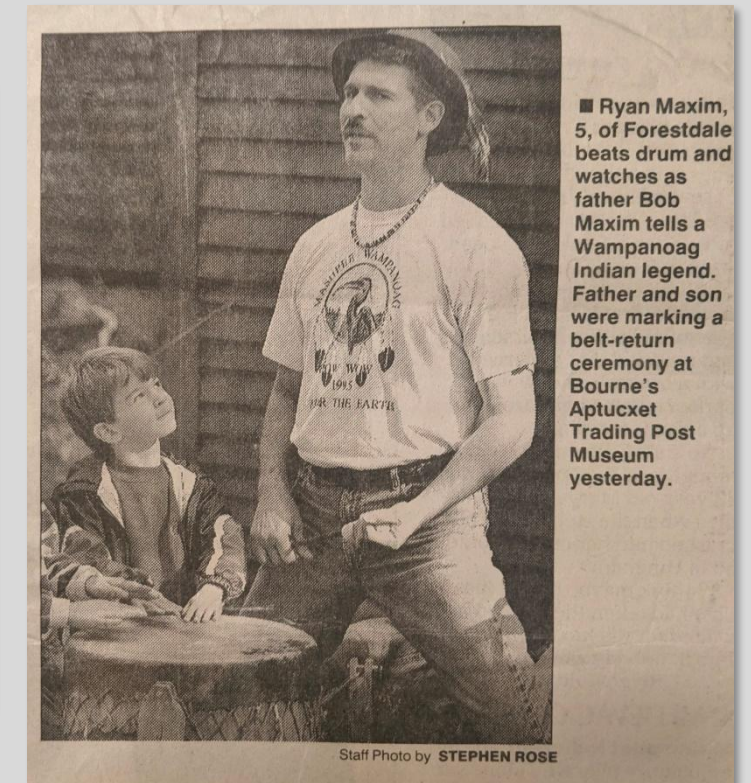
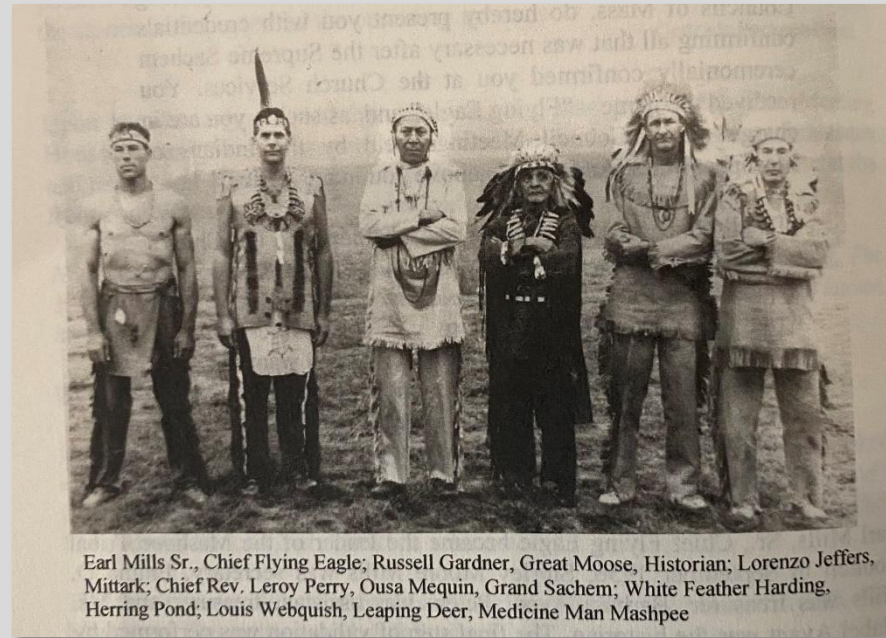
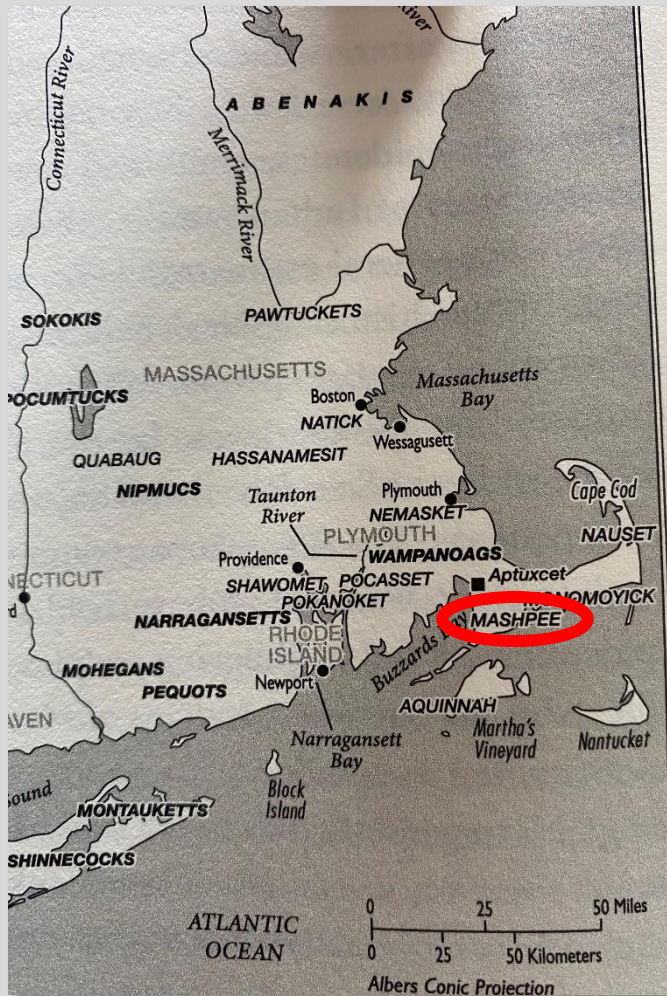
Ideas for action from Brookings-SCAG Tribal data needs project

