

# The BIE Leader's Connection Checklist: Beyond Compliance to Community

Guidance for Leading with the 4 R's: Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility

## Phase 1: Environment & Culture (Respect)

*Respect starts with acknowledging that Indigenous knowledge is a rigorous, foundational asset, not a "supplement."*

- The Mirror Test:** Do 75% or more of the visual elements (posters, student work, hallway art) reflect the specific faces and landscapes of the Nation you serve?
- Linguistic Presence:** Are the "functional" signs (Office, Library, Cafeteria) displayed in the Native language of the community?
- Elder Integration:** Is there a dedicated physical space or an open-door protocol for Tribal Elders and knowledge-keepers to participate in school life?
- Staff Orientation:** Does your onboarding for new (especially non-Native) staff include a formal introduction to the local history, land, and Tribal protocols?

## Phase 2: Curriculum & Instruction (Relevance)

*Relevance ensures students don't have to "leave their Indigeneity at the door" to succeed academically.*

- The "So What?" Check:** When you visit a classroom, ask three students: *"How does this lesson help your community?"* (Aim for a meaningful answer beyond "to pass the test").
- Land-Based Learning:** Does each grade level have at least one unit per semester that is taught primarily outdoors or through Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)?
- Instructional Balance:** Is at least 50% of the class period dedicated to student-led dialogue or collaborative work, rather than a one-way teacher lecture?
- Resource Audit:** Are your supplemental materials (books, videos, math problems) vetted for cultural accuracy and tribal specificity?

### Phase 3: Community & Partnership (Reciprocity)

*Reciprocity means the school functions as a "two-way street" where the community is a partner, not a customer.*

- Listening Sessions:** Do you hold at least one "Open Listening" session per quarter that is *not* tied to a specific compliance report or disciplinary issue?
- Shared Power:** Is the Tribal Council or Education Committee consulted during the initial planning phase of new initiatives, rather than just at the "approval" phase?
- The Gift of Service:** Do students have regular opportunities to present their learning or solutions to real-world community problems to Tribal leadership?

### Phase 4: Operations & Wellness (Responsibility)

*Responsibility is the commitment to the "whole child" and the future of the Nation.*

- Calendar Alignment:** Is the school schedule cross-referenced with the local ceremonial or seasonal calendar to prevent attendance conflicts for students?
- Compliance Buffering:** Have you identified one "red tape" task you can handle for your teachers this week so they can spend that time building relational connections with students?
- Holistic Support:** Does the school have a clear, trauma-informed wellness plan that incorporates both Western mental health resources and traditional healing practices?

---

***"Compliance is the floor, but connection is the ceiling."***

**Use this checklist monthly to ensure your leadership is moving the needle toward the  
future of the Nation.**