

LIFEWays: Learning in and from the Environment through Multiple Ways of Knowing

Landscape Study Summary of Findings

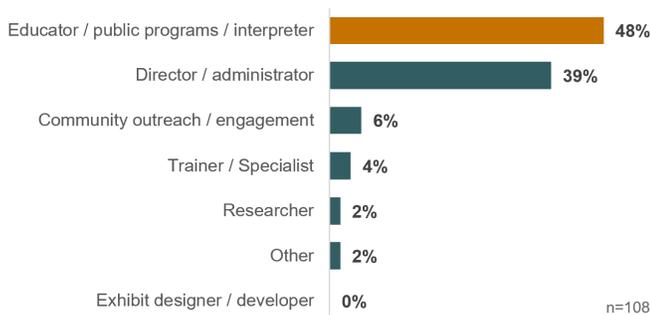
Prepared by Jill Stein, Martin Storksdieck, Shelly Valdez, & Victoria Bonebrake

Who participated in the study?

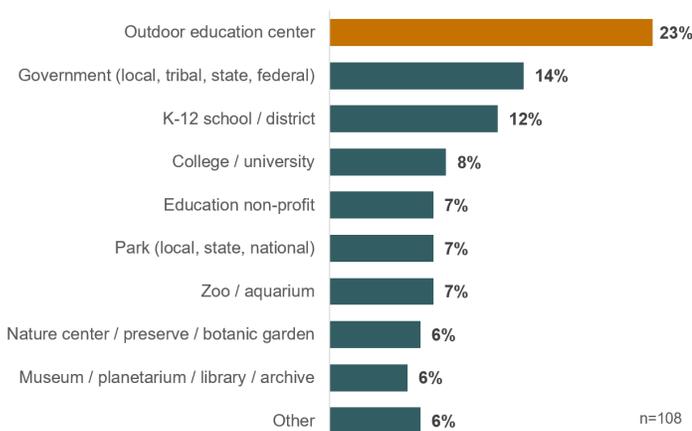
116 individuals participated in the landscape study, which occurred in two parts. An online survey was shared through the Lawrence Hall of Science’s distribution list of outdoor education sites, and through a network of National Park Service interpreters. There were a total of 109 responses. In order to deepen the Indigenous voice in this study, 7 in-depth interviews were conducted with Native educators / knowledge holders who were chosen from the authors’ networks.

Almost half of survey participants (48%) are educators, interpreters, or public program developers, while 2/5 (39%) are administrators or directors. About 1/5 (17%) are personally or professionally affiliated with tribes. Nearly a quarter (23%) work at outdoor education centers. An additional 14% work in government, and 12% work in K-12 schools or school districts. Half (50%) have been in their field for sixteen or more years.

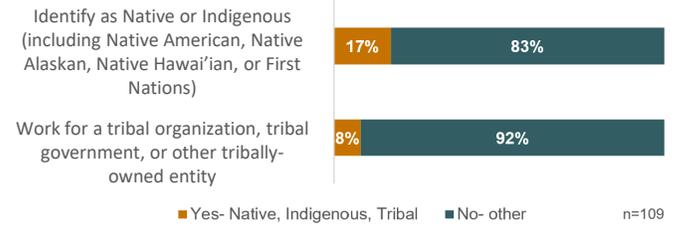
A majority of responses came from educators and interpreters.



Nearly 1/4 of respondents work at outdoor education centers.



Almost 1/5th are personally or professionally affiliated w/ tribes.



Indigenous perspectives on what it means to learn from the land & nature

Seven practitioners who identify as Native or Indigenous were invited to share their thoughts with us. When asked to describe what learning from the land and nature meant to them, they responded:

Being connected to the environment and your community across time

Putting nature’s interests over your own

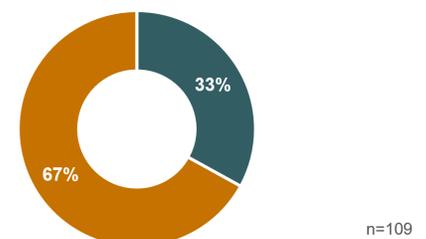
Letting nature’s cycles guide your work

Knowing that caring for the land must be done as a collective

“You feel connected to the land and your ancestors, because it’s the teachings that have been carried on throughout the years ... it kind of brings the past, present, and future together.”