**4**

Best practices for Tribal and Native American data



# My background



Sources: David J. Silverman, *This Land Is Their Land: The Wampanoag Indians, Plymouth Colony, and the Troubled History of Thanksgiving*; Earl H. Mills Sr., *Talking with the Elders of Mashpee*; Cape Cod Times

# Terminology: what Indigenous groups exist in the U.S.?

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# Terminology: what Indigenous groups exist in the U.S.?

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# About the partnership

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- **Largest MPO in the U.S.:** 6 Southern California counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura) and 191 cities
- **16** federally recognized Tribal Governments + **many more Tribal communities**
- **37,000 people** living on tribal lands, and **500,000 residents** identifying as American Indian/Native American
- **7** voting policy committee seats representing Tribal governments
- Premier **place-based think tank** in the United States
- Extensive experience with **data product development** focused on underinvested communities, e.g. landmark Black Progress Index
- Significant federal, state, and regional **research and policy development** capacity
- **Existing understanding** of misrepresentation of Native Americans in federal and other datasets

# Project goals

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- 1 **Identify data needs** in federal and state data for Tribes and Native Americans in the Southern California region
- 2 Explore how states and regions can better engage with Tribes and Tribal leaders to help **fill those gaps**
- 3 **Advance new approaches** for data collection and ownership that center Tribes and Tribal sovereignty



# Context: Why good data matters

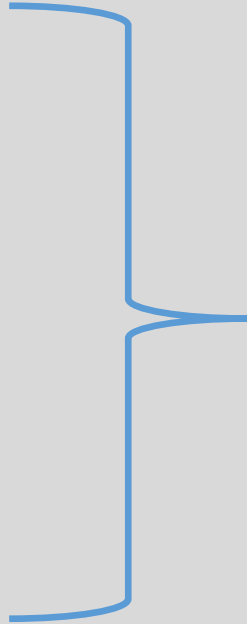
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**Tribal  
governance**



