# TRIBAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT


NCAI
Defending Sovereignty Since 1944

# THE TOOLKIT

## WHERE IT COMES FROM

The learnings presented in this toolkit derive from an array of sources, notably: NCAI's partnerships with the 30 Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities featured as "Indian Country Snapshots" in the toolkit; the dozens of other Tribal Nations, Native non-profit organizations, and tribal colleges and universities it consulted during the toolkit's development; interviews and surveys it has conducted with tribal leaders and workforce development practitioners over the years; breakout sessions on workforce development held at NCAI conferences; NCAI's network of tribal workforce development practitioners and collaborating entities such as the National Indian and Native American Employment and Training Conference (NINAETC) and DOL's WIOA Section 166 Native American Employment and Training Council; NCAI's TANF Task Force and Economic Development, Finance, and Employment Subcommittee; recent media accounts documenting effective Native workforce development initiatives; and the latest relevant academic research.

## WHO SHOULD USE IT

NCAI developed this toolkit as a collaborative resource for:

- Tribal, intertribal organization, Native non-profit, and tribal college and university leaders
- Native "workforce development practitioners" (see definition in Glossary on page 3)
- Tribal TERO staff
- Tribal citizens
- Tribal enterprise CEOs and staff
- Other tribal/local employers
- Native small business owners
- Partners/prospective partners of Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities
- Federal/state policymakers and staff

## HOW TO USE IT

NCAI designed this toolkit to serve as a thought-provoking guide that can be used in multiple ways. Tribal leaders and Native workforce development practitioners can use the entire toolkit to inform their deliberations about how best to design, implement, and grow a self-determined, comprehensive workforce development approach over time. Alternatively, they can select and "pull out" specific strategic considerations from among the 15 featured in the toolkit and use them to focus discussion and work on those specific aspects of workforce development. For example, if a Tribal Nation or other Native-led workforce development entity has determined it needs to build more partnerships to strengthen or expand its workforce development initiatives, it could pull out and use the "Partnerships" section on pages 36-37 to assist with that effort. Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities should consider using the toolkit as part of their orientation programming for newly elected and hired leaders and workforce development program staff. For more information about how to use the toolkit, please visit **www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit**.

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## LEARN MORE & STAY CONNECTED

To learn more about this toolkit and access related resources for further learning, please visit NCAI's "Tribal Workforce Development" toolkit resource center at **www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit** or scan the QR code to the left. For questions or more information about NCAI's workforce development initiative, please visit **www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit**.

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**TRIBAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: AN NCAI INITIATIVE**

This toolkit shares the main findings of NCAI's ongoing research examining the innovative approaches to workforce development that Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities are forging, how they are achieving success (as they define it), and why. This work seeks to answer the following key questions (among others): How are Tribal Nations and others working to create reliable, sustainable career opportunities for tribal citizens that directly advance the long-term goals of the nations to which those citizens belong? How are they investing in and preparing tribal citizens to succeed in particular careers that their nations need, and how are they creating pathways for those citizens to provide their nations a meaningful, lasting return on that investment?

# Tribal Workforce Development:
## 15 Strategic Considerations

*This toolkit explores 15 mission-critical considerations that Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities must strategically address if they are to design, implement, and grow self-determined, innovative approaches to building Native workforces in accordance with their cultural values and economy-building priorities. Each of these strategic considerations spans two pages in the toolkit and features four learning components as explained below.*

**FRAMING THE DISCUSSION**: A short summary of the strategic consideration and the role it plays in the design, implementation, and growth of a strategic approach to developing Native workforces.

**INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS**: Two leading examples of innovative Native-led solutions to workforce development that exemplify the strategic consideration in question.

SELF-GOVERNANCE

FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

The growing body of research on Native nation rebuilding identifies "practical sovereignty" – the assertion of Native decision-making power – as one of the five main keys to successful, sustained economic and community development.[1] When it comes to workforce development – an integral part of economic and community development – sustained success depends, above all else, on tribal control: the willingness, ability, and unrelenting commitment of a Tribal Nation to seize and exercise authority over the programs and activities that develop its human capacity. More and more Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities (such as Native non-profit organizations and TCUs) are recognizing this fact – and acting on it.

