

# Indigenous Agroforestry

Cultural Practitioner  
Survey Report



INDIGENOUS  
AGROFORESTRY  
NETWORK

# **Indigenous Agroforestry Survey Report**

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## Introduction

This Cultural Practitioner Survey was developed to better understand the lived experiences, priorities, and challenges of Indigenous cultural practitioners engaged in land stewardship, agroforestry, and place-based cultural practices across the Pacific Northwest and beyond. While closely related to the [Indigenous Agroforestry Technology & Tools Survey](#), which focused on tribal natural resource departments and technical staff, this survey centers practitioners whose work is often informal, intergenerational, and rooted in cultural responsibility rather than institutional roles.

Cultural practitioners frequently operate across multiple land tenures, including tribal trust lands, co-managed areas, public lands, and privately owned parcels. Their stewardship activities often fall outside standard programmatic definitions, even when they align closely with agroforestry, restoration, and climate-adaptive land management. As a result, their needs, barriers, and sources of knowledge are often underrepresented in formal assessments.

This survey was designed to elevate practitioner perspectives, identify gaps in support systems, and inform culturally grounded programming that complements technical capacity-building efforts underway through the Indigenous Agroforestry Network.

## Survey Approach

The survey was distributed through Indigenous Agroforestry Network partners and practitioner networks using relationship-based outreach methods. The approach prioritized accessibility and voluntary participation, recognizing that many cultural practitioners are not embedded within formal institutions and may face time, funding, or access constraints.

Survey questions were designed to capture both quantitative patterns and qualitative context, including land access, knowledge transmission, technology use, and perceived barriers to sustaining cultural practice. Several questions intentionally mirrored themes explored in the Technology & Tools Survey to allow for high-level comparison, while remaining grounded in practitioner-specific realities.

## Key Takeaways

**Center cultural knowledge and mentorship.** Build programming that elevates cultural teachings and hands-on learning with elders, culture bearers, key tribal staff—since these are the most relied-upon knowledge sources. Seek opportunities to pair mentoring time of elders and others with youth to address the 56% concern about youth involvement.

**Invest in land-access solutions.** Support agreements and partnerships that expand access to traditional areas and co-managed spaces, responding to the 72% citing land access challenges and barriers. This constraint directly affects the ability to practice, teach, and steward culturally significant species and places.

**Target technical capacity.** While many practitioners already use mobile tools, mapping, or imagery in limited ways, a substantial number expressed interest in using technology but lacked training, equipment, or technical support. The barrier is not opposition to technology, but misalignment between available tools and practitioner realities.

**Provide access.** Enable tribal practitioners to access lightweight, portable technology that can be used with and without cellular or wifi access, which may not be available in remote locations.

**Clear protocols.** Support practitioners in identifying and adapting clear protocols to uphold the data sovereignty of their tribes, to work cooperatively when possible with their tribal natural resource and cultural resource departments.

**Tie funding to practice continuity.** Short-term, project-based funding and lack of direct support for cultural practitioners contribute to burnout, discontinuity, and loss of knowledge. Respondents emphasized the need for stipends, honoraria, and flexible funding tied to ongoing practice rather than discrete deliverables.

**Allow for different laws/different land jurisdictions.** Establish agreements, policy and laws that allow cultural practitioners to tribes, Indigenous cultural practitioners to gather and conduct resource management on adjoining lands, including under federal, state, local, corporate and private ownership.

# Pathways for Program Development

**Small-cohort pilot:** Offer a 6-8 week hands-on cohort focused on field data collection with mobile apps and mapping basics, anchored by knowledge holder-led sessions and youth participation.

**Target tech adoption, not just tools.** Provide starter kits and onboarding for field data collection and mapping, where interest and partial use already exist. Prioritize training and set-up support for those who want to use data and planning tools but are not yet doing so.

**Micro-grants + technical assistance bundle:** Pair \$5,000 to \$10,000 micro-grants with one-on-one onboarding and office hours to jumpstart technology for those who want to use it but lack time, training, or set-up support.

**Access & agreements track:** Convene partners to troubleshoot land access barriers and document templates for co-management and access arrangements practitioners can adapt.

**Knowledge continuity:** Fund honoraria and recording support for elder-practitioner exchanges to stem the loss of knowledge holders.