**Trust and  
treaty  
obligations**



**Economic  
development**



**Education**



**Health**



**State/federal  
funding**

# However, Native Americans face more significant data challenges than other groups

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**Small sample sizes**



**Remote and non-contiguous Tribal geographies**



**Misperception of Native Americans as just a racial group**

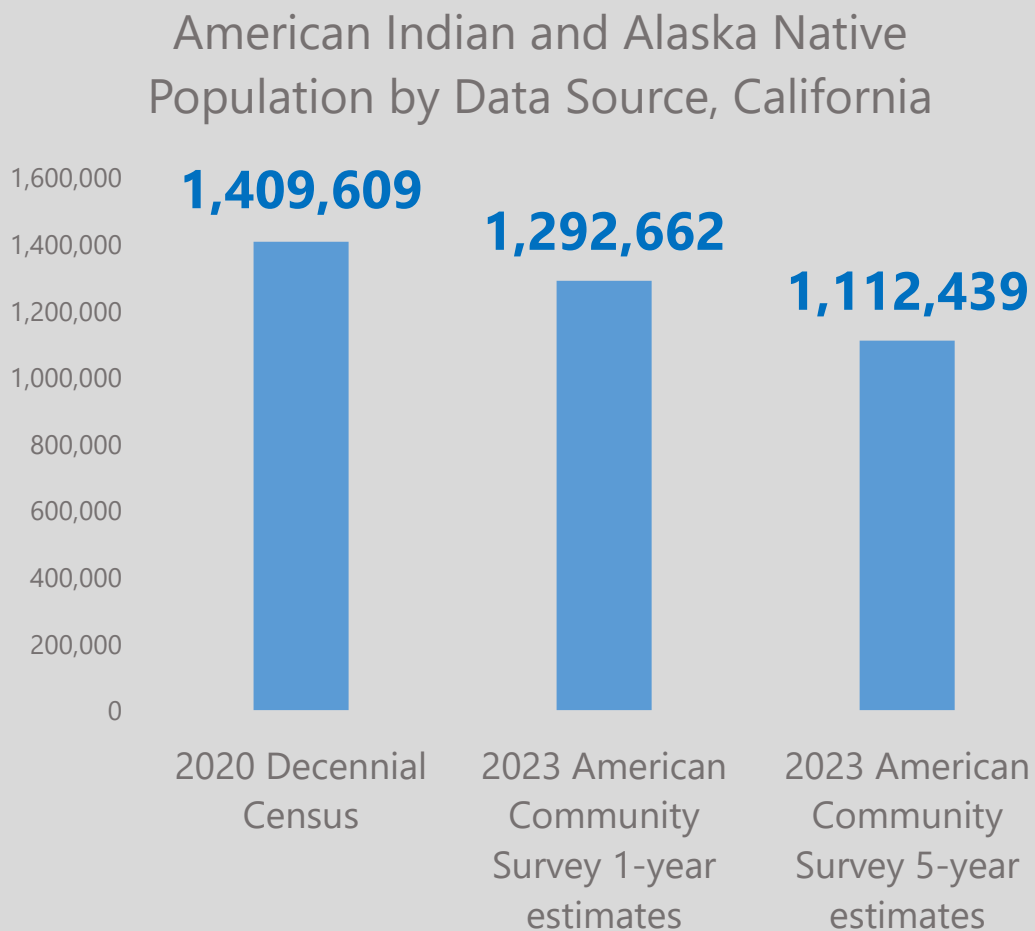


