

BREAKING STEREOTYPES:
REPORTING ON RURAL ALASKA

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ANALYSIS

For the research component, I analyzed 26 Anchorage Daily News articles (a non-Native owned statewide newspaper) and 25 Cordova Times articles (a Native-owned local newspaper) using textual analysis methods and critical-cultural scholarship as a guide. To find those articles, I queried each website using the search term “Native” and the date range of Jan. 23, 2017, to Jan. 23, 2018. I then read through each article and deleted any Associated Press stories, stories from other news outlets or stories that were unrelated to Alaska Native peoples or communities. Because about four times as many articles were found for the Anchorage Daily News (formerly Alaska Dispatch News) as for The Cordova Times, I then randomly pulled every fourth article from the Anchorage Daily News for the analysis.

For each article, I filled in the following template to help standardize the comparison:

Name of Article:

Paper:

Author:

Date:

Category:

How are Alaska Natives identified?

Short summary of topic:

Are any Alaska Native words or names used?

Terminology:

Stereotypes/tropes?

Sourcing (who's given a voice?):

Historical/cultural context (is it given?):

Other general thoughts:

Tone:

I used this analysis to inform my interview questions and to help answer the following research questions:

1. *-How are Alaska Natives being covered by Alaskan news media?*
2. *-How does an Alaska Native news organization cover Alaska Natives?*
3. *-How does a mainstream Alaskan news organizations cover Alaska Natives?*
4. *-What are the themes and issues regularly covered by Alaskan journalists when writing about Alaska Native communities?*

I did not find a significant difference between coverage of Alaska Native communities by a Native-owned newspaper and a non-Native owned newspaper. Generally, the coverage avoided stereotypes, was accurate and tended toward the positive. There was not an abundance of negative articles, and most articles contained relevant contextual information. The major themes of the articles were climate change and the environment, energy, culture, event coverage, politics, profiles, education, language preservation, business and economics, and health. Most sources were identified by their tribal affiliations (when relevant) rather than being identified as Alaska Native or Native.

I did notice that the sourcing from the Anchorage Daily News relied heavily on the voices of Alaska Native corporations, that a few articles were missing important historical and

cultural context and that one article quoted the Secretary of Interior of the United States as calling Alaska Natives “Native Alaskans,” and the author did not paraphrase to avoid the incorrect usage. I also noted that many of the more complex articles about rural Alaska were written before the Anchorage Daily News (then Alaska Dispatch News) laid off many of its employees and pulled a rural reporter back to Anchorage. Also, many of the articles about Alaska Native peoples and communities focused on rural Alaska, although a significant number of Alaska Native peoples live in cities, and they focused on Western Alaska. There were few articles about southeast or about southcentral Alaska (where I live).

I used those observations to inform my questions when interviewing journalists about coverage. I then read articles and blog posts by nine writers, academics and former or current reporters who are Alaska Native or who cover Alaska Native communities. I conducted interviews with the following journalists, academics and writers:

1. Sharon McConnell, the executive director of Denakkanaaga, Inc, a non-profit that works with Alaska Native elders. She was the first Alaska Native news anchor when television was introduced to villages in the mid-1970s, hosted a national radio talk show from Anchorage in the mid-1990s (Native America Calling, The Wellness Edition) and co-owned a production company (Blueberry Productions) that produced a weekly Native news television program and PBS documentaries. McConnell is Inupiaq and grew up above the Arctic Circle in Evansville.
2. Joaqlin Estus, a special projects consultant and retired reporter for KNBA, a Native-owned radio station in Anchorage. Her beat was Alaska Native peoples and communities at the radio station. Joaqlin is Tlingit and grew up in Wrangell in Southeast Alaska. She now lives in Anchorage.

