

A photograph of a rock surface with ancient petroglyphs, including a prominent anthropomorphic figure with a star-like symbol below it.

TRIBAL & NATIVE AMERICAN ISSUE AREA



Incorporating Tribal Perspectives Into Audits

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Presentation Outline

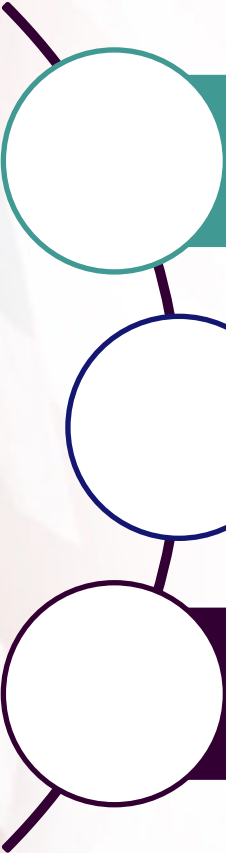
Tribal Nations in the
U.S.

GAO's Tribal Work

Building Tribal
Perspectives into
Audits



Context: Tribal Nations



574 federally recognized Indian Tribes vary greatly in terms of culture, language, population, land base, location, and economic status

Tribal Nations are distinct political entities whose inherent sovereignty predates the U.S.

Tribal Nations have a government-to-government relationship with U.S. federal government

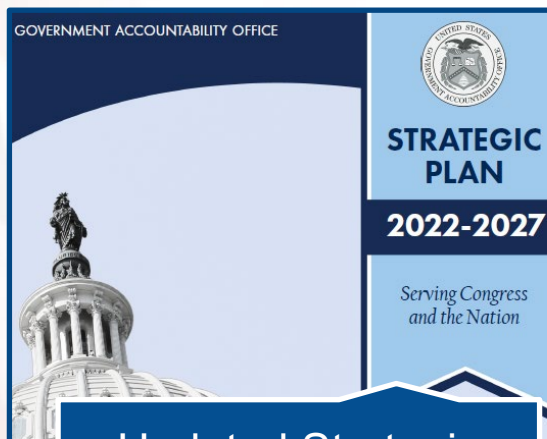
Federal Programs that Serve Tribes

- More than 20 federal agencies administer programs and grants for Tribal Nations
- Tribes can administer certain federal programs and funds themselves under self-determination and self-governance mechanisms
- We cannot assess the government's effectiveness without talking directly to Tribes



Source: GAO. | www.gao.gov

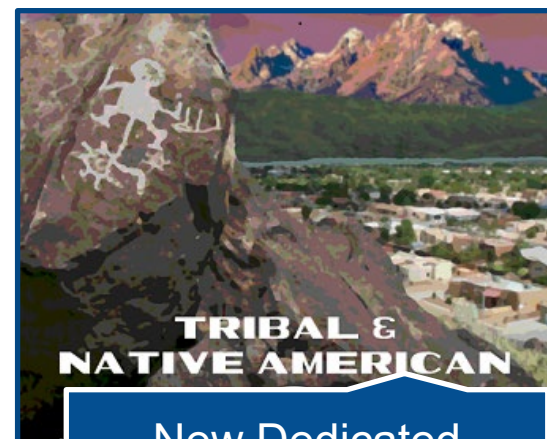
GAO's Tribal Work: Recent Initiatives



Updated Strategic Plan

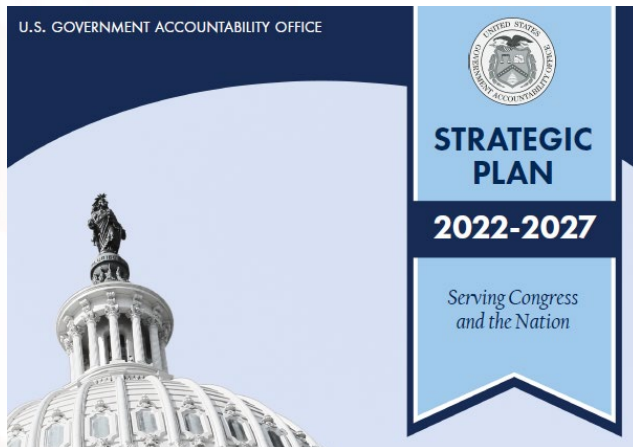


Tribal and Indigenous Advisory Council



New Dedicated Portfolio

GAO's Tribal Strategic Objective



Public commitment to evaluate federal efforts to fulfill the federal government's responsibilities to Tribes, their members, and individual descendants

- Evaluate federal policies and programs that serve Indian Tribes, their members, and other Indigenous groups
- Assess federal efforts to protect Native American cultural, environmental, and natural resources
- Examine federal efforts to foster tribal self-determination and self-governance, and economic development

Tribal & Indigenous Advisory Council

- Comprised primarily of leaders or delegates of federally recognized Tribes
- Advises GAO on vital and emerging issues affecting Tribes, their citizens, and Indigenous communities
- Advances contextual sophistication by providing expertise, sharing lived perspectives, and facilitating communication with tribal communities and entities





GAO's Tribal Portfolio

Coordination

Coordinates across engagement teams on tribal work.