**Data sets frequently designed without Tribal input**



**Some data remains inaccessible to Tribes**

# Sample sizes for Native Americans are often too small, affecting the quality of many data sets

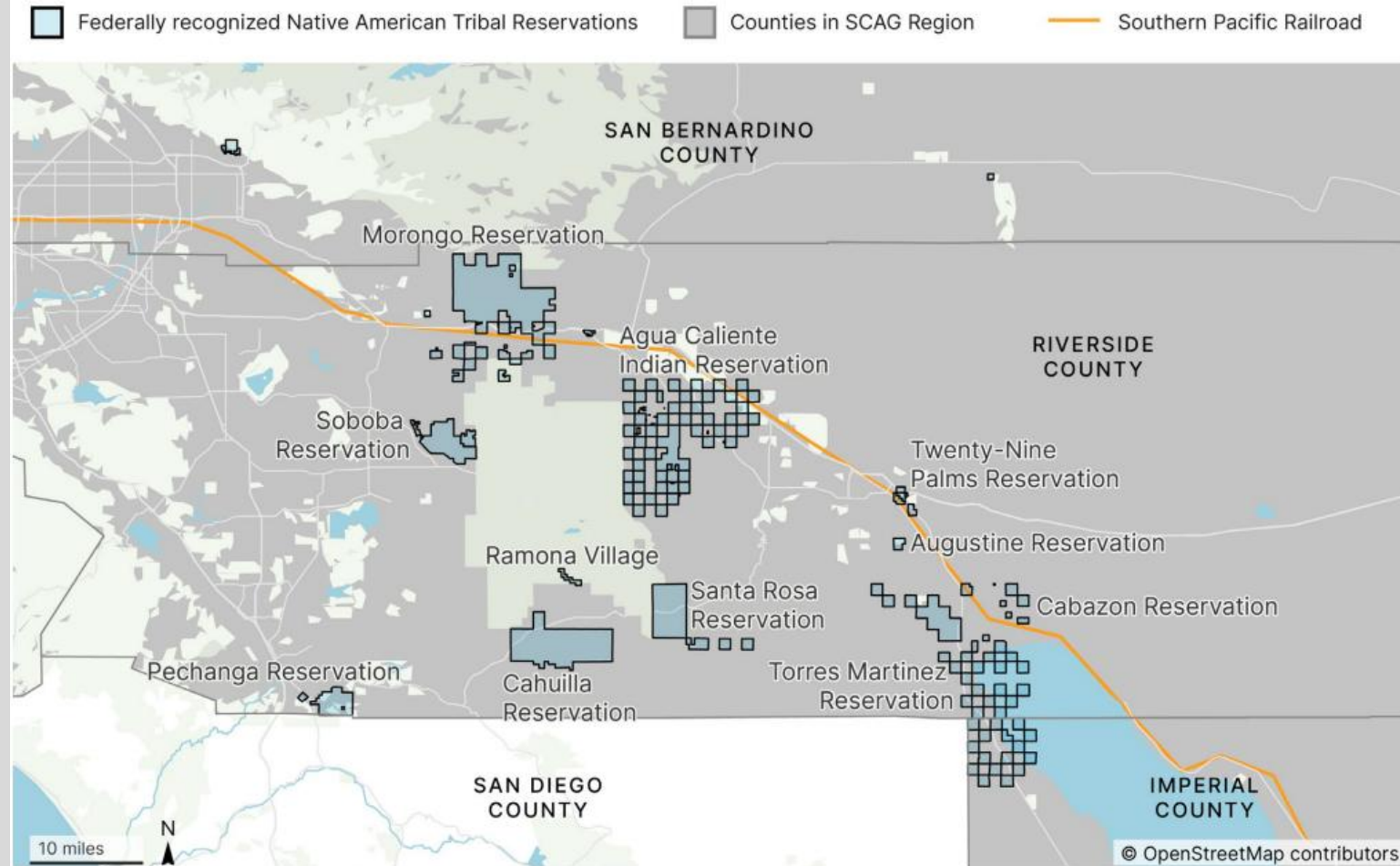


Across **16** federally recognized reservations in the SCAG region:

- 0** have 1-year ACS data available
- 3** have margins of error that exceed the population count entirely
- 2** have no population data at all

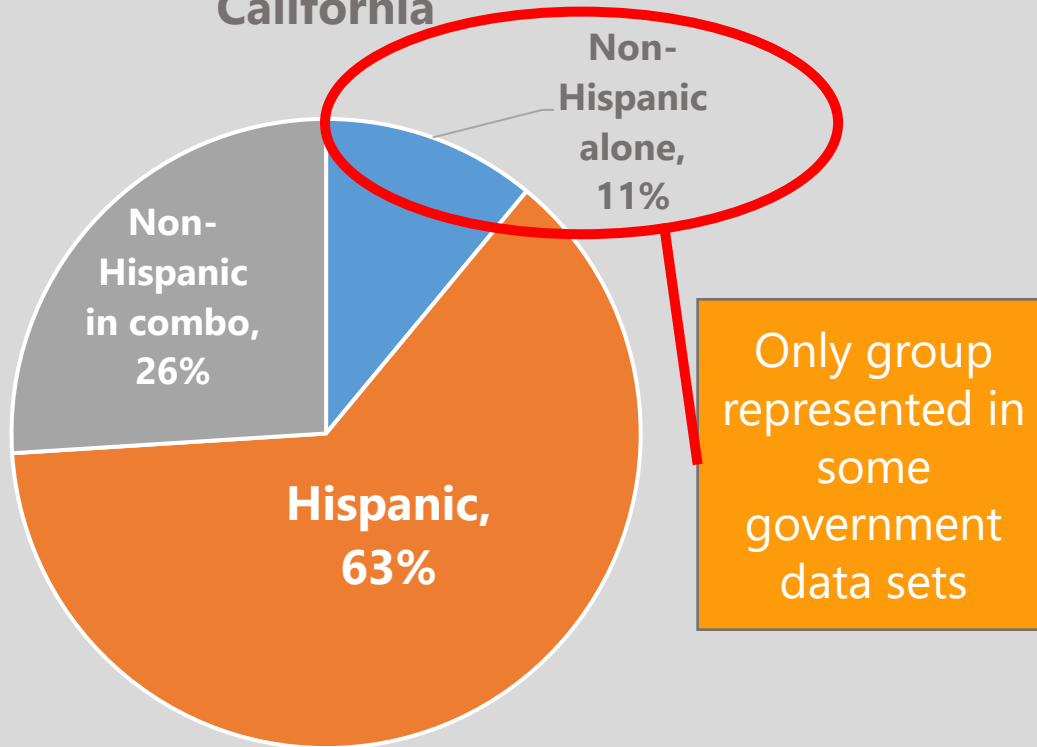
# Remote and non-contiguous reservation geography makes data collection and aggregation more difficult