3. Laureli Ivanoff, a freelance writer, communications professional and columnist. She's Inupiaq. She's the former news director for KNOM in Nome, Alaska, lives in Unakleet in Western Alaska where she grew up, and writes a blog called Living Village about life in Unakleet.
4. Diana Campbell, a freelance writer and adjunct faculty member for the Department of Communication and Journalism and the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She's Gwich'in Athabascan and Alutiiq and used to work as a reporter for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner. She lives in Fairbanks, Alaska.
5. Edgar Blatchford, professor of journalism and Alaska Native Studies at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He is Inupiaq, used to work for the Chugach Native Corporation, ran for governor and was the mayor of the town of Seward, and used to own several local newspapers throughout the state.
6. Anna Rose MacArthur, news director at KYUK Bethel. She's from out of state and is non-Native, but the station she works at covers an area that is predominantly Yup'ik: the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Her entire career as a journalist has focused on covering Alaska Native communities and rural Alaska. She worked at KNOM Nome under Laureli Ivanoff.
7. Shady Grove Oliver, freelance reporter for the Arctic Sounder. She's also from out of state and is non-Native, but she's the only reporter who covers the Arctic, a predominantly Inupiat region of the state. Her entire journalism career has focused on covering rural Alaska and Alaska Native communities. She moved to Alaska in her early 20s and started working at a radio station. She's worked as a reporter in Wrangell, Homer and the Arctic.

8. Christine Trudeau, an education and government reporter at KYUK Bethel. She's also worked on special projects. She's a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation and moved to Alaska to work at KYUK in Bethel, mostly because she was interested in working in a predominantly indigenous community.
9. Angela Gonzalez, indigenous communications director at First Alaskans Institute and freelance writer. She runs a blog called Athabascan Woman where she highlights stories of rural Alaska, Athabascan culture and prominent Athabascan and Alaska Native people. She is Koyukon Athabascan and grew up in Huslia, Alaska, northwest of Fairbanks.

With each reporter, writer or researcher, I discussed the following broad research questions:

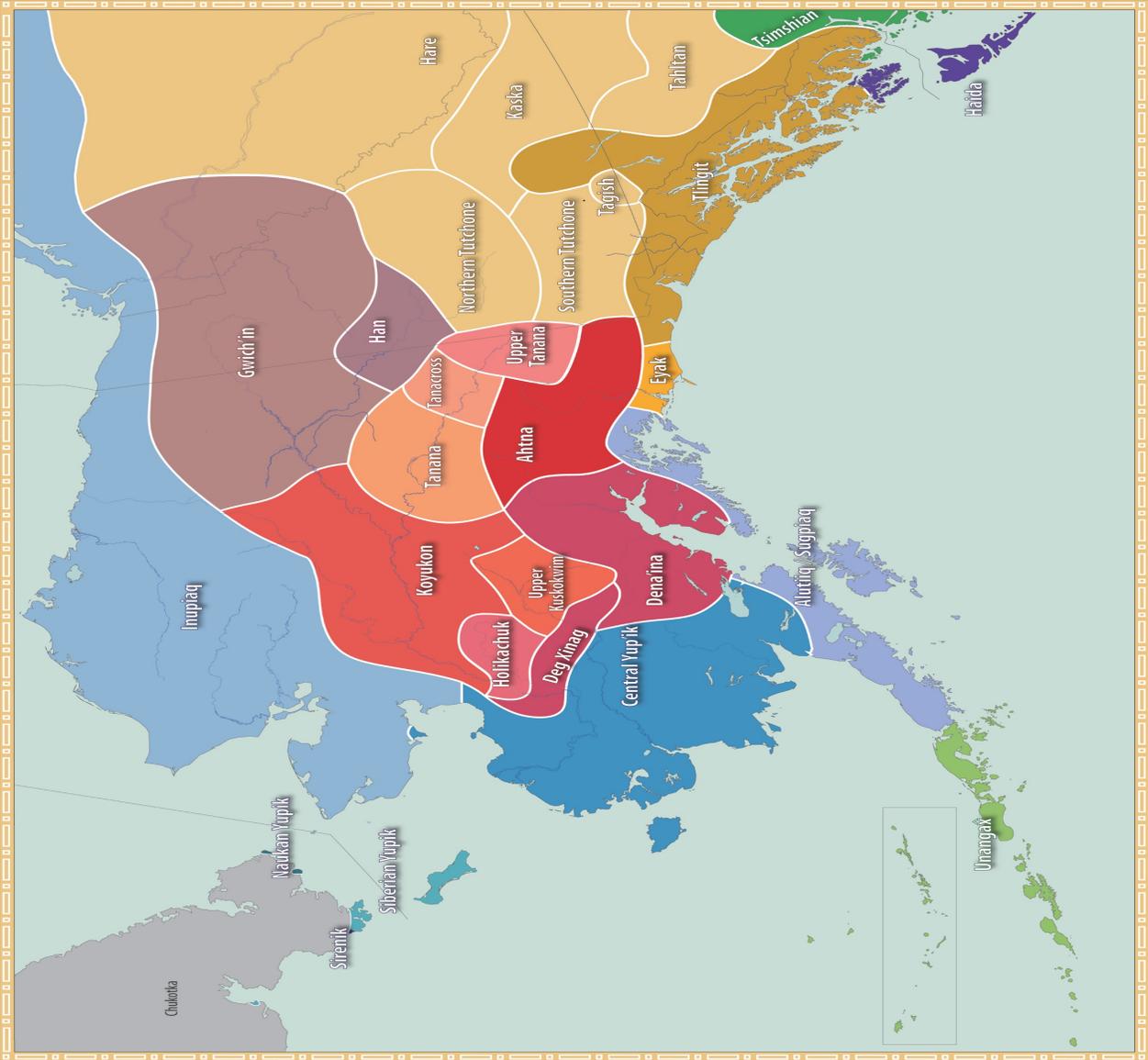
- *How are Alaska Natives being covered by Alaskan news media?*
- *What are some of the challenges that journalists face when covering Alaska Native communities and writing about Alaska Natives?*
- *What do they think they could do better?*
- *What advice do journalists who regularly cover Alaska Native communities and write about Alaska Natives have for other journalists interested in covering Alaska Natives and other tribal nations?*
- *How can journalists more accurately cover Native Americans and Alaska Natives in the news media, rather than relying on stereotypes or ignoring them altogether?*
- *What are some of the issues that are important to Alaska Native peoples and communities but that aren't receiving enough attention in the press?*