## Summary of Results

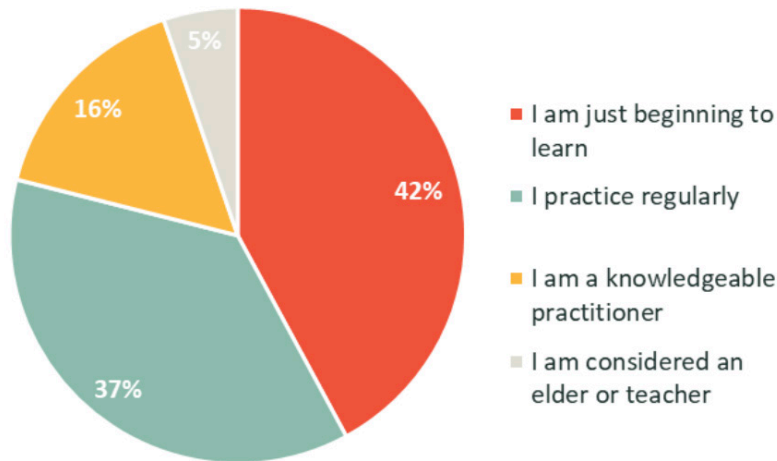
### Respondent Overview

- **Total responses:** 19
- **Gender identity:** 42% women, 32% Two-Spirit/non-binary/gender-diverse, 11% men
- **Tribal affiliation:** 53% of respondents were members of a tribe or tribal nation.
- **Location:** Survey respondents were from across the Pacific Northwest, with a strong cluster around urban centers (e.g. Portland, Tacoma, Olympia).

| Region        | Respondents | % of Total | Notes                                    |
|---------------|-------------|------------|--|
| Oregon        | 7           | 36         | Strong concentration in Multnomah County |
| Washington    | 4           | 21         | Primarily Pierce and Mason Counties      |
| California    | 3           | 16         | Humboldt and Sacramento                  |
| Idaho         | 2           | 11         |  |
| Other U.S.    | 2           | 11         | Colorado, Minnesota                      |
| International | 1           | 5          | Costa Rica                               |

- **Experience levels:**
  - 42% were early learners
  - 37% had some experience
  - 16% were experienced practitioners
  - 5% were elders or teachers.

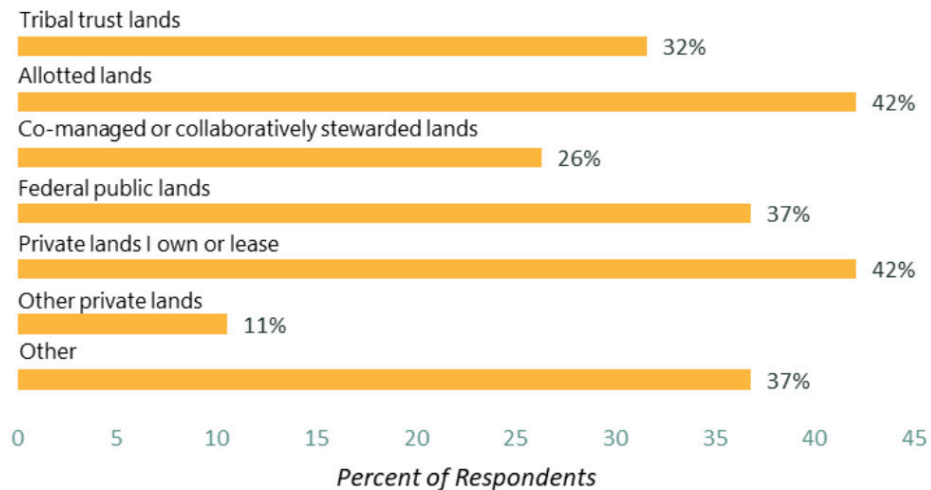
Figure 1: Level of Experience



### Land Tenure and Stewardship

- Practitioners work across multiple **land types**:
  - 42% on **co-managed or collaboratively stewarded lands**
  - 42% on **other private lands**
  - 37% on **tribal trust lands**
  - 37% on **federal public lands**
  - 26% on **lands they personally own or lease**
- This mix of land use illustrates how Indigenous stewardship frequently occurs **across jurisdictions**, emphasizing the need for flexible support tools and cross-agency coordination and the importance of co-management or co-stewardship agreements and access to private lands.

