

Interviewer:

A number of smaller cities are home to a significant proportion of Native Americans, for example — Green Bay, Wisconsin; Rapid City, South Dakota; Santa Fe, New Mexico. What do you think at these smaller communities can do to bridge the gaps that we talked about earlier, and to improve life for the Native Americans that live in those communities?

Wilma:

First, I think that people have to listen to Native people. I think with Native people in urban areas, it may be even worse than it is in rural areas because rural America is basically where most of the homelands of Native people are located. So you have the power of a tribe behind you when you want to move forward with an agenda in a community. In urban areas, there is this sort of inter-tribal groups — the inter-tribal groups are people from various tribes who don't have the power of a government behind them. So there are all kinds of great people who want to help, but the community doesn't necessarily listen to them. And so I think for an agenda to move forward, the organizations involved need to listen to the Native people first and see them as partners, not as recipients of money or recipients of services, but as partners, and trust them. People can tell when you are "bullshitting" them, or when you really do trust them, or when you really are going to work with them and move toward articulating a goal for a community, or a goal for a project. I just don't think that people listen to Native people.

Interviewer:

We have in this country, this whole notion of being concerned with the next generation and tribes have a particular way of saying they are concerned for "seven generations to follow." What are some of the strategies for engaging young people in their community, that we might want to pay more attention to, as we go into this next century?