

NATIVE AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS PROTOCOLS FOR SURVEYING INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL BURIAL SITES

MARSHA SMALL, FARINA KING, AND PRESTON MCBRIDE

JULY 2021

This set of Indigenous-centered protocols is addressed with urgency primarily to Tribal nations and Indigenous communities that are beginning to survey Indian boarding school cemeteries and burial sites for their children who never returned home or are lost in the on-reservation Indian boarding school cemeteries. It is a starting place and offers a range of suggestions to take into consideration for those engaging in this work, this area of healing.

There should be Natives always present during the survey. These Natives need to be included in the survey budget at same scale as the surveyor. Another key approach is respect for other Tribal nations' children who may be in the same cemetery. There are Nations that do not believe in the disinterment of their relatives.

Native elders, of course, must be consulted and familiarized in the ways of geophysical inspection, as should any community members. This connection with elders and communities bridges the healing aspects of the survey. Some communities or elders may consider certain types of survey (for example, those that transmit energy into the ground) as damaging and to be avoided.

These times require both new songs and old ways of honoring. Most Nations rarely disturb or disturbed the final rest of the deceased. As such, protocols addressed by the community should be adhered to with the majority voice with consensus prevailing, if exhumation is the goal.

Steer clear of choosing to commission and work with a company that is there just for the monetary profit, extractive data, and 'notoriety.' It is best to choose a geophysical organization or business that is already familiar with Indigenous protocols. It will decrease the risks and impacts so often accompanied by outside entities that know little of Native American and Indigenous identities and epistemologies.

As a survey is initiated, it is critical that all surveyors and Native representatives meet as a team to go through the protocols of the Tribal nations and Indigenous communities involved. Much attention and consideration should be taken to identify and include respective Tribal nations and Indigenous communities whose children are in the cemeteries.

In addition, it is imperative that surveys consist of at least two instrument types, ground penetrating radar and at least one other instrument, such as magnetometry or electromagnetic conductivity. It is the general consensus of cemetery survey experts that using two different types of instruments is key to survey success. What one instrument may miss, the other may pick up, decreasing the possibility of missing the children or community members' graves. Ground penetrating radar by itself is not sufficient.

As a survey team, be sure to focus on procedures, the timing, reference, depth metrics,

receiver capacities, surface, and subsurface inconsistencies (e.g., soil and vegetation differences), burial characteristic definitions, and details such as maintaining the consistency of a magnetometer's height during survey. Cemetery surveys must have high density data. This means for radar, transect spacings of 25 centimeters or tighter and a trace interval of 5 centimeters or tighter. With other instruments such as magnetometry and conductivity, transect intervals should be 50 centimeters or tighter, with 8 or more readings/samples per meter along survey lines. All radar survey products must include the production and analysis of time/slice amplitude maps, in addition to examining radar profiles. The surveyor should also record the locations of existing grave markers and other cemetery features, and these cemetery features should appear on maps of survey results, to show how existing markers and other features relate to detected graves. We are not locating utilities here; we are locating missing children. These aspects are all part of quality control and they should be of primary consideration.

Be certain to check that your contracts stipulate closed findings, and that the data belongs only to your respective Tribal nation and Indigenous community. The survey company should prepare you a full survey report. The report should include maps of processed data, separate maps of interpretation, and a table with a list of coordinates related to the detected graves. The surveying company needs to go over their results with you in detail. It will take considerable time. Consider the timeline and commitment of time for these efforts accordingly. The company should turn over copies of all materials associated with the survey to the respective Tribal nation and Indigenous community. The company should sign a document, such as a contract, stipulating that it cannot share any data or images from the survey without Tribal Nation or Indigenous community approval. All files should be Tribally owned. This is critical.

Be prepared to spend hours learning how to read the geophysical survey results if this is important to you. Select those tribal members who have a commitment to finding the Native American and Indigenous children in the Indian boarding school cemeteries. For many Nations, this is not a simple process meant to yield data on the numbers of unmarked graves. Indeed, it is a journey of bringing a loved one's voice to the surface that the relatives can visit or, in the case of off-reservation sites, possibly even return them home. The latter could conflict with the non-invasive and non-disturbing Indigenous and tribally specific methods, but indiscriminate digging should not be part of any survey. These protocols apply to those ancestors whose families want them closer to their Homelands. It is part of the healing process.

There should be efforts and ways for Nations and Indigenous communities to connect with one another, and Indigenous professionals who are all committed to this work to survey and find missing Native American and Indigenous boarding school children in the unmarked burial sites. Together, they can and should further develop these specific protocols and recommendations to rematriate their children. Also, each Tribe or Indigenous community will have to decide how they want the graves marked after the survey is complete.

This document is developed as a base metric for Nations and entities who will work together to find the stolen and kidnapped and missing children in the Indian boarding school cemeteries and other burial sites.