Outreach

Supports consistent outreach and serves as a focal point for external parties.

Capacity

Provides education, job aids, and guidance on tribal issues to GAO staff.

Engagements

Leads engagement work and sponsors GAO's Tribal and Indigenous Advisory Council

Key Principles Underlying Our Tribal Work

- 
- Tribal sovereignty and self-determination**
 - Fulfilling the federal trust responsibility**
 - Unique political status**
 - Meaningful and robust tribal consultation**
-

Selected Opportunities for Incorporating Tribal Perspectives

Context

- Educational Foundations
- Understanding Local Context
- Relationship Building

Design and Scoping

- Research Questions
- Scoping Choices
- Criteria

Evidence Collection

- Case Selection
- Interviews & Site Visits
- Comparisons

Reporting

- Inclusive Language
- Review Opportunities
- Contextualization

Considerations for Performance Auditors

Are the programs accessible to all eligible recipients?

Do different types of recipients have greater success?

Are there opportunities to reduce administrative burden?

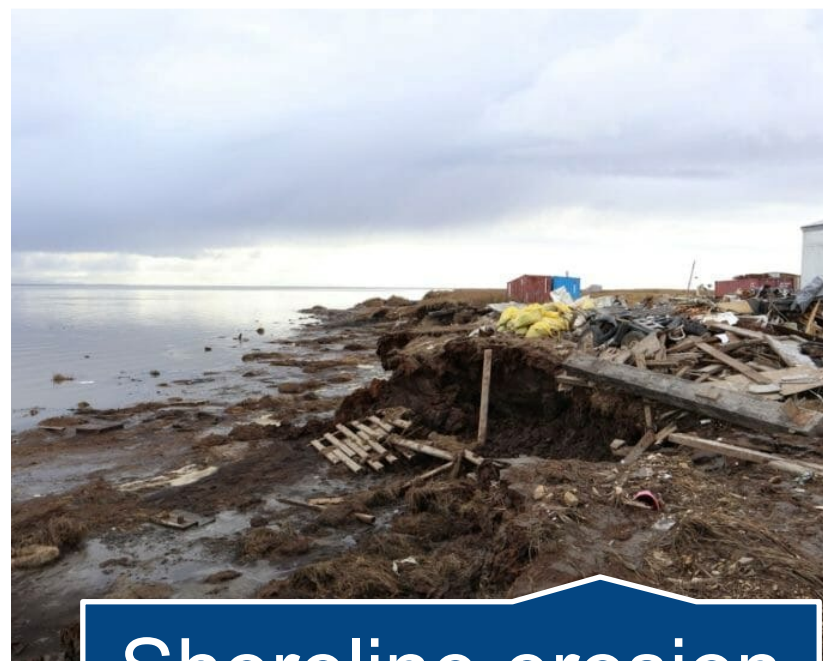
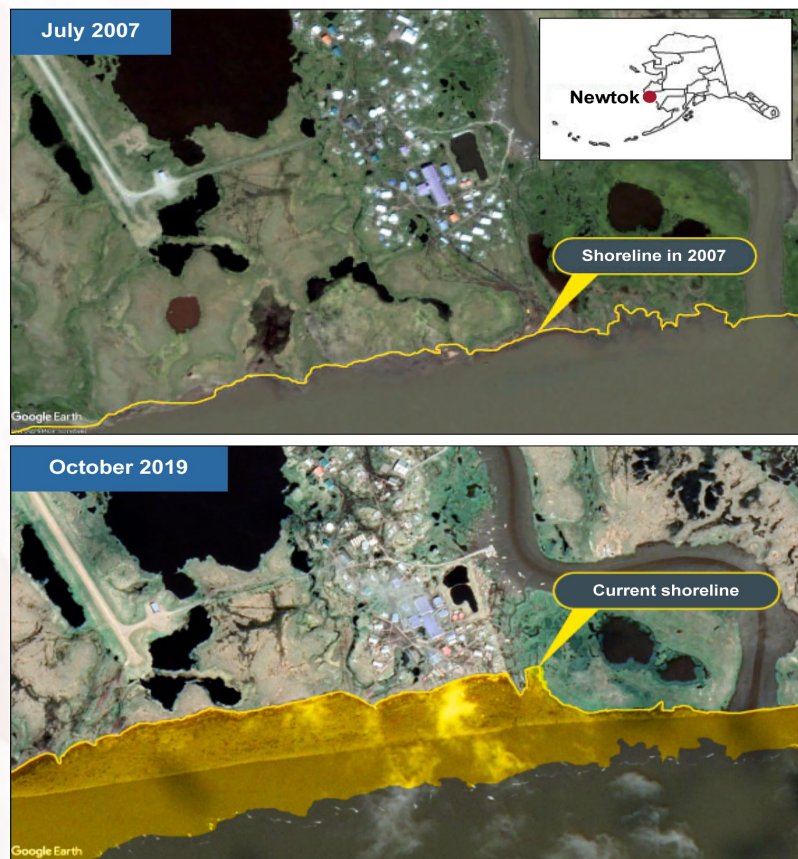
Considerations for Compliance Auditors

