



November 23, 2021

Rethinking Thanksgiving

For many Indigenous People, giving thanks is a way of life.

Among the Haudenushonne (Iroquois) Nations an opening address, or Great Thanksgiving, are the words spoken at start of day and before any important gathering of people commences its activity... Other Indigenous People also begin their days and activities with a prayer of Thanksgiving for all creation. We put our tobacco down as a gift of thanks.

Thanksgiving, respect and reciprocity are core to our life ways.

- Barb Munson (Oneida Nation), Wisconsin Indian Education Association, Indian Mascot and Logo Taskforce

At this time of year, those who celebrate Thanksgiving offer appreciation for the people and experiences for which they are grateful. The holiday allows time for families and friends to connect and to reflect upon the past and share hopes for the future.

However, Thanksgiving Day may also be considered the [National Day of Mourning](#), which commemorates a painful history for the Indigenous communities on whose land we are settled. It serves to remind us of our country's attempts to dismiss its beginnings as a [settler colonial state](#), and underscores the violence and trauma many Indigenous Peoples experienced through war, disease, broken treaties, forced settlement on reservations, boarding schools, the denial of civil rights, and attempts to eliminate traditions, languages, spiritual practices, and access to natural resources.

Importantly, [Native American Heritage Day](#) falls on the day after Thanksgiving each year and represents the opportunity to "understand the rich culture, tradition, and history of Native Americans and their status today, and to appreciate the contributions that First Americans have made and will continue to make to our Nation", as stated in [Barak Obama's proclamation in 2009](#). During this time, we are encouraged to educate ourselves about Indigenous history, and to elevate Indigenous strength and resilience in the face of agonizing historical realities. It is with this sentiment that we offer you, our esteemed colleagues, the opportunity to take one small action over the holiday weekend in this direction:

- [Rethinking Thanksgiving Toolkit](#) and consider where there might be areas of intersection and gaps of knowledge for you. Commit to learning and doing more in these areas to minimize this gap.
- Access the [map](#) of the Washington Tribes and visit the websites for more information on our local tribes.
- Check out a timeline of the nation's efforts to acknowledge Native American and Alaska Native heritage from the [Office of Civil Rights](#).
- Remember that there is no single American Indian culture or language. It is to be encouraged to [ask the person or group which term they prefer](#).
- Donate to the [Native American Rights Fund](#), a fund that assists more than 250 tribes in the United States. NARF applies the funds to protecting sovereignty; tribal recognition; ancient traditions; religious freedom; remains and burial goods; and voting rights.
- Consider how you might talk about the painful realities of our country's past with your family and friends, and role model learning with one another through critical inquiry and reflection.

As we hold space for boldly facing the truth of our country's past and take action in building a more equitable future, the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion team would also like to honor the Indigenous sentiment of "giving thanks as a way of life" by extending a deep appreciation to our colleagues across this incredible agency.