The majority of survey respondents are basing their perspectives on extensive professional experiences.

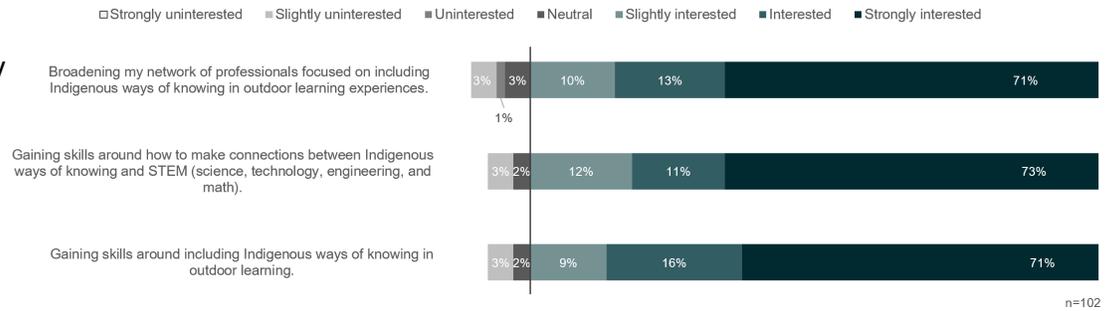
■ 0 to 10 years in the field ■ More than 10 years in the field



Wanting to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing into their current practice

Respondents ranked their personal interest on a scale of 1- strongly uninterested to 7- strongly interested. A majority (more than 70%) are “strongly interested” in all three aspects, and more than 90% of all participants indicated at least a slight interest in gaining these skills.

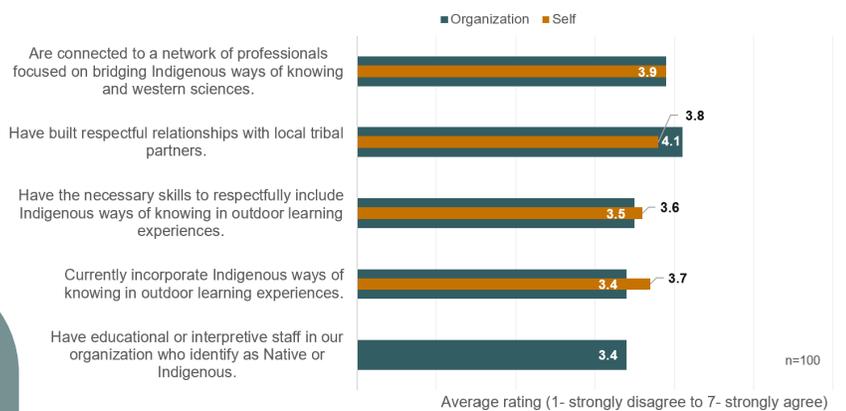
The vast majority are interested in gaining skills to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing.



Recognizing room for growth

Asked to rate both their and their organization’s use of bridging practices on a scale of 1 to 7, participants indicated low scores across the board. The differences between these scores were not found to be statistically significant.

Respondents see a lot of room for change in their/their org's current practice.



Weaving Western science and Indigenous ways of knowing

Seven Native and Indigenous practitioners shared their thoughts about weaving Indigenous ways of knowing about nature with Western science. Out of those conversations, two big ideas arose:

“Not all knowledge is learned in one school”

“Not all knowledge is learned in one school ... if you have a school of knowledge that you're in the contemporary world or you're in the Indigenous world or you're in an ethnic world or you're in, you know, whatever it is ... You've got to humble yourself.”