Taking control is an essential first step, but taking control of what exactly? For many, achieving practical sovereignty in workforce development means taking control of federal, state, and other programs designed by outsiders for other places, populations, and purposes. These typically ignore the uniquely complex conditions in Native communities and fail to consider and address the distinct workforce development needs and priorities of Native community members. As one might expect, these uniform, top-down, and "outside-in" approaches have a poor track record of workforce development success, mainly because they are not meaningfully designed, guided by, or primarily accountable to those they are meant to serve. As one tribal workforce development practitioner explains, "Many of the grants and contracts that we have to administer are framed in what it would look like in a major urban city in America. That's not our reality."[2] These programs also define and measure success based on nationally-standardized performance indicators that often aren't relevant to the particular challenges, values, and goals of Native communities. In addition, at an institutional level, they tend to embrace the status quo and avoid taking risks, which stifles the development of new workforce development strategies to replace inefficient and ineffective ones.

As decades of Indian Country experience illustrate, simply taking over administration of these programs won't change how, and toward what ends, they function. And it can improve their effectiveness only so much. The challenge for tribal and Native organizational leaders and key decision-makers is how to build a truly self-governed workforce development approach, either from scratch or more commonly by moving beyond simply administering programs in the same way that others did previously to fundamentally redesigning them. As one tribal leader frames it, "What are we doing differently in this time of self-determination, when supposedly we are in control, different from the times that we weren't?"[3]

*"No right is more sacred to a nation, to a people, than the right to freely determine its social, economic, political, and culture without external interferences. The fullest expression of this right occurs when a nation freely governs itself."*

– JOSEPH DELACRUZ (1937-2000), FORMER PRESIDENT, QUINAULT INDIAN NATION

This approach is empowering. As one workforce development practitioner whose nation has embraced this challenge concluded, "We are no longer victims of our history. We are now impacting and directing where we are going as a tribe."[4]

It also works better, generating tangible, life-changing, positive outcomes for Native people that externally imposed approaches have proven wholly incapable of producing. Public Law 102-477 is a prime example. Created by Congress in response to decades of Indian Country advocacy to center self-determination in federally supported Native workforce development (see infographic on page 7), 477 has produced "increased job placements, much higher hourly wages, and nearly universal positive employment and education outcomes"[5] among participants across the 300 Tribal Nations who are taking advantage of the program.

To take true ownership of their workforce development systems, Tribal Nations and Native organizations must embrace the "grassroots" process[6] of "uprooting the limitations and programmatic silos that federal approaches have created. They must thoroughly assess whether their current approaches are effective and culturally appropriate, and what their findings mean for how they should change them."[7] To bolster their efforts, the federal government must no longer dictate to Indian Country how it should do workforce development. It must instead support Tribal Nations and Native organizations as they invent or reinvent strategies that work best for those they serve.[8] According to one tribal college president, "Flexibility works – enabling tribes to do what we're good at doing. We know our problems intimately. We also know the solutions."[9][10]

INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

**Citizen Potawatomi Nation (CPN)**

Determined to "design what works for us,"[1] in 1996 CPN took full ownership of the federally funded workforce education, training, and related programs serving its citizens and other local Native people. By creating a 477 plan, it merged these once-siloed programs into a single, tribal approach that holistically assesses the needs of each 477 participant and their family and empowers them to achieve self-sufficiency through a seamless, integrated system of "hand-up" versus "hand-out") supports.[2] Utilizing a single intake system that creates ease of access to culturally relevant services, CPN's 477 program is reducing "dependency on public assistance programs and reducing the effects of poverty on the Tribal Service Area population" by familiarizing Native workers and future workers with rewarding careers in various fields and preparing them to successfully pursue those careers.[3] Prior to 477, CPN had to turn some people away because of the eligibility and funding restrictions of the individual federal programs it administered. Today, its self-determined approach flexibly leverages dollars to provide customized services to each 477 participant based on their particular challenges and career aspirations. Other benefits include reduced administrative costs (which frees up more dollars for direct services), the increased effectiveness of those services, reduced joblessness among 477 participants, and an enhanced ability to create jobs – in part through a partnership with CPN's CDFI to help participants become small business owners.[4] Through cooperative agreements with four neighboring Tribal Nations, CPN has expanded its 477-based services to eligible Native people across six Oklahoma counties.[5] "Pushing the integration envelope,"[6] in recent years CPN added to its 477 program federal funds from LIHEAP, CSBG, Safe and Stable Families, and Reentry and Diversionary (which helps former felons reintegrate into the workforce and has produced a recidivism rate under two percent to date).[7] As CPN explains, moving its people towards self-sufficiency starts with "understanding your own tribe's distinct needs [and] the needs of your people, which is something that a federal, uniform approach to workforce development can't possibly account for."[8]