## Railroad expansion contributed to noncontiguous Tribal reservations in the SCAG region

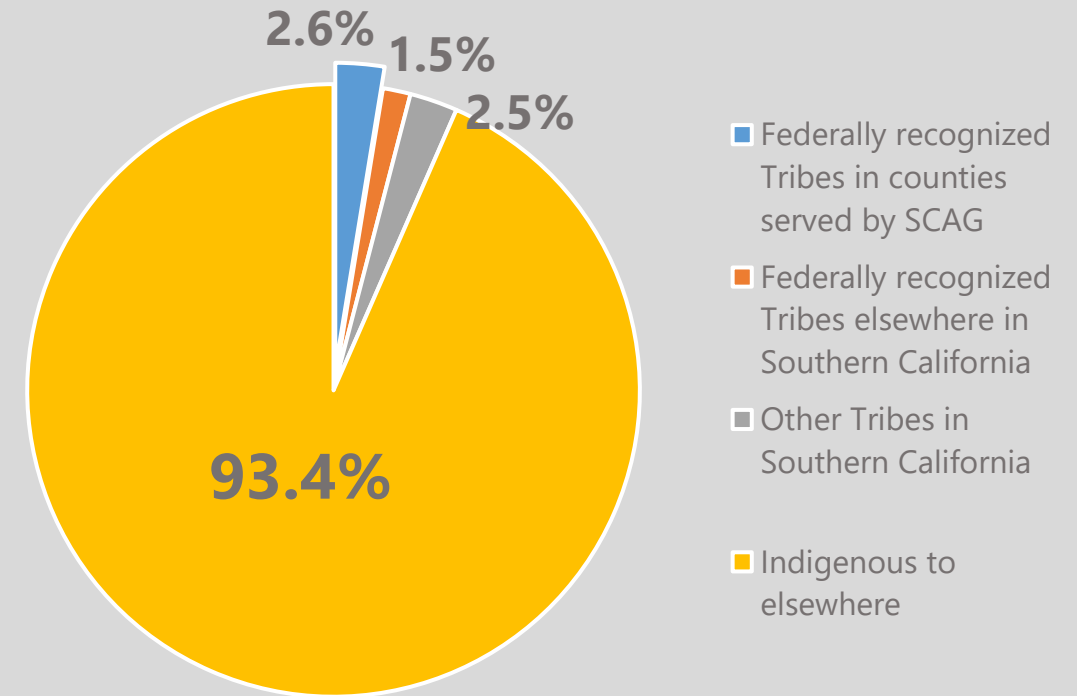


# Many data sets treat Native Americans as just a race, misunderstanding of Native identity and tribal governance

American Indian and Alaska Natives by race and ethnicity in California



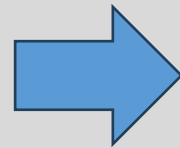
Native American population in SCAG region by community of origin



# The U.S. government definition of American Indian and Alaska Native does not align with what most people imagine

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Individuals with origins in **any of the original peoples of North, Central, and South America**, including, for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, Aztec, and Maya.



Makes data work on Native Americans and Tribal communities more difficult







# Some federal, state, and local data remains inaccessible to tribes

## IMPORTANT NOTICE: TEMPORARY PAUSE ON THE IRS STATISTICS OF INCOME DATA ACCESS APPLICATIONS

THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE (IRS) STATISTICS OF INCOME (SOI) IS CURRENTLY POSTPONING THE 2025 JOINT STATISTICAL RESEARCH PROGRAM (JSRP) APPLICATION WINDOW AND IS NOT ACCEPTING NEW PROPOSALS AT THIS TIME, WITH A RE-EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM'S STATUS TO OCCUR AT A DATE TO BE DETERMINED.

NOTE: THIS ACTION DOES NOT IMPACT REQUESTS TO ACCESS COMMINGLED FEDERAL TAX INFORMATION THROUGH THE FEDERAL STATISTICAL RESEARCH DATA CENTERS.



## IMPORTANT NOTICE: TEMPORARY PAUSE ON THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (NCES) AND SAMHSA CENTER FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH STATISTICS AND QUALITY (CBHSQ) DATA ACCESS APPLICATIONS

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (NCES) AND SAMHSA CENTER FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH STATISTICS AND QUALITY (CBHSQ) ARE CURRENTLY NOT ACCEPTING NEW APPLICATIONS FOR ACCESS TO DATA THROUGH THE STANDARD APPLICATION PROCESS. REVIEW OF APPLICATIONS FOR ACCESS TO DATA FROM NCES AND CBHSQ ARE ALSO PAUSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

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# Tribal leaders shared insights on their priorities regarding data

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- 1 Tribal leaders have a strong interest in data that **more accurately measures their populations and lands**
- 2 Tribes see data as key for accessing **federal, state, and regional funding**
- 3 **Lack of understanding of tribal sovereignty** contributes to misunderstandings about tribes as government entities

## Tribal leaders shared insights on their priorities regarding data (cont.)

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- 4 Sample size limitations, Tribal boundaries, and other challenges **inhibit the development of new data products** by and for Native American communities
- 5 Tribes **vary significantly in their data capacity** and desire for autonomy
- 6 Many current government processes and structures **struggle to support Tribal data capacity**

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Best practices for Tribal and Native American data

# We've developed a four-part agenda of ideas for action

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Robust Indigenous data ecosystem

