



film production guide

FOR NATIVE STORIES/NATIVE LOCATIONS



The State of Minnesota’s Tribal-State Relations Training on Native/ Indigenous history and government relations emphasizes that since none of us were at the signing or development of treaties that created the body of Indian law, none of us are to blame for what happened. However, knowing what we know now, individuals have responsibility and an obligation to change things going forward.

The following information will guide filmmakers and productions in their work with Tribal governments and Native peoples in and around Minnesota. Your role as a filmmaker developing these stories can help with the improved understanding and education of Native and non-Native people alike.

history/background

What we know of Native and Indigenous peoples in film and media has been documented in research by [IllumiNative](#), a Native woman-led former nonprofit whose mission was “to build power for Native peoples by amplifying contemporary Native voices, stories, and issues to advance justice, equity, and self-determination.” [IllumiNative’s research](#) provides a comprehensive view into Native entertainment media, including ways to change perceptions, and an entry into public policy to improve equity and inclusion and support solutions to promote Native communities moving forward.

As of 2026, there are 575 federally recognized Tribes and over 100 state-recognized Tribes in the U.S. There are eleven (11) federally recognized Tribes that share geography with Minnesota ([Find a map here](#)):

- [Bois Forte Band of Chippewa/Zagaakwaandagowiniwag](#)
- [Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa/ Nah-gah-chi-wa-nong](#)
- [Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa/ Gichi-Onigaming](#)
- [Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe/ Gaa-zagaskwaajimekaag](#)
- [Lower Sioux Indian Community/Ćansa’yapi Oyáte](#)
- [Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe/ Misi-zaaga’iganiing](#)
- [Prairie Island Indian Community/ Tínta Wíta Oyáte](#)
- [Red Lake Nation/ Miskwaagamiiwi-Zaagaiganing](#)
- [Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community/ Šákpe Bdewákhanthunwan](#)
- [Oyate \(Upper Sioux Community\)/ Pežihutazizi K’ápi Oyáte](#)
- [White Earth Nation/ Gaa-waabaabiganikaag](#)

To better understand American Indian treaties, one can compare them to treaties in international law. When one sovereign, like France or England, makes an agreement/contract with another country for things like recognizing boundaries, nuclear weapons, or climate change it is called a treaty. In the case of the relationship between United States and the Tribal Nations, treaties were made to take land from the Indian nations in exchange for goods or services. There was a total of 374 treaties made between the United States and the Tribal Nations and 10 specific to Minnesota.

LEARN MORE

- [“What is Tribal Sovereignty?”](#) Native Governance Center
- [“Tribal Sovereignty Explained”](#) – Crash Course Native American History

Given this history, one can understand why Tribes continue to educate all people about Tribal sovereignty and Tribal citizenship as a political classification and not simply a racial one. Tribal citizens may be racially different from people of European descent but that is not their full identity. They are citizens of their Tribal Nation as well as citizens of their state and of the United States.

depiction considerations

for Tribal nations and Indigenous peoples' stories

IllumiNative's founding research "[Reclaiming Native Truth](#)" provides significant insights into how productions can work with Native peoples to "shift the public narrative and create societal change leading to more opportunities for Native peoples." Below are key points to consider as you develop your project. We encourage you to review the research findings to deepen your understanding of the Native American experience.

- Contemporary Native voices are largely absent from mainstream systems and media, leading to outdated stereotypes and misunderstandings—but exposure to accurate, Native-led stories can quickly shift perceptions.
- Non-Native narratives often focus on deficit and misinformation—especially around government benefits and casinos—reinforcing harmful stereotypes that can be countered through more balanced, Native-informed perspectives.
- Native peoples are frequently misrepresented as a single, homogenous group, when in reality they are citizens of distinct Tribal Nations with unique cultures—making it essential to engage tribally specific perspectives.
- Bias toward Native Americans varies by region and is often shaped by proximity and limited interactions, which can reinforce narrow or negative perceptions—underscoring the importance of informed, respectful engagement.
- Americans often hold conflicting stereotypes about Native Americans simultaneously—both positive and negative—highlighting the need for more accurate, nuanced portrayals.
- Many Americans recognize that education about Native history and culture is inaccurate or insufficient, creating an opportunity for more truthful, inclusive storytelling.
- In Minnesota, the legislature recently passed "Indigenous Education for All" which will ensure that K-12 schools will teach a curriculum designed and written by Natives on the history and culture of Natives that share geography with Minnesota. Some State of Minnesota employees are mandated and encouraged to take [Tribal State Relations Training \(TSRT\)](#).
- While people acknowledge historical harm against Native Americans, they often underestimate its scale and ongoing impacts. Learning accurate history increases understanding and support for Native communities.
- Research shows that effective narratives center Native strengths, culture, and contemporary voices while respecting tribal distinctions—pointing filmmakers toward more authentic storytelling approaches
- Native-themed mascots and caricatures remain a common but harmful form of representation, reinforcing bias and negatively impacting Native communities.
- Although Native Americans are often associated with strong cultural values and resilience, their economic contributions and modern community impacts are frequently overlooked.
- People interpret Native issues through deeply held values like fairness and unity, making it important to frame stories in ways that align with these values while avoiding oversimplification or erasure.
- There is broad public support for many Native issues—from funding and land protection to more accurate education—indicating meaningful opportunities for storytelling to align with and build on this support.