After transcribing all the interviews, I wrote an 11-page magazine-style article discussing current representations of Alaska Native peoples and communities in the news and then offering

advice, from the perspective of those I interviewed, for reporters when working on stories about Alaska Native peoples and communities and about rural Alaska in general.

Fighting stereotypes: Advice for reporting on Alaska Native communities.

Figure 1.



Source: (Krauss, 2011)

Historically, media representations of indigenous communities have been fraught with stereotypes.

Portrayals have often only displayed the negative, like problems with alcoholism or domestic violence, without providing proper historical context about how and why those problems persist. They've labeled indigenous communities as poor and destitute without also

highlighting the resilience and richness of their cultures, which in turn shapes how the public views and interacts with indigenous peoples.

Laureli Ivanoff works as a freelance writer and columnist and is Inupiaq. “Much of it is directly related to historical trauma and the treatment of Alaska Natives by the U.S. government, by churches, by essentially white people who came into our communities and forced assimilation,” she said.

“I think that's a big conversation in our community that's not really addressed in the media at this point.”

Nationwide, Native Americans and Alaska Natives make up only [1.3 percent of the population](#). Although the group is small, it's incredibly diverse: there are [562 federally recognized nations, approximately 229 of which live in Alaska](#). Each has its own culture and customs and often its own language. Some people live without running water and electricity, living off the land like their ancestors, while others live in urban centers.

That diversity, that geographic distribution and that deep, complex history of colonization means covering indigenous communities is complicated.

Diana Campbell is a freelance writer and adjunct faculty member at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. “Racism — you can discuss on a very surface level, but then if you start taking it apart and unpacking it, people just can't sit still for it. When you talk about health disparities or economic issues, it's hard for reporters to understand, but it's also hard for the readership to understand,” Campbell, who's Gwich'in Athabascan and Alutiiq, said.