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graph TD; A[Robust Indigenous data ecosystem] --- B[Implement data strategies for interacting with tribes and tribal data]; A --- C[Invest in tribal data capacity]; A --- D[Support tribal sovereignty and self-determination]; A --- E[Make government data more accurate and relevant to Indigenous Peoples];
```

Implement data strategies for interacting with tribes and tribal data

Invest in tribal data capacity

Support tribal sovereignty and self-determination

Make government data more accurate and relevant to Indigenous Peoples

# **Idea for action: Implement data strategies for interacting with tribes and tribal data**

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## **Regional ideas for action**

- 1. Develop a regional Indigenous data strategy**
2. Formalize government relationships with tribes in MoUs

## **State and federal ideas for action**

- 1. Create a state Indigenous data strategy**
2. Convene Tribes and regional orgs to share data best practices

# Idea for action: Invest in Tribal data capacity

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## Regional ideas for action

1. **Develop new data programs and tools in partnership with tribes**
2. Communicate tribal data needs to local, state, and federal counterparts
3. Engage with and fund local Indigenous-led data coalitions
4. Expand internships and data-focused skill development for tribal and non-tribal youth

## State and federal ideas for action

1. Fund tribes and regional organizations to enhance data capacity
2. **Provide technical backbones and expertise to support development of new data tools**



# Idea for action: Support tribal sovereignty and self-determination

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## Regional ideas for action

1. **Allow Tribes to provide their own data to access regional grants and funding**

## State and federal ideas for action

1. Explore alternatives to blanket sovereign immunity waivers for state- and federal-funded projects.
2. Give agencies more flexibility to waive grant requirements, including data requirements, for tribes
3. Increase tribal access to public agency data about their citizens
4. **Develop secure online portals for tribal governments to more easily access data about tribal lands and citizens held by state and federal agencies**

# Idea for action: Make government data more representative of and relevant to Indigenous Peoples (1/2)

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## Regional ideas for action

1. Make regional data about Native American populations more comprehensive and accessible