We encourage filmmakers and their cast/crew to [read the full research report](#) for more information.



Native representation in entertainment

IllumiNative developed a resource, “The Time is Now: The power of Native representation in entertainment,” to serve as a guide for industry professionals. Key points are summarized below. Production cast and crew are encouraged to [review the guide](#) in full.

- Native peoples are consistently underrepresented or misrepresented in entertainment, and increasing accurate visibility is essential to combating bias and systemic racism. Below is a consolidated list of subject matter to consider avoiding:
 - » Having non-Native actors depict a Native character
 - » The use of made-up or unrelated languages to depict specific Tribal languages
 - » The use of non-specific and ambiguous Tribal identities
 - » Relying on magical, mystical Indian stereotypes and/or one-dimensional characters that rely on stereotypes that misrepresent Indigenous peoples
 - » Over-sexualized representation of Native people
 - » Unnecessary and graphic depictions of violence against Native peoples
- We encourage productions to:
 - » Bring in Native consultants at the beginning and throughout the development process
 - » Include Native creatives, cast, crew, etc. as much as possible in the process
 - » Avoid cultural appropriation (see above)
 - » Combat negative stereotypes and myths
 - » Understand and respect cultural protocols



protocols

If you plan to film on Tribal land, use Minnesota Tribal stories or characters, or use references to Tribal spaces in Minnesota, please be aware and abide by the following protocols.

- Every Tribe is a [unique government](#) and have distinct protocols. Tribal Nations should be treated independently from one another.
- Explore Minnesota Film and the Explore Minnesota Tribal Liaison will connect you with media contacts at the Tribe(s).
- Please be respectful when working with Tribes and Tribal Leadership. Practice active listening, respect the location and the land.
- Be open-minded and flexible and make the Tribes' requests and recommendations a priority for your project.
- Engage the Tribe(s) early, often, and respectfully throughout the filming process from initial ideas to final wrap.
 - » Early discussions allow Tribal leadership adequate time to review the request and involve community partners, if needed.
- Please be patient with Tribes as their decision-making processes may include many Tribal members and groups. Don't be afraid to follow up if you have not heard back within two to three weeks.
- If possible, include the Explore Minnesota Tribal Liaison in communications to help expedite requests.
- Depending on the project and level of engagement, you may be asked to provide regular updates to a Tribal Council.
 - » If meeting in person, offer to bring gifts/swag or ask whether a traditional offering is appropriate (tobacco, sweetgrass, cedar, sage).
 - » Always ask the Tribal staff whether bringing snacks is appreciated. Having food at face-to-face meetings is customary.
 - » Unless told otherwise, please address Tribal leaders and staff with respect – greeting them with their titles (e.g., President, Chairwoman, Secretary/Treasurer, Director, etc.”).
- Each Tribe in Minnesota has a Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) – likely one of the people Tribes may provide for media/film to contact. Connect with the THPO as you get to know Tribal staff and leadership.

