

THE NATIVE PEOPLES TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OFFICE  
NATIVE AMERICAN RESEARCH LECTURE SERIES

Contact Information:

Navajo Nation IRB/Research  
Protocols

Presented by Ronald P.  
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KEY POINTS FOR UNIVERSITY RESEARCHERS  
WHEN CONSIDERING A RESEARCH PROJECT WITH THE NAVAJO NATION

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- Sovereignty and tribal law are the key concepts researchers should keep in mind when approaching the Navajo Nation with a research request.
- Researchers, whether or not they have conducted preliminary introductory field work with individuals or chapter communities, must present their research proposal before the Navajo Nation Institutional Review Board. Currently, Ron Maldonado is the principal contact to obtain preliminary information on the research process, discuss project potential, and to arrange for board hearing.
- On occasion, researchers proclaim that they've already received university IRB permissions completed and are unaware of the Nation's mandate for simultaneous IRB process with the Nation under the principles of the Nation's sovereign status, where tribal law governs researchers' activities within the boundaries of the reservation.
- Basically, geography dictates their domain, including within reservation boundaries and IHS sites within the Navajo Area Office.
- The first question the Navajo Nation or its citizens would ask is: "How would [this research project] benefit my family"; or "what comes back to me?" For example, in 2003, Johns Hopkins University approached the Tribe to test the efficacy of a certain children's vaccine. JHU's first proposal only offered the test vaccine at no charge to the IHS. The Nation negotiated two additional

years of free vaccine to all, resulting in several hundred thousand in savings to the IHS over the two year period.

- Human genome testing is strictly prohibited by the Tribe. “Navajos were created by Changing Woman; therefore they know where they came from.
- Under the Nation’s protocol, any and all equipment purchased, data collected, reports developed, belong to the tribe.
- The Board also mandates hearings before, during, and after research is conducted with all levels of the community, including for example, chapters, schools and school boards, PTA groups, clinics, the tribal council and oversight committees.
- Research progress reports are required on a quarterly basis.
- The Navajo Nation IRB has resisted developing priorities for research (in contrast to the Hopi Tribe’s Cultural Protection Office mandates). However, Ron indicated that they are reluctant to permit any further diabetes or other health-related studies where blood is drawn or other physically invasive tests are required.