

## 11. Protocol and Etiquette

*Protocol:* a code prescribing strict adherence to a correct etiquette or precedence.

*Etiquette:* the forms prescribed by authority to be observed in social or official life.

### 11.1 General Preparation Guidance for Visiting or Working in Rural Alaska

Be prepared for distinct cultural differences. Depending upon where you go, expect to see or experience the following:

- Poverty and lack of sanitation in some areas, outhouses and honey buckets – about 130 villages do not have running water or sewer systems.
- Native foods – depending on the time of year, you may see meat or fish drying on racks. Some of the odors will be unusual. Do not react in a negative manner, verbally or in expression, to different foods.
- Walking, waiting, silence – hear a lot of silence
- Review literature on the community you will visit. Published material and website can provide valuable information. Check out the state’s community database on its website [www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CF\\_COMDB.htm](http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CF_COMDB.htm).
- Find out which governing body has the leadership role concerning your assigned task. Some of the villages have dissolved their municipal governments. In such cases, you will work with the local tribal government. Always contact the local tribal government to let them know your plans to do business in their area.
- Ask if you need to hire an interpreter. This will be an area-specific concern. To locate these services across the state, contact the respective regional corporation and/or the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage.
- Advance contact should be made with all parties. Send a letter stating who will be traveling to the area, the dates of the visit, and the specific purpose. Send maps and/or appropriate information in advance of your trip to allow time for meeting preparation. Be specific about the information or help you are requesting. Ask parties to identify any traditional leaders or practitioners that should be notified. Call at least two days before your trip to confirm your plans. If a meeting is not in your plans, ask if they need one.
- Plan your logistics, including travel, lodging and food. If commercial lodging is not available, you may be able to make arrangements to sleep in the school, community hall, or locally used federal facility. You should always bring a sleeping bag, any medications you need, and an emergency food and water supply (always be prepared in case you are stranded by inclement weather). Know where to get treated water. Bring your own toilet

needs. If you have extra supplies when your mission is complete, contact the local tribal office about leaving the extras with a charitable organization in the village.

- Check the land status and do not trespass. Much of the land is privately owned.
- Check the weather forecast and bring appropriate outer wear. You may need rubber boots, rain gear, and insect repellent.
- Dress casually; no ties, high heels, or umbrellas.
- Know which villages practice search and seizure procedures for drugs and alcohol. Do not attempt to bring inappropriate items to rural villages.
- Churches are very important in some villages. Leave your religious preferences behind.

## 11.2 Timing

- Be aware of perceptions of time. Remind yourself that “time” is a western concept. You may have a more difficult time finding individuals to work with at certain times of the year. Find out the seasons for fishing, berry picking, hunting, migratory bird hunting/egging, and the local seasons for harvesting land animals.
- Schedule business meetings in the afternoon and any community meetings in the evening. Prepare to stay as long as you are needed. Most people do not like to make snap decisions.
- Know that all activities and meetings could be postponed without notice because of subsistence activities or tragic events.

## 11.3 Protocol: Practical information to help you work with Alaska Native communities:

- Work with the tribes. Even if your business is with the ANCSA corporation, make contact with the tribal official. Tribes expect a significant level of consultation on all issues which relate to their members or indirectly affect their use of subsistence resources.
- Not all Alaska Native people have adjusted to the changes created by the ANCSA and ANILCA, and you will hear some opposition. Listen, but remain neutral.
- Recognize there are cultural differences which can have a negative impact on communication. Respect these differences. You have your own communication style unique to you. Realize that each Alaska Native community will have a slightly different communication style and method and respect those differences.
- Many Alaska Natives appear to be bashful and some may not make eye contact with you right away. In some areas, if you do not make eye contact, they may believe you are not

telling the truth and are not to be trusted. In other areas, if you make too much eye contact, you may be perceived as too aggressive or demanding. Learn about the area you plan to visit.

- Greet people. Get acquainted. Walk around. Go to the post office or local store. Get to know the people before you begin your business. Tell people who you are, where you're from, and why you are in their village. When you willingly talk about your family you establish yourself as a family person. Everyone has family. Be courteous to others, including the children. Be honest. Avoid jokes. Humor tends to be subjective. If you are invited to share a meal or a steambath, accept it as an honor. If you are invited for a boat ride (or other motorized transport), insist on paying for part of the gas.
- Do not take pictures, tape recordings, or copy Indian crests or other Alaska Native designs without obtaining permission. Many objects are viewed as sacred.
- Do not assume that a person who speaks broken English is not intelligent. Do not assume that silence means acceptance. Nodding of the head does not necessarily mean agreement. Sometimes it means an acknowledgement that you are speaking and nothing more.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep. If you cannot make a commitment, say so and give your reason. Follow up with appropriate information when you get back to your office.
- Go with an open mind and enjoy your opportunity to experience another culture.