- 2. Encourage municipalities and other government agencies in the region to update their data policies to more accurately identify Native American people**
3. Develop and distribute model data policies for Native American-related data
4. Develop trainings and other supportive resources for local government agencies
5. Foster relationships between tribes and other governments in their regions

# Idea for action: Make government data more representative of and relevant to Indigenous Peoples (2/2)

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## State and federal ideas for action

1. Fund efforts to make existing state and federal datasets more relevant for tribes and Native American groups
2. **Provide tribes with a bigger role in surveying their own residents for relevant data sets**
3. Change data aggregation practices to address undercounts of Native American people
4. Increase the representation of American Indians and Alaska Natives in agencies that engage in data work

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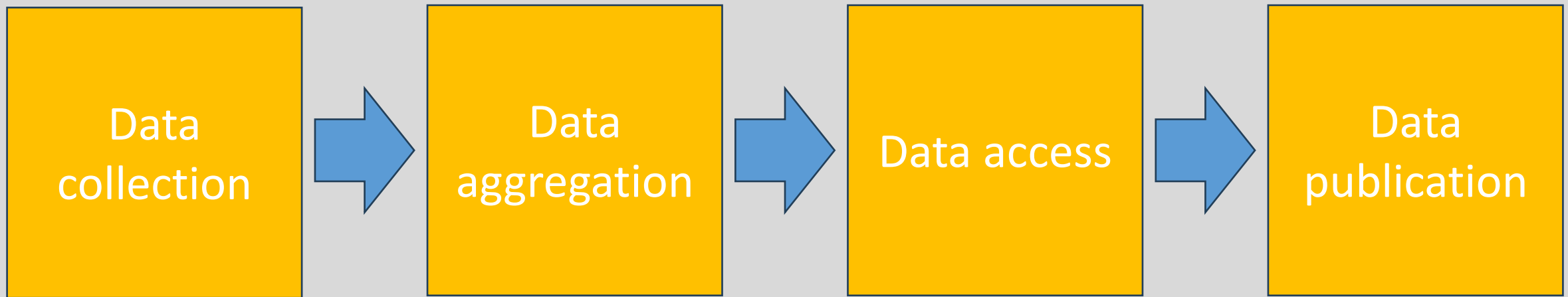
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Best practices for Tribal and Native American data

# Best practices for collecting and using data about Tribes and Native Americans

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# Best practices for collecting data about Tribes and Native Americans

1. **Oversample** Tribal lands and Native populations in government surveys
2. Collect data on **Tribal identity**, consistent with best practices
3. For private/non-profit surveys: determine Tribal data **access and ownership** before collecting data on Tribal land
4. Respect **Tribal IRB** processes where they exist



# Best practices for aggregating data about Tribes and Native Americans

- 1. Don't lump AIAN people into an **"other" category**
- 2. Use an **inclusive definition** of AIAN: include both single-race and multiracial/multiethnic Native categories
- 3. Break out **multi-race identities** where possible
- 4. Consider **other subgroups** (local Tribes, U.S. vs. Canada vs. Latin American Indian)
- 5. You can **aggregate time-series data** (e.g. 3-month rolling average), BUT it comes at the expense of real-time responsiveness

## SCAG, 2020:

Race/Ethnicity of Population			
White, non-Hispanic (%)	38.8%	33.3%	31.5%
Black, non-Hispanic (%)	7.3%	6.5%	6.3%
Asian & Others, non-Hispanic (%)	13.3%	14.9%	15.9%
Hispanic (%)	40.6%	45.3%	46.4%
Normalized Entropy Index	0.86	0.86	0.86

## SCAG, 2024:

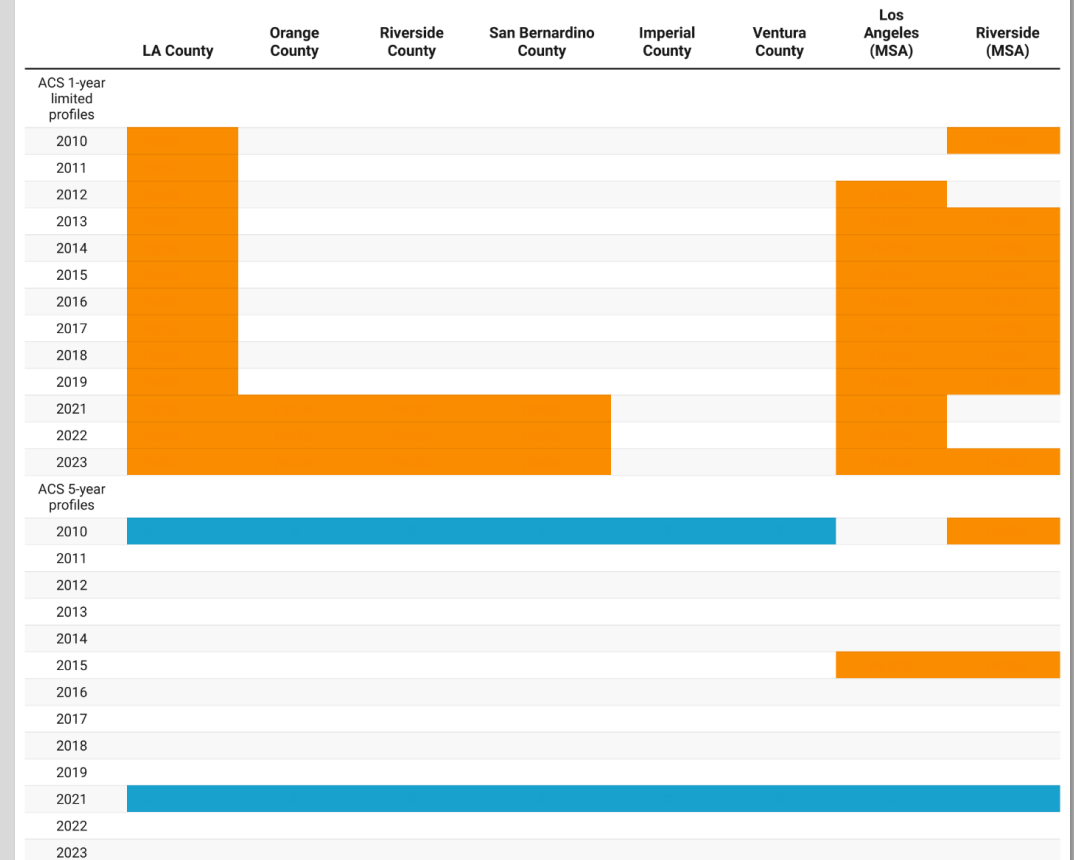
Race/Ethnicity of Population	1990	2000	2010	2019	2050
American Indian, non-Hispanic (%)	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Asian, non-Hispanic (%)	8.8%	10.4%	12.0%	13.8%	18.0%
