



# MAKING TRIBAL HISTORIES ACCESSIBLE

## Collaborating with the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana

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ALILAMO (thank you!)

The Coushatta Archives serves as a central repository of materials related to the history and culture of the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana. The primary purpose to the Coushatta Archives is to promote and increase awareness of the rich history and culture of the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana.

### PROJECT RATIONALE & OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project is to create a digital resource utilizing best practices in the Digital Humanities, educational technologies, and indigenous information sharing platforms to make Coushatta history accessible to tribal citizens and to provide the tribe with opportunities to enhance their public educational programming.

1. Increase Coushatta Digital Presence
2. Improve Information Accessibility
3. Integrate Materials into a Single Platform
4. Ensure Data Sovereignty

### PROJECT SUMMARY AND TIMELINE

The Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana is a sovereign nation with a long and complex history characterized by displacement and marginalization. While their language, culture, and oral histories persevered since permanently settling in southwest Louisiana following the Civil War, it has only been in recent decades that the Coushatta Heritage Department has (re)claimed photographs, maps, field notes, reports, correspondence, and government documents that offer more detail and texture to their history from early European contact through the 20th century. To manage this growing collection, a tribal archivist has recently been hired to organize, digitize, and catalog these historical resources. The next challenge the tribe had faced was how best to create an easily navigable website to make Coushatta historical and cultural materials accessible to both tribal members and the greater public. Such a site should serve as a digital library, featuring important tribal governing documents, reports, photographs, maps, etc. It should also support grassroots historical inquiry and information sharing within the Coushatta community with the inclusion of oral histories and other private contributions.

#### December 2018

##### Preparation Steps Prior to Launch:

- Go through the resources provided by the Sustainable Heritage Network at <http://sustainable-heritagenetwork.org/digital-heritage/2018-pre-atalm-workshop-providing-culturally-appropriate-digital-access-indigenous>
- Figure out what steps need to be taken to set up an account and get started. The "Getting Started" guide can be found here:
- <http://support.mukurtu.org/customer/en/portal/articles/2794448-getting-started-with-mukurtu-cms>
- Identify some best practices utilizing Mukurtu CMS - <http://mukurtu.org/showcase/>
- Consult with the Mukurtu developers

#### January 2019

##### Kick off meeting:

A phone conference with staff from the Coushatta Heritage Department (Marianna and Linda) to go over the plan, make adjustments, and gain their approval for moving forward.

#### January - March 2019

##### Building the Site:

- Build the skeleton of the site along with a few entries to demo. Complete what is reasonable in that period of time with the understanding that adjustments will likely be made after meeting with the tribe.
- Prepare a demo:
- Prepare a slideshow presentation for the Coushatta Tribe to gain approval before beginning the process of building the site. Include the following elements:
- A glossary of terms used within the Mukurtu system to ensure common understanding.
- Create a proposed site layout that captures the tribe's cultural and historical information, which also includes areas where the Koasati language will be integrated. This should include a list of needed summary text that the Coushatta Heritage Department will provide as the site evolves.