“And I've just found that to be true in all walks of life, not just in the media, but everywhere I've been there's few people I can have a deep conversation with about racism, enculturation, ethnocide, micro abrasions, things like that. What it's like to be a Native person.”

Many non-Native journalists grew up without exposure to indigenous peoples, and reporting on remote, rural sections of the country can be difficult with time and money constraints. Freedom of Information laws may be different or non-existent. And although Native-run news organizations have a long history in the United States, they are still few and far between.

Journalists aren't likely to have someone who is Native American or Alaska Native in their newsroom either to answer questions or bring their stories to the forefront. Fewer than 1 percent of journalists are Native American or Alaska Native, [according to the Nieman Foundation](#).

Christine Trudeau is a reporter for KYUK. "If somebody is non-Native and they leave the office after doing a story, they might not have Native friends. They might not go to art events where there are Native people," Trudeau, who is a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, said. She reports on the majority Yup'ik communities in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta area of Alaska. "It might not enter into their consciousness."

That means that sometimes Native stories are just completely ignored, or Native voices are only sought for stories specifically related to a Native cultural event or an issue that predominantly affects indigenous peoples, rather than being included in stories about day-to-day life.

That's what inspired Angela Gonzalez to start her blog, [Athabascan Woman](#). She's of Koyukon Athabascan heritage and grew up in Huslia in rural Alaska. She said she wanted to share stories of her upbringing and of Athabascan culture.

"There's all the negative statistics and crime like if the state trooper is involved. You know they have their daily update to the media, so the media is fed this information on a daily

basis sometimes about Alaska Native people,” Gonzalez said. “And are they fed with the other side of the story, too, about talking about our ways of life? Not as much.”

She said there *are* some publications that write about those sorts of things, like KYUK, where Trudeau works.

Anna Rose MacArthur is the news director at KYUK. “It’s not like, how do we report on the Native community? We just ask, how do we report on the YK Delta? And most of the YK Delta is Alaska Native,” MacArthur, who is non-Native, said. “So, we’re just reporting on the life and the issues and the joys and the tragedies and the developments that are all happening within our region.”

In general, Native voices and cultures are more visible in the state of Alaska than in other parts of the country. Alaska Native and Native American peoples make up a greater portion of the population than in any other state: [15.2 percent](#). [Koahnic Broadcast Corporation](#), which runs all kinds of nationwide programming focused on Native issues and peoples like [National Native News](#), [Native America Calling](#) and Stories of Our People, was started in the state. And [Alaska News Nightly](#), a statewide radio broadcast, and the [Anchorage Daily News](#), the biggest paper in the state, regularly feature stories about Alaska Native peoples and their communities.

That has to do with history, at least in part. Campbell said the history of colonization is a bit shorter here.

“I think that impact happened a lot sooner in the lower 48. They’ve been living with the mechanisms of that for a lot longer than Alaska Natives have,” Campbell said. “And we’re lucky that we still can practice a subsistence lifestyle in a way and practice who we are in some way with potlatches and gatherings and things like that.”

In many parts of rural Alaska, non-Native people are the minority, and subsistence activities rooted in Alaska Native cultures are practiced and valued across the community.

In areas such as the YK Delta, indigenous languages like Yup'ik are still widely spoken. Almost half of all Yup'ik people speak it. KYUK has a Yup'ik newscast, and it uses Yup'ik sound bites in its English newscast.

“Having that commitment as a part of our value system and having programs on our air waves that are entirely in Yup'ik... We are able to do the work that we do because we're committed to it but also because our community is the YK Delta,” MacArthur said. “It's not like we're reporting on a region that has a reservation within it, and we're reporting from the outside. We're reporting from the inside.”

Alaska has no reservations. Things played out a bit differently there. Not to say that it was perfect or that Native peoples didn't experience exploitation or marginalization or that white people didn't take land from them, but the [Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act](#) (ANSCA), signed by President Richard Nixon in 1971, did establish 12 regional Alaska Native corporations (and later added a 13th) and 220 village corporations, and it put 44 million acres of land and \$962.5 million under their control. Alaska Native peoples alive at the time became shareholders in those corporations.