Figure 2: Land Type for Practice Implementation



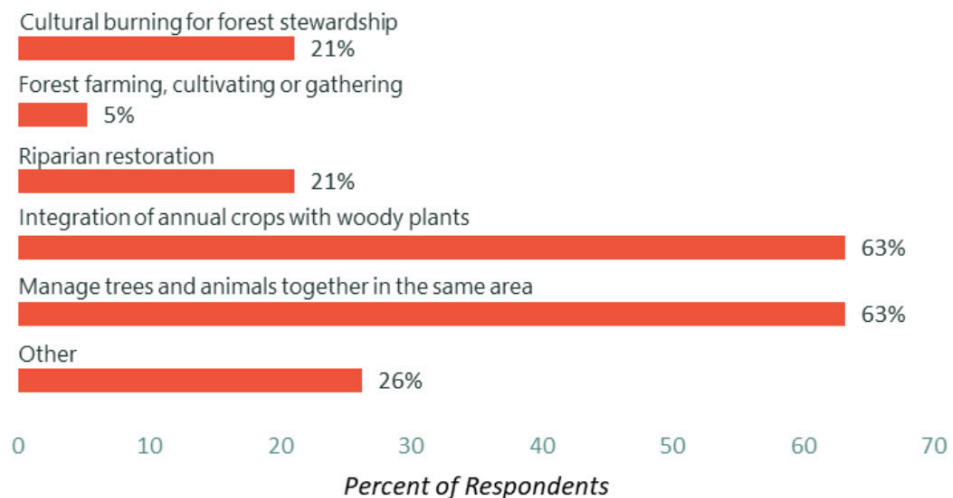
## Agroforestry Practices

Common activities included:

- **Forest farming and gathering forest foods or fibers: 63%**
- **Riparian restoration and replanting: 63%**
- **Alley cropping or planting trees among crops: 21%**
- **Silvopasture (trees and livestock): 5%**

Many practitioners described work that aligns with agroforestry principles but is expressed in **cultural and place-based terms** (e.g., cultural burning, tending, first foods restoration).

Figure 3: Current Practices



## Knowledge and Learning

Knowledge was reported as primarily **intergenerational and experiential**:

- 100% cited **cultural teachings and traditional knowledge**
- 90% learned **directly from elders or cultural practitioners**
- 84% cited **personal experience**
- 63% learned through **formal education or workshops**
- Only 26% used **technical or digital resources**

This emphasizes that **community-based learning** is the foundation of Indigenous agroforestry capacity.

## Technology Use and Interest

- 53% use **mobile apps or field data collection tools**
- 47% use **aerial imagery or remote sensing**
- 42% use **mapping or GIS tools**
- 25% maintain **databases for resources**
- Roughly a third of respondents **do not use technology but would like to**, indicating a readiness for more user-friendly, culturally relevant technology.

## Barriers to Practice

Top challenges cited:

- **Loss of elders and knowledge holders: 83%**
- **Limited access to traditional lands: 72%**
- **Climate and environmental change: 67%**
- **Policy and permitting constraints: 61%**
- **Lack of funding and institutional support: 61%**
- **Limited youth engagement: 56%**

No respondents indicated “no significant challenges,” highlighting systemic issues that continue to hinder long-term practice sustainability.

## Existing Support Systems

Of those who had received support:

- **80%** received **funding assistance**,
- **40%** participated in **training programs**, and
- **20%** accessed **mapping tools or resource assessments**

These figures suggest that **financial support remains the most direct enabler** of practice, but training and long-term mentorship are equally necessary for continued tool usage.

# Survey Methodology

Responses were collected anonymously and analyzed in aggregate to protect participant privacy and respect cultural sensitivities. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize patterns across respondents, while open-ended responses were reviewed to identify recurring themes and contextual nuance.

Given the relatively small sample size, findings should be interpreted as **indicative rather than representative**, offering directional insights rather than population-level generalizations. The results are best understood as a qualitative-quantitative snapshot of practitioner experience that complements, rather than replaces, broader tribal program assessments.

## **Conclusion**

The Cultural Practitioner Survey reinforces what many Indigenous communities already know: cultural practitioners are carrying forward essential stewardship knowledge under increasingly constrained conditions. Despite limited land access, funding instability, and the accelerating loss of elders, practitioners continue to sustain agroforestry and land-based practices that support ecological health, cultural resilience, and intergenerational learning.

When viewed alongside the Indigenous Agroforestry Technology & Tools Survey, a clear opportunity emerges. Technical tools, data systems, and training investments will be most impactful when they are intentionally designed to support cultural practitioners as well as tribal programs. This includes funding mentorship, improving land access pathways, pairing technology with onboarding and relationship-based support, and honoring Indigenous data and knowledge sovereignty.

Supporting cultural practitioners is not an ancillary effort. It is a core strategy for sustaining Indigenous agroforestry, climate adaptation, and land stewardship into the future.