

5 Tips for Leading a NATIVE SMALL GROUP

1. PATIENT CONVERSATIONS

Native people have a different time-orientation than the majority culture in North America. Instead of cutting short the current task (e.g., a conversation) to be early/on-time for the next, Native people often prefer to finish the task at hand before moving on, even if that means they are late arriving to the next thing. We hope you find a balance between the official schedule and having good deep conversations with those in your small group, but we also would encourage you to press into the conversation at hand more than worrying about what's coming next.

2. FAMILY AS PRIMARY COMMUNITY

In collegiate ministry, we often emphasize sharing the story of Jesus with friends. Native people, however, often grow up with cousins and siblings as their main (and sometimes, only) friend group, holding those relationships sacred above all else. So, make sure you're mindful to include not just questions and anecdotes about serving and honoring college friends, but also family. Honor students' need to include family in decisions they are discerning.

3. THE HEART OF WORDS

There are many trigger-words for skeptical Native students. These may include words like discover, destiny, and progress. But Christian words can also be triggering: many Christian *missionaries* would hit Native children if they spoke their traditional language, claiming it was *sinful*; they would smash traditional pottery in the name of *sanctification*. "Sharing the gospel" was often equated with violent misplacements of whole Native communities. It's hard to avoid these words when we've used them for years, but we would encourage you to take more time and consider using common words to describe what you mean and be prepared to explain the heart of other triggering words other people may unknowingly use (e.g., sin is rejecting God's hope for our lives, sanctification is the pursuit of growing closer to Jesus, the gospel is Creator's good news about Jesus).

4. SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS WITH A LOWER THRESHOLD

Ministry in North America often starts with convincing skeptical non-Christians that the spiritual realm exists. However, Native people have often grown up believing that the physical and spiritual are woven together, so be encouraged to ask about spiritual experiences. Dive into prayer with Native students and encourage them to discern what the Holy Spirit is doing.

5. LAUGHTER AS GOOD MEDICINE

It often takes a bit of time for Native people to warm up to others, but consistent attempts at humor, despite not getting initial reactions, often shows others you want to laugh together and bond. Be patient with yourself, and don't take it personally if they start opening up with a little bit of teasing—that means you're in.