Native corporations have become major economic players in the state. Sometimes their interests come in direct conflict with the preservation of the land and subsistence activities valued by Alaska Native peoples, and not everyone sees ANSCA as a positive thing. But in general, the economic power of the corporations *has* made native voices and concerns more visible across the state.

“With the passage of the Claims Act, I think the voice has gotten stronger,” said Sharon McConnell, who was the first Alaska Native news anchor.

And that’s reflected in the media. The corporations are quoted all the time.

But that doesn’t mean that coverage of Alaska Native communities and peoples is perfect.

“News coverage of Alaska Native issues is kind of broad but doesn't go very deep,” Campbell said. “It's not all about the leadership in the corporations. People tend to depend on them as a source of people who know what's happening in Alaska Native politics. It's also very confusing, I think, for outsiders, which makes it more difficult to cover.”

Native reporters in Alaska are still very few and far between.

“For a while, I was the only rural Alaska, Alaska Native reporter,” Ivanoff, who worked as the news director at KNOM, said. “That's not OK. I mean, to me, that's not right.”

Stereotypes persist, McConnell said, whether through media portrayals such as reality television shows or in the minds of people across the country.

“There's still the belief, not just in the state but across America, that Alaska Native people are just getting free health care, they're just handed that,” she said. “They've got to realize the history of our Native people and what has taken place.”

Small papers like the now-closed [Tundra Times](#) used to represent the voices of Alaska Native communities from the perspective of Alaska Natives. And there are still papers and media outlets under Native ownership. [KYUK](#) is one example. [The Delta Discovery](#) is another. But as the newspaper industry has lost steam, many have closed. Bigger papers in Anchorage and Fairbanks have less of a budget to send reporters to report on rural areas.

Alaska is a big state. It's over twice the size of Texas, and the divide between rural and urban is huge. Many places are only accessible by bush plane, and in some areas like the Arctic, there's now only one reporter for the entire region.

"There's an incredible lack of coverage in rural parts of the state. Being completely frank, there's no possible way that I can do it justice," Shady Grove Oliver, who reports for [The Arctic Sounder](#), said. Grove Oliver is non-Native.

"I'm the only reporter for more than a dozen communities stretched out over a massive swath of the state. There's major industries (here too)."

Reporters end up relying on official voices from afar. Context is left out. And stories go untold.

In some cases, national outlets have come in to tell some of those stories, particularly stories about climate change's impact on rural Alaska Native communities.

"I think that coverage is needed, and we need more coverage," MacArthur said. "When the coverage is done well, it's done from the standpoint of agency and resiliency and innovation. When it's done poorly, it's done from the standpoint of victims of greater forces."

In general, over the past few decades, coverage of Alaska Native peoples and rural communities has grown.

Ivanoff said that when she was growing up, it was rare to hear a story about rural Alaska on the news. "I remember any time a rural Alaska community was mentioned or highlighted or a story took place in rural Alaska," she said. "We would get so excited because things happening in rural Alaska were rarely showcased or highlighted or mentioned."

Now, she sees more stories.

“I think it's gotten more accurate because again we have social media, we have the internet,” McConnell said.

And Gonzalez said simply because there are more stories about rural Alaska, the quality has also improved.

But, there's still plenty of work to do.

“I can guarantee you that not everything is as bleak as some people like to make it look, and unfortunately I see that in a lot of reporting on Native communities,” Trudeau said. “We've come a long way, but we also can see — this is across the lower 48, too — there's strides moving forward, but there's also the occasional articles where it's just like: ‘What was this person thinking? Why didn't this person talk to this person?’”

