



APGA IDEA COHORT FINAL PROJECT REPORT

Project Title: Developing a Stronger Relationship with Suquamish Tribal Members and Celebrating the History of the Property that is now Bloedel Reserve

Description:

Deepening and sustaining our relationship with our neighbors, Suquamish Tribal members, through a broadened awareness of the history of the land and the people to whom it is connected.

Project Goals:

- 1) To establish meaningful dialogue leading to a relationship with Tribal members - find out what they would like to see and how they would like to be honored
- 2) To co-create visual and physical representations of improvements
- 3) To make practical improvements and demonstrate progress, such as: - interpretive materials telling a more comprehensive history of the land - information about indigenous plants as food and medicine - erect a physical land acknowledgment - incorporate more seating areas - making the property more accessible to Tribal members.

This project represents a continuation of an initiative started prior to the IDEA Cohort program and is one which will be ongoing, as it is embedded in the strategic plan of the Reserve. We wanted to take advantage of the Cohort time to hone the goals and examine our progress and intentions.

Among the reasons this project makes sense for the Reserve are that the Reserve is in the ancestral lands of the Suquamish People and it is located in close proximity to the Suquamish Reservation. The Suquamish traditions, which continue today, of caring for our land and waterways align with Bloedel Reserve's environmental commitments.

Through focus on this project overall, organization wide awareness has increased around the long history of the land before the Bloedels established the gardens here. We have, in consultation with the Suquamish Tribe, developed a land acknowledgement statement which recognizes the history and re-affirms our shared commitment to stewardship of this area of the Salish Sea land and waterways.

As part of recognizing the history of the land and the Suquamish people, we are committed to providing access to Tribal members free of charge. This initiative is under consideration by the Tribe as to how best administer automatic membership and how it might be used in a way which is beneficial to Tribal members. Some uses may include traditional plant gathering, or ceremonial uses. We recognize that programming needs to be adaptable, co-developed and have shared ownership.



BLOEDEL RESERVE

Staff and board, Guests and Members and Tribal Members will all benefit from more inclusive programming with the Suquamish Tribe. It is important work as Bloedel strives to become more integral to the community at large and to play an important role as part of the community fabric.



BLOEDEL RESERVE

To achieve our goal of furthering relations with the Suquamish Tribe we have identified a multi-pronged approach.

- We have woven IDEA into our strategic plan to ensure ongoing legitimacy of the work from an organizational perspective.
- We are aware that relationships are built individual to individual, and focus must be on relationship building
- Reciprocity must be a guiding principle.

Challenges

Expected challenges included:

- Creating a value proposition for the Suquamish Tribe. We need to always start by opening dialogue, not prescribing or making value assumptions.
- Identifying who the best Tribal contact is for each discrete program or interaction. The Tribe is made up of individuals, as is this organization, and sometimes the appropriate contacts can be a moving target.
- The Tribe is overrun by requests for partnerships and can be slow to respond and so we know to practice patience and to be understanding of the situation. We take a long view.

Unexpected challenges included:

- Differences in workstyles, priorities and timelines. Despite these, we will always continue to honor our commitments, and exercise persistence and patience.
- Different understandings of interest/commitment levels (unintentional miscommunications)
- Changing personnel set us back in our relationship building (example: the Suquamish Museum Director and our own IDEA Chairperson both left mid-year)

Take Aways

- There are differing levels of interest among individuals and organizations
- We need to honor our commitments using persistence and patience even when the outcome is uncertain.
- We need to be prepared for resistance from public stakeholders who may question our need to focus on IDEA and on the Tribe in particular.
- We learned the importance, culturally, of always offering food, representing mutual nourishment, at any gathering or meeting with Tribal members. There are likely more “norms” that we need to learn.
- Building trust is slow, multifaceted, incremental work and is the bases of any success
- This work will never be done, but rather a continuum that is constantly changing.



Resources Used

- Relationships
 - As relationships between individuals strengthen, so does the organizational relationship between the Tribal body and Bloedel Reserve. There is an ongoing need for individual relationship building to understand who may be best positioned in any circumstance to work well as partners. The Tribe has helped as well by hosting a good neighbor luncheon, opening canoe journey gift making days to public participation, and offering a translated variation of our land acknowledgment.
- The Bloedel Reserve IDEA Advisory Council offered recommendations and provided introductions.
- A partnership with an outside consultant continues to help us to see things from different perspectives and be aware of impacts of decisions and power dynamics.
- Appendix X Funding (Suquamish Foundation) and other grants help us to support some of our targeted programming like the Creative Residency designed for area indigenous creatives.

How we would do things differently if we were to start over

We would work to have a shared understanding between the board, staff and IDEA Committee of the “why” of IDEA work up front. It would have been helpful to engage the skeptics and contrarians right from the start and address their questions and concerns. This might have helped us avoid some hard feelings or feelings of “aloneness” of proponents of IDEA on the Board. The Staff, Board and IDEA Committee would ideally be more closely aligned with where they are/want to be with this work. Sometimes that just isn’t possible if progress is to be made, but it is important to have significant buy in before investing too much time.

What’s Next

- We are working to better tell the story of the land through an Interpretive Master Plan which will be a living document and is being created over the next year.
- We hope to have a physical representation of the Land Acknowledgement and some lines of Lushootseed translation also displayed on the grounds.
- We are continuing to implement our strategic plan, which calls for ongoing strengthening of our relationship with the Tribe as well as other IDEA initiatives.
- Continued persistence will be given to advance programming such as the Native Residency, opportunities for Tribal plant gathering, free access to the Reserve.
- We will continue to build individual relationships to better identify the appropriate people for co-creating programs.

We found the APGA IDEA Cohort useful for collegial support and education in all areas of IDEA and are grateful for being included in its’ inaugural year.



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