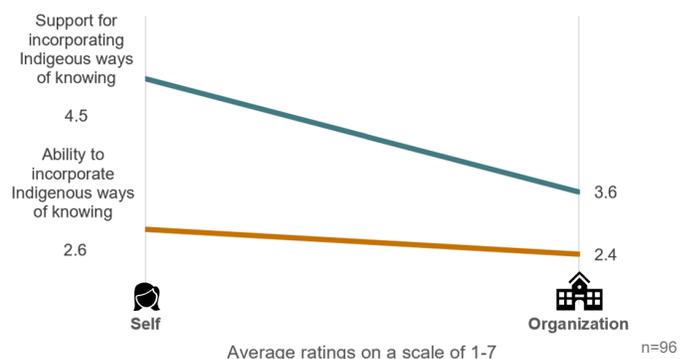
Emphasizing that Native cultures are vibrant, living, and transforming

“People just don't get enough lessons around who Native people are from a Native context. And that is to our detriment really because part of colonization is the erasure and invisibility of a people. And so, our work I believe in this era of opportunity is to make ourselves visible so people know we exist. That has to happen so that we're not [misrepresented] or we're not overlooked in the data.”

Wanting to change, but feeling unprepared

Survey respondents generally ranked themselves higher than their organizations on both support for and abilities around incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing on a scale of 1 to 7; although they felt that they and their organizations were equally unprepared to do this work. On the other hand, respondents rated themselves almost a full point higher than their organizations when it comes to their support for incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing (e.g. value and commitment), suggesting a significant gap that needs to be addressed.

Respondents want to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing but feel unprepared, and think their orgs are even worse off.



What participants need most

Participants were asked to share what they need most in order to respectfully include Indigenous voices and perspectives in outdoor learning experiences. Responses are organized here by the respondents' identity/ tribal affiliation and broken down by theme and sub-theme, along with the number of comments.

| No Native Identity or Tribal Affiliation (69 participants) | |
|--|---|
| Knowledge & training (n=31) | Starting with the basics (n=12) |
| | How to do this work respectfully (n=10) |
| | Access to prepared resources/materials (n=6) |
| | Learning directly from Indigenous communities (n=3) |
| Networking & relationships with tribes (n=25) | Finding and forming relationships (n=12) |
| | Deepening and sustaining relationships (n=9) |
| | Supporting Indigenous communities in their own work (n=4) |
| Institutional/administrative reform (n=7) | |

| Identifies as Native/Indigenous or Works at a Tribally Affiliated Organization (14 participants) |
|---|
| More knowledge and training around including Indigenous perspectives (n=4) |
| More collaboration and networking with Indigenous peoples (n=4) |
| Access to resources like space, money, time (n=3) |
| Centering Indigenous perspectives in every aspect of project work (development, programming, evaluation) (n=3) |

Core values & practices for teaching how to learn from the environment

Native and Indigenous practitioners described key practices and values for teaching others how to learn from the environment.

Learning by doing: relying on physical practice and turning ideas into action

Learning directly from elders, artists, practitioners

Letting participants' interests guide the learning

Basing expectations on learners' prior experiences

Learning from the land is a lifelong pursuit

Having good logistical support

Thoughts about supporting non-Native audiences while honoring cultural knowledge

Native and Indigenous practitioners shared their thoughts about supporting non-Native audiences in learning through Indigenous ways of knowing, while still protecting and honoring cultural knowledge. Ideas they shared are organized here by theme and sub-theme.

Project sustainability

Relationships that are mutually beneficial

Projects that can be sustained long-term

Protecting Tribal Assets

Giving tribes control over resources, practices, and cultural assets

Protecting against misrepresentation and appropriation

Balancing visibility with protecting tribal assets

Resources: Budget, staffing, and time concerns

"I think we are always concerned about that certain cultural harvester that wants to come around and try to make a living off of selling the lifeways of our people ... the very nature and promise of capitalism that is about extracting all the resources from the land, that is not the basis of what this ecological knowledge movement is about."