So, what can journalists do to keep heading in the right direction? And what can be gleaned from the experiences of reporters working in communities where Alaska Native voices *are* being heard? Here's what these writers and current or former reporters who are Alaska Native or have extensive experience covering Alaska Native communities had to say:

ANGELA GONZALEZ

Gonzalez works as a freelance writer and as Indigenous Communications Manager at [First Alaskans Institute](#). She also runs the blog [Athabaskan Woman](#) where she highlights Athabaskan culture and notable Athabaskan and Alaska Native peoples. She's of Koyukon Athabaskan heritage and grew up in Huslia, Alaska, northwest of Fairbanks along the Koyukuk River. Her Denaakk'e (Koyukon Athabaskan) name is Łot'oydaatlno. She lives in Anchorage.

Understand Alaska Native 101. Learn about the history of ANSCA and the corporations. Understand the geography of different tribes and linguistic groups. Understand

what tribal sovereignty is and the role of different entities in the community, like the tribal council, the village council, the Native corporation and the non-profit corporation.

The term is Alaska Native, not Native Alaskan or Alaskan Native.

Don't assume that all Alaska Native — or all native peoples — are the same. Each region has many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Try to be as specific as possible when identifying someone (i.e., Siberian Yupik rather than Alaska Native or just Native).

There's no such thing as "the Native perspective" on something.

Build relationships beyond the corporations. "A lot of Native corporations have budgets for communications people, and they have an office and staff who can respond to media inquiries. But for the smaller tribes, they may not have as much staff. The reporter may not know who to contact in a tribe, and then the person at the tribe may not know how to respond to media, and they might be suspicious," Gonzalez said. She said building relationships over time can help.

Don't assume that people in rural Alaska have the same phone and internet speed as you do and recognize that not all rural Alaskans are Alaska Native.

Don't judge by appearance. People drive four-wheelers in rural Alaska, so most people don't wear suits. "You might look at somebody and, based on their appearance, you might not think that they're someone important, but they might be the mayor or the chief," Gonzalez said.

Don't believe all the bad statistics, and don't use those statistics without context.

Being humble is valued. Many Alaska Native people don't like to talk about themselves. So, the person you're talking to might be the right person for an interview, but they wouldn't ever say so themselves. They might send you to another person. It's going to take time, trust and patience.

Make sure to call ahead. Just like in a city, you need to make an appointment to talk to the mayor of a rural village.

When looking for stories, **focus on the positive and the day-to-day**, not just the negative.

CHRISTINE TRUDEAU

Trudeau came to Alaska last year to work for KYUK in Bethel as a radio reporter, where she covers government and education. She's a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation in Mayetta, Kansas. "To me, it really just came down to, this is a majority Native community. I'm going to be delivering news to a Native audience," she said. "That is incredibly unique, and I feel really privileged and honored to be able to participate in that. Because it's just something that I couldn't do where I'm from."

Stay connected to the smaller communities. When people come together for bigger events or visit Bethel for the weekend from a village, she asks them about what's going on in their communities, or she calls the local post office, the tribal council office, the school, or the village corporation office and asks if they have any upcoming events. There's also Facebook, and when she can, she visits in person.

Explain the media process (and this goes for reporting on anything). "You know, this is what the deal is with this story. This is how I go about it. This is what we're saying is on the record. And if you wanted to say something or not communicate something, then we have a very set guideline to go about that and what feels comfortable," Trudeau said.

Ask questions...and don't be afraid to look stupid. "That's your job is to ask every single question, so you understand something," Trudeau said. "People are so afraid of just asking a dumb question. What if that is racist to ask? Well, think about what you're going to say first,

and don't just blurt out the first thing. A lot of times it's just like, well, let me just try to understand this.”

If it doesn't mean that much to you, then you need to figure out why it means a lot to other people. “Let's say you're doing a story on a low fish count run, and you've never covered fish before,” Trudeau said. Ask kids and elders what fishing means to them. And make sure to get a sampling of perspectives.

Let go of your assumptions. “You should be doing that as a reporter anyway. You shouldn't have an idea of what the story is before you go and cover it,” she said. “Check your own value system, too. Don't get too caught up in framing something from your perspective, an outsider's perspective, because you're inside now and you need to be aware.”