#### March 28-29, 2019

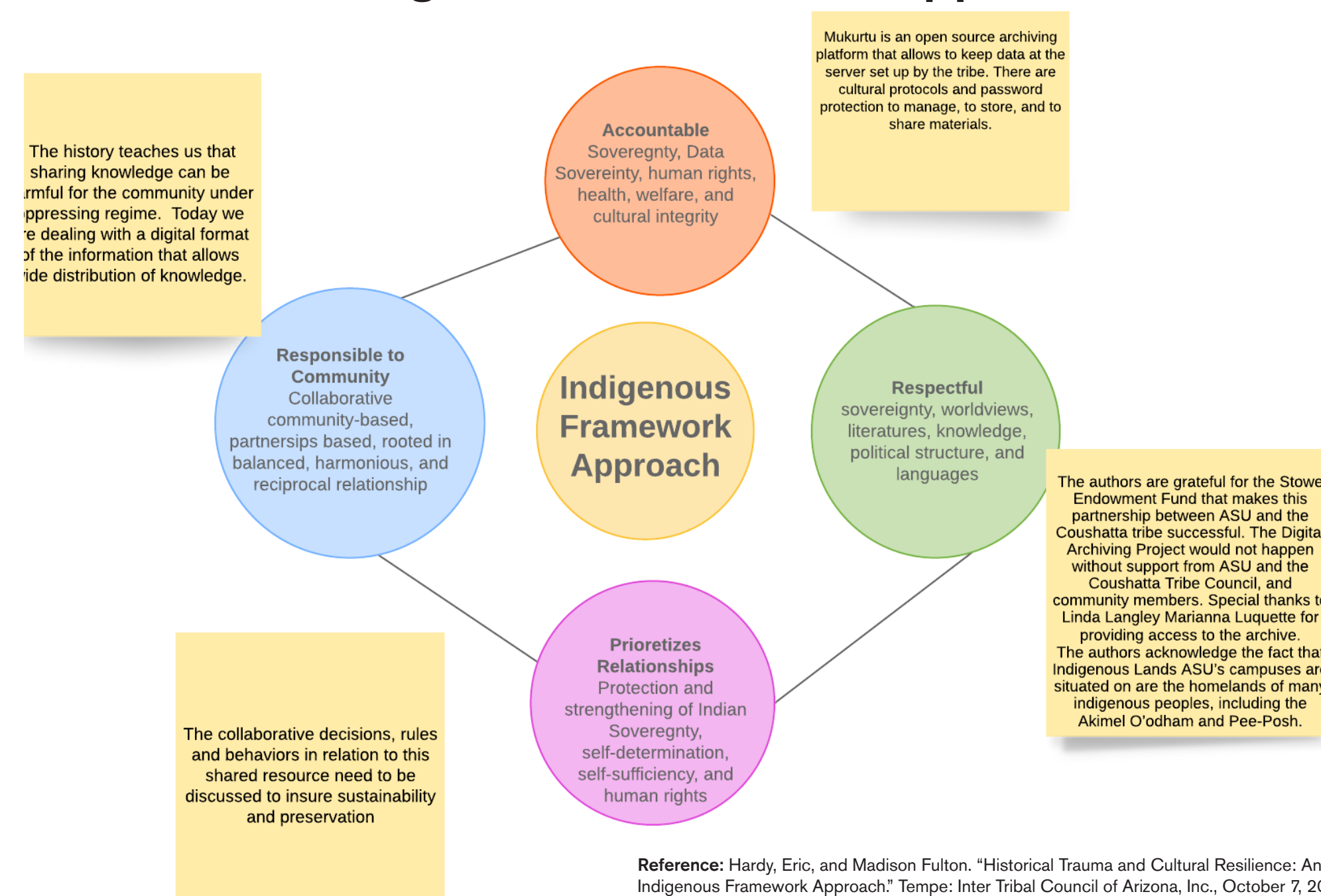
##### Status Update Meeting in Louisiana

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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### METHODS

#### Indigenous Framework Approach



Reference: Hardy, Eric, and Madison Fulton. "Historical Trauma and Cultural Resilience: An Indigenous Framework Approach." Tempe: Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc., October 7, 2019.

### DISCUSSION

According to Elinor Ostrom, an ASU scholar, the Nobel laureate, the economist and social scientist, the knowledge is considered the commons and a classic example of pure public good (Ostrom and Hess, 2007). The history teaches us that sharing knowledge can be harmful for the community under the oppressive regime (Israel et al., 2012). Ostrom also recognized the fact that the new technology "creates a fundamental change in the nature of the resource, with the resource being converted from a nonrivalrous, nonexclusionary public good into a common-pool resource that needs to be managed, monitored, and protected, to ensure sustainability and preservation" (Ostrom and Hess, 2007). This transformation allowed marginalized communities to access information and interact with it. To improve equity outcomes, the ASU-Coushatta partnership bases its activities on the Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) principles. The key elements of CBPR (LaVeaux, D. & Christopher, S., 2009) are the community involvement in the research and co-producing knowledge through de-colonizing practices. This project is about organizing the digitized archived materials at the Mukurtu platform in a digitally accessible format. It demonstrated the best practices of CBPR such as making collaborative decisions, and establishing rules and behaviors in relation to this shared resource. The partnership offers the historical societal framework (Bates, D., 2020) that allows all details to be discussed to insure sustainability and preservation.

### MUKURTU

#### Open Source Digital Archiving Platform for Indigenous Peoples

First created in 2007 for the Warumungu community in the Northern Territory of Australia, now extended without cost to all Indigenous communities world-wide. Cultural protocols and password protection to manage materials, sharing what is meant to be shared and protecting and storing information that is not meant for the general public. "Mukurtu" is a special bag for sacred cultural items that no one else is allowed to touch without permission. The Coushatta demo is accessible only to people with the project manager status in the platform. The protocol keeps the site and all items invisible to public. The protocol is a tool to control the access to the information. To see the site, the access should be granted by the community admin.



### RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Equitable partnership with Indigenous communities is a challenge for Western-informed approaches in academia. In response to this problem, a collaborative project among ASU faculty, a graduate student, and the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana has demonstrated a successful partnership between tribes and academic institutions. This project was funded by the Stowe Endowment Fund to maintain ASU's commitment to the communities it serves. The open-source digital archiving platform Mukurtu explicitly designed for the Indigenous communities has been employed to develop a mockup for the integrated materials currently held at the Coushatta Tribal Archives, and to make Coushatta history more accessible to tribal citizens. CBPR proven to be beneficial to the Coushatta community in the first phase of the partnership. The proposed recommendations for improving accessibility of the Coushatta digital archive have been discussed and approved by the Tribal Council.

### REFERENCES

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Koasati Heritage website: <http://www.koasatiheritage.org/pages/coushatta-archives/>