Black, non-Hispanic (%)	8.0%	7.4%	6.5%	6.1%	4.9%
Hispanic (%)	33.1%	40.6%	45.3%	46.6%	48.6%
Two+ races or other race, NH (%)^		1.5%	2.3%	3.3%	4.2%
Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic (%)^		0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%
White, non-Hispanic (%)	49.7%	39.6%	33.4%	29.8%	23.6%

# Best practices for expanding access to data about Tribes and Native Americans

1. For place-based data: ensure **Tribal geographies** are available
2. Partner with Tribes and/or Native orgs to **ensure access to Native data** even if it can't be made public
3. Determine **existing state/local/private data sets** that may be of use to Tribes, and work in partnership to expand access
4. Government: work on a government-to-government basis with Tribes on issues of **data ownership**

## Available Data for American Indian and Alaska Natives

Orange indicates partial data profiles available; Blue indicates full data profiles available

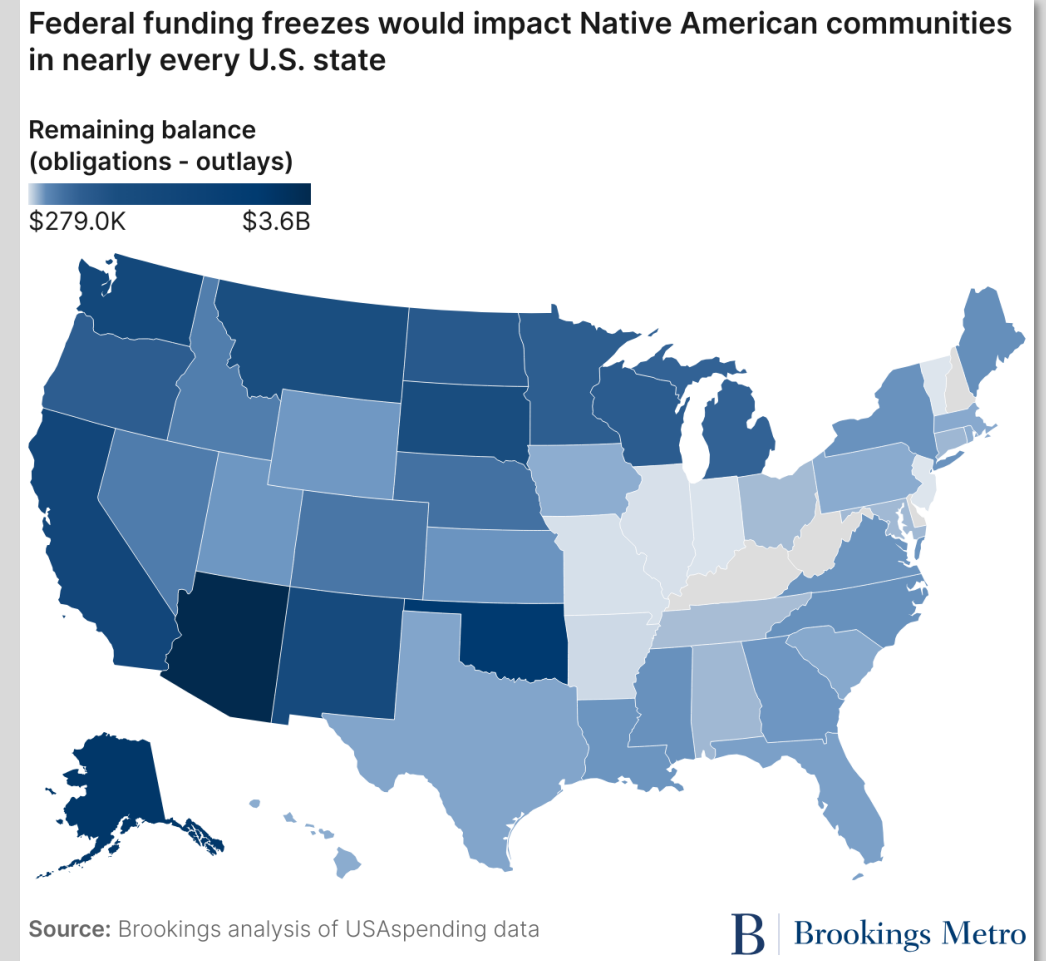


Source: Brookings' analysis of US Census American Community Surveys 2010-2023 • Created with Datawrapper



# Best practices for publishing data about Tribes and Native Americans

1. Seek **Tribal consent** and buy-in before publishing any data affecting Tribes or Native populations
2. Avoid publishing data about **individual Tribes** that cannot be accessed by a person without specialist data skills unless you have Tribal consent
3. **Aggregate data** to a level where individual Tribal data cannot be reverse-engineered
  - **State data** typically fine
  - **County data** okay in counties with many Tribes (but still a best practice to seek consent)



# Kutâputunumu (Thank you)

Robert Maxim  
Fellow

Brookings Metro

**[rmaxim@brookings.edu](mailto:rmaxim@brookings.edu)**



# QUESTIONS?

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**Please raise your hand or provide your question directly in the chat.**

# Empowering Tomorrow's Leaders In Regional Planning

Creating accessible avenues for young adults to deepen their knowledge of **Connect SoCal** planning principles, frameworks and practices, and opportunities for direct engagement with practitioners and local leaders

- Six-month civic leadership program
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- Cohort will meet once per month for six months (virtually)
- Participants will be eligible for a stipend of \$500
- Applications open on Tuesday, October 14

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# Tell us how we did!

Take a quick 2-minute survey to help us improve future Toolbox Tuesdays!





# THANK YOU!

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For more information, please visit:

<https://scag.ca.gov/iers>