Make sure you're pronouncing someone's name correctly. Trudeau doesn't speak Yup'ik. She's learning as she goes. “You wouldn't want to mispronounce the governor's name, so you kind of have to treat it with that same mindfulness,” she said.

Develop mentorship programs and be a good mentor to help bring more Native reporters into the newsroom. “Look at what support systems you have in place for them. You have to look at what they can do and what you ask of them. And be aware that some things that you assume are easy to do aren't always easy for everybody in the same way,” Trudeau said. If you're non-Native and mentoring someone who is Native, be aware that there are limitations on your perspective. Adapt your teaching style when necessary and be open to them teaching you something too.

DIANA CAMPBELL

Campbell is a former reporter for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, an adjunct faculty member at the Communication and Journalism Department at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and a freelance writer. She's Gwich'in Athabascan and Alutiiq.

Understand tribal sovereignty and what the fourth estate means when reporting on Alaska Native communities. The process for FOIA or access may be completely different. You may not be allowed into a corporation meeting or a tribal council meeting. Read up on the specific laws and practices of the tribe you're covering. And develop relationships over time to help gain access. Sometimes you might have to take the back door.

Each community has its own micro culture, and each is constantly in flux. “You have to understand what happens and what happened and how it changed and then how it is continuing to change,” Campbell said.

Accept that you'll never learn everything, but keep trying. “You get over your first hurdle, and you finally get comfortable. You feel like you're in a place of understanding and acceptance, and people kind of stop there. It's really a life-long journey,” Campbell said. “I mean, I've been a student of Alaska Native cultures all my life, and I still don't know what I don't know.”

Be patient and don't be afraid of silence. People who are bilingual sometimes need to find the right words in the right language. “Their silence may not mean what you think it means. In some communities — in Yup'ik communities — there's a lot of nonverbal communication that happens,” Campbell said.

Not all Alaska Natives live in rural areas. “There's a difference between an urban Native and a rural Native. I don't think that enough has been said about urban Natives,” she said.

JOAQLIN ESTUS

Estus is a retired reporter and a special projects consultant for KNBA, a Native-owned radio station in Anchorage. She's Tlingit and grew up in southern California until she was 13, when she moved to Wrangell in southeast Alaska. She now lives in Anchorage.

We need more Native reporters, and then we'll have more Native stories. “I think if we had more Native reporters, they would have more background. I know Native history, and I lived through a lot of what happened,” Estus said. “So I remember exactly what I thought and felt with some of these momentous occasions.” She said that would add complexity, nuance and richness to reporting.

If you're not familiar with the community, consider a guide. When she wrote [a series of stories about the lack of water and sewer infrastructure](#) in rural Alaska Native communities, she had a guide who spoke Yup'ik travel with her. “Having somebody who speaks Yup'ik and that local people know, it just opens the door. People are justifiably afraid of reporters, I think. They're going to put your voice on a megaphone and send it out to the world. It's scary,” Estus said.

Spend a few minutes before the interview getting to know the person and building trust. “I tell them where I'm from, something about myself, what I'm trying to do with this story. I do this with non-Natives, too,” she said. “And when it comes to building trust, it doesn't have to be I'm an Alaska Native. It can be: I come from a place like this. I hunt and fish too. I've had the same kind of job you've had. It's just like getting to know anybody else. It's just building bonds and helping the other person see what you have in common.”

Think about it before identifying someone as Alaska Native, particularly in crime articles. Would you identify someone as white in the same scenario? Is their ethnicity relevant to

the article? If it has bearing on the story, include it. Otherwise, don't, because it can reinforce negative stereotypes.

SHADY GROVE OLIVER

Grove Oliver is a freelance reporter for [The Arctic Sounder](#) and is the only full-time reporter covering the Arctic in Alaska. She's also worked in Sitka, Homer and Wrangell. She's non-Native.

The lines of personal and professional might not be as distinct as you're used to.

“Especially when covering small and tight-knit communities, before you can ask other people to trust you with their stories, opening yourself up as a human being and not just as a reporter is important,” Grove Oliver said.