- Ask the Tribe for their vendor list for media/film if they have one to help guide your Native hiring. Aim to hire Native staff for your project – writers, PA's, caterers, camera crew, editors, graphic artists, costume makers, makeup artists, set design, and executive-level positions, etc., should all be part of Tribal member hiring for your project.
 - » Consider creating free opportunities for Natives and Tribal members to learn the film/TV trade.
- Provide fair compensation and credit to all Native staff and consultants, especially those with lived experience keeping cultural knowledge.
- Book scouting appointments with Tribal staff designated by Tribal Leadership.
 - » You may be asked to leave if you veer off the designated route to view areas that have not been approved. Please be respectful and leave an area, if requested.
- Take the initiative to learn more about Native history and Tribal culture (specific to the Tribe you are working with).
- Take recommendations made by Tribal Leaders seriously, especially when it comes to the following topics:
 - » Regalia (traditional, ceremonial, and cultural attire) — Regalia, or traditional, ceremonial, and cultural attire, of Native peoples are not costumes. When looking to incorporate the use of traditional attire, it is important to include Native creatives, consultants, or Native elders to understand if it is appropriate.
 - » Native languages and traditional names — Native languages are an important and integral part of Native cultures. Accuracy and specificity are paramount when including Native languages or names and can only be gained when working with language experts who can advise, correct, or translate to the specific language you are portraying.
 - » Sacred objects and Totems — Sacred objects and Totems are representations of sacred spirits and beings that are part of Native cultures. A general rule is to not use these objects and if you must, please consult with Tribal leaders/staff on proper use.
 - › Land use — There will be land on and off the reservation that has sacred and spiritual meaning to a Tribe. Connect with Tribal contacts to ensure you respect and observe proper land use.



consider best practices

Please consider adding the following to your interactions and contracts with the Tribes that share geography with the state of Minnesota.

- Implement Best Practices Guidelines for your production, such as:
 - » Prepare for location fees for filming on Tribal land, especially for areas of cultural significance or environmental sensitivity.
 - » It is strongly encouraged that production staff who have regular contact with Tribes, participate in training that covers local customs, significant historical contexts, and respectful cultural protocols. Always defer to the Tribe's specific training.
 - > In the alternative, [Crash Course Native American History](#), offers a good basis of understanding. Recommended episodes 1–5, 8, 10–17, 20, 22, 23.
 - > Direct all interactions with Tribal leadership through designated channels.
 - > Request signoffs on scripts involving native languages, cultural events, or depictions of ceremonies.
 - > Fully vet production leadership staff and any staff working with children and/or vulnerable adults. The Tribe may require cast/crew background checks if there is close contact with Tribal minors and/or vulnerable adults.
 - > Seek feedback after filming. Assess the Tribe's satisfaction with how their land was used and suggest improvements for future collaborations.
- When contract negotiations commence, offer a collaborative approach.
 - » Emphasize a willingness to work together to meet the Tribe's needs while respecting production constraints.
 - » Provide a transparent outline of the production's size, scope, and expected impact on the land and community.
 - > Include specifics like anticipated duration, crew size, equipment, and any potentially intrusive elements (e.g., nighttime lighting, large props).
 - > Be prepared to explain project details in person, if requested.
 - > Allow two weeks to a month, depending on the Tribe, to review requests.
 - > Be prepared to be asked for budget information and have a plan on what you can share, if requested.
 - > Demonstrate how location fees are calculated to show good faith and prevent misunderstandings.
 - > Approach these conversations with cultural sensitivity and awareness, recognizing the Tribe's sovereignty and unique protocols.

- Create a comprehensive written contract that clearly specifies the following:
 - » Fee structures (flat rate, daily, percentage of budget, etc.).
 - » Payment schedules (e.g., initial deposit, post-filming balance).
 - » Expectations for land restoration and clean-up costs.
 - » Any additional costs for providing local staff, resources, or Tribal oversight during production.
 - » Consider language examples like these to include in your contract:
 - > “All filming locations will be restored to their original condition within [X days]. Restoration costs beyond the agreed amount shall be borne by the production company.”
 - > “The Tribe will receive a [flat fee of \$X] or [% of gross production budget] for use of the specified Tribal property, payable in two installments: [X% upfront upon signing] and [X% after the project concludes].”
 - > Include community benefits beyond fees. Offer other tangible benefits (e.g., using Tribal-owned businesses for services, contributing to community funds or providing training to Tribal members interested in the film industry).
 - > Promoting public acknowledgment of Tribal participation in press releases and media marketing to elevate the visibility of their culture.
 - > Submit a detailed report to Tribal councils post-filming, including how Tribal resources were utilized and the economic impact generated.

If you have further questions about this guide, please contact mnfilm.EMN@state.mn.us or Dawn Blanchard, Tribal Liaison, 651-757-1850 or dawn.blanchard@state.mn.us.

photo credits

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