

COWICHAN TRIBES



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[BRINGING ETHICS REVIEW HOME TO COWICHAN: INDIGENIZING ETHICS REVIEW IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA](#)



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COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

Cowichan Tribes is the governing body of the Cowichan people, located in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island, is part of the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, and has seven traditional villages throughout their traditional territory: Kw'amutsun, Qwum'yiquin', Hwulqwselu, S'amuna', L'uml'umuluts, Hinupsum, and Tl'ulpalus. With over 4,900 members, Cowichan Tribes is the largest single First Nation Band in British Columbia (Cowichan Tribes, n.d.). The Hul'q'umi'num people, meaning "people who speak the Hul'q'umi'num language," are members of the larger Coast Salish First Nations group.

The Hul'q'umi'num people have maintained strong cultural practices and traditions, passed through generations of community members and Elders teachings (Cowichan Tribes, n.d.).

COWICHAN TRIBE COMMUNITY-LED ETHICS REVIEW

Cowichan Tribes recently undertook a remarkable example of a community-led ethics review, guided by community members and Elders. In 2019, Cowichan Tribes, Island Health, and FNHA completed their collaborative, in-person research ethics review process. This process is documented in "Bringing Ethics Review Home to Cowichan: Indigenizing Ethics Review in British Columbia, Canada," published by Cowichan Tribes.

The process detailed in this article describes the ways in which the Nation-led ethics review generated and supported self-determination for Cowichan Tribes, while centering the principles of OCAP®, The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, FNHA's seven directives, and the Cowichan snuw'uy'ulh (teachings from Elders) (Cowichan Tribes, 2021).

The Nation-led ethics review involved the development of three written guiding documents, and incorporated cultural ceremony and oral traditions (Cowichan Tribes, 2021). The three written documents developed to guide the ethics process are the following:

1. **A standard operating procedure (SOP):**

The SOP provided a framework for a “collaborative full board review for multi-jurisdictional research involving two Research Ethics BC partners,” and guided the entire process of the ethics review (Cowichan Tribes, 2021). Crucially, the SOP established that the Cowichan Tribes would have the first and final approval of the study (Cowichan Tribes, 2021).

2. **A proposal for the alternative process:**

The proposal for the alternative outlined the representation of the Cowichan Tribes, Island Health, and FNHA at the in-person ethics review, with Island Health acting as the Board of Record (BoR), and holding the role of granting a Certificate of Approval. The proposal also outlined the role of Cowichan Tribes and Island Health in collaboratively developing the SOP (Cowichan Tribes, 2021).

3. **Official minutes for the review:**

In this document, Island Health documented the review processes in order to provide a record “for accountability and auditing purposes” (Cowichan Tribes, 2021).

The Nation-led ethics review process is unique and meaningful for a number of reasons. First, the process and setting through which the ethics review was conducted demonstrates a powerful example of implementing community practices, protocols and traditions. The review process included a blanketing ceremony for guests, traditional dance, song and drumming by Cowichan Elders and community members, and the traditional practice of gift giving to symbolize reciprocity (Cowichan Tribes, 2021). The ethics review process included dialogue, feedback, and conversation in tandem with the cultural ceremonies (Cowichan Tribes, 2021).

Second, the Cowichan Tribes ethics review is a distinctive example of the ways in which self-determination and governance can be implemented in the ethics review process. As highlighted through the documentation of this process, Indigenous peoples have historically been excluded from the systems and processes put in place to protect them – in this case, research ethics review bodies. By asserting their right over direction, guidance, and process of this ethics review, and by hosting the ethics review process on Cowichan territory, the Cowichan Tribes asserted their inherent right to decision-making and control over research ethics in their territory.



RESOURCES:

Cowichan Tribes. (n.d.). About Cowichan Tribes: Cowichan Tribes. Retrieved from <https://cowichantribes.com/about-cowichan-tribes>

Cowichan Tribes. (2021). Bringing Ethics Review Home to Cowichan: Indigenizing Ethics Review in British Columbia, Canada. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 16(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.32799/ijih.v16i2.33099>