Be aware of your background. “The Arctic is predominantly indigenous. I am a white reporter covering majority Native communities,” she said. She said you have to keep the extremely troubled history of colonization and imbalanced power structures in mind. “If you're a non-Native reporter working in a Native community, you're part of that,” she said. “I can't hide that I'm white. I can't hide where I'm from. I wouldn't want to. So, being transparent about that and not shying away from that difference. You're not pretending that you're working in a place that you're from.”

Keep intellectual property rights in mind. You need to get permission to record songs and dances, and never record the whole thing. “It's like you're physically taking someone's shirt and passing it to someone else. Being aware that you're taking a physical thing,” she said.

Don't expect people to share their stories. “Realizing that you don't have a right to their stories. You only have stories that people trust you enough to give you,” Grove Oliver said.

Use the local language when you can. “I write stories that have words that aren’t translated,” she said. She said a lot of people use Inupiaq words in daily conversation. So, she makes sure that she’s familiar with those words and she uses them in her stories without translating them into English. Always keep your audience in mind.

Sometimes you have to let a story go by for the sake of building trust. “I’ve tried really hard to not just jump headfirst. I’ve let stories go past for the sake of giving space and time,” she said.

Be flexible. “You don’t want to give up your journalistic integrity, but letting go of some of that control, just opening yourself up to like why are you doing that,” she said. Journalistic conventions were formed around western thought and values. Keep that in mind when working in indigenous communities.

ANNA ROSE MACARTHUR

MacArthur is the news director at KYUK in Bethel, Alaska. She’s non-Native.

Be humble. It’s something she tells reporters when they first land in rural Alaska. “Recognizing that I’m landing in a radically different place with a different culture and a different history and a different language and even a different geography and climate, and I’m just a humble student,” she said.

Value where you are. She said some reporters land, and they leave immediately. “They land in this place where it’s a bunch of Natives walking around, speaking a different language. They look different. They have different cultures. They have fish hanging outside in their yard,” she said. “And it’s different and therefore it’s this other and it’s just not valued.” She said the reporters who succeed are curious and recognize that those differences are something they can learn from.

The history is a lot deeper than you know. “I would emphasize more than anything just humility as a non-Native person,” she said. “I think will take a very long time to learn and build an appreciation for systemic forces that have over a long period of time shaped the experiences in the present moment. Learning that history is massive. So, just entering with respect.”

Know the best practices for the communities you’re covering. She said she knows that she needs to call the tribe before landing in a community and ask permission to come. Early on in her career, she said she cut an introduction for the sake of timing, and she later realized she shouldn’t have. The man she was interviewing had said his name, his mother’s name and his occupation. “I cut out him saying his mom's name, and I later learned oh you shouldn't have done that because that's how you introduce yourself here,” MacArthur said. “You say who you are, and you say who you're related to as a method of introduction and building relationships.”

When looking at problems, look at those who have solved them. “Look at communities that are doing well and what are they doing and why is that working for them and how did they get there. What can we learn from that,” she said.

LAURELI IVANOFF

Laureli Ivanoff is a freelance writer, columnist and communications professional, and she’s the former news director at KNOM in Nome. She’s Iñupiaq and lives in Unakleet, where she grew up.

Watch your negative adjectives. “I worked in a newsroom, and I saw the press releases that reporters get every day from the Department of Health and Social Services and from the State Trooper Dispatch,” Ivanoff said. “In most cases it was negative news, negative information, negative statistics on rural Alaska.”

Check your value system. “We have such a rich community when it comes to natural resources, and economically I feel like that makes us very wealthy people,” she said. “What makes a person wealthy or rich is very different here.”

Watch your words and the connotations they carry. “In news stories, I never used the word ‘village.’ I would train reporters not to use that word because it further separates our communities from communities on the road system.” She said to watch for words that highlight differences instead of similarities.

If you don’t know how to identify someone, ask them. Ask if they want you to include a Native name. Ask if they want to be identified by a specific tribal affiliation. “What I would tell reporters is how does that person identify? What do they say they are?” Ivanoff said. “You can go with that.”