What is your motivation?

What are your information sources?

Are there opportunities to streamline existing processes?

Tribal Perspectives in GAO's work: Alaska



Shoreline erosion
in Newtok

Tribal Perspectives in GAO's work: Alaska

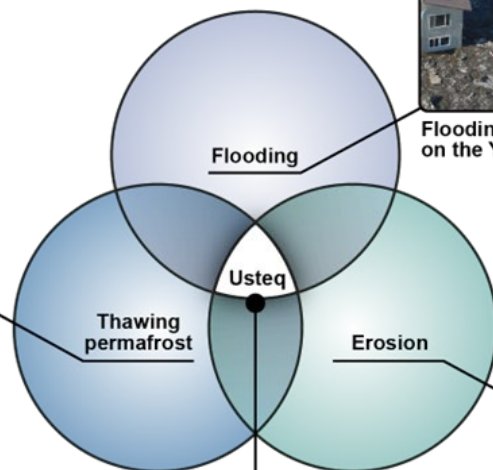
Individually, erosion, flooding, and thawing permafrost are persistent hazards in Alaska. When combined, they can result in a type of catastrophic land collapse known as usteq.



Thawing permafrost undermining electricity infrastructure in Newtok



Flooding in Galena resulting from an ice jam on the Yukon River



Usteq undermining the land beneath homes in Newtok



Erosion along the riverbank in Huslia

Tribal Perspectives in GAO's Work: Alaska Summary Results

Tribal Perspectives

Challenges navigating maze of federal programs and barriers to program access

No federal programs to address combined effects of erosion, flooding, and permafrost thaw (usteq)



Resulting Agency Actions

Agencies working to remove program barriers, increase coordination and streamline program delivery

Native villages, tribal organizations, and state partners collaborated to include usteq in disaster programs

Tribal Issues: Barriers to Access to Federal Assistance (GAO-25-107674)

Limited staffing and administrative burden

Tribes may have limited staffing and administrative capacity which makes it challenging to identify, apply for, and monitor funding spread across multiple agencies and programs.



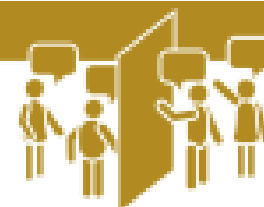
Financial constraints and economic development

Financial or economic development constraints can be significant obstacles to accessing certain federal programs, especially for smaller Tribes.



Limited agency communication

Limited agency communication on (1) consultation efforts, (2) outreach on other relevant information, and (3) feedback on the application process or results can hinder Tribes' access.



Remoteness of Tribes and limited federal awareness of Tribes' traditions

Tribes can experience challenges due to limited federal understanding and consideration of (1) geographic and physical barriers and (2) Tribes' traditional and cultural factors.



Tribal Issues: Barriers to Access to Federal Assistance

GAO-25-107674, December 2024

Supporting Auditors that Work with Tribes



Identify Educational
Resources



Templates and Work
Aids



Invest in
Relationships



Questions? Contact Anna Maria Ortiz at OrtizA@gao.gov

Special thanks to Lisa Van Arsdale and the rest of GAO's Tribal Team:
Estelle Bowman, Tammy Conquest, Paige Gilbreath and Leslie Pollock