*LEARNING LINK:* https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/cpn.pdf
*CONNECT:* Margaret Zientek, Workforce and Social Services Director, Citizen Potawatomi Nation, mzientek@potawatomi.org

**Swinomish Indian Tribal Community (SITC)**

For decades, Swinomish confronted an oral health crisis of epic proportions: 68% of its community members saw their dental problems go untreated, the rate of tooth decay among youth was four times that of white people, and SITC members who were treated received care from "traveling dentists performing painful procedures in a doublewide trailer."[1] In response, SITC exercised its sovereignty and self-regulation of healthcare services to bring a solution established by Tribal Nations in Alaska to its community in the lower 48 states: dental health aid therapists (DHATs).[2] SITC spent two years redesigning the Swinomish Dental Program and developing the first tribal Dental Health Provider Licensing Code.[3] The first Swinomish DHAT started seeing patients in 2016, and a year later Washington State recognized Tribal Nations' authority to license DHATs on tribal lands.[4] Over the past decade, SITC has become a state leader in access to dental hygiene,[5] with its DHATs providing roughly 50 primary dental prevention and treatment services under the supervision of a licensed dentist, dramatically increasing SITC members' access to routine and preventative care and reducing wait times for patients from months to same-week and even same-day appointments.[6] To develop its DHAT workforce, SITC initially partnered with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium[7] to train its DHAT providers, and in 2022 it launched the dxʷlaʔwabš Dental Therapy Education Program, a rigorous, accredited, three-year DHAT training curriculum delivered with Skagit Valley College.[8] SITC also expanded its regulatory authority[9] to not only license everyone who works in its clinic – including its dentists, DHATs, and dental hygienists – but also those who train its dental therapy providers.[10] SITC provides regular trainings to maintain "competent provider" status for all of its licensed providers that emphasize cultural responsiveness and meet state requirements for continuing education and license renewals.[11] Growing a template any Tribe can follow,[12] SITC has drastically improved access to "high quality, culturally competent, primary oral health care," eliminating the traumatic treatment experiences members long endured.[13]

*LEARNING LINK:* https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/sitc.pdf
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ASK YOURSELF

- Where do our workforce development programs come from? Who designed them and for what purposes?
- Do they reflect the values and needs of our community? Do they advance the long-range priorities of our Tribal Nation?
- How do these programs measure whether their efforts are effective? Do these performance criteria/metrics reflect our definition of what workforce development "success" looks like?
- Do other governments (federal, state, local) limit or interfere with our ability to develop our Native workforce in the ways we see fit? In what ways?
- Is our overarching workforce development approach truly self-governed? How about the individual workforce development programs we administer? Who has the final say on how we operate, who we serve, and how we serve them?
- What will it take to make them self-governed? How can we make them successful based on how we define what success looks like and how to measure it? What laws, policies, processes, and infrastructure do we need to create and implement to get there?
- Do we have the human capacity (leaders/staff with the experience and technical know-how) to claim control of, redesign, implement, and sustain a self-governed approach to workforce development?

POLICY TIPS

- Build a working history of where your workforce development programs come from, how and why they were designed, and how they were meant to operate and for what purposes. Update this history as you take full ownership of these programs and redesign them to meet the specific workforce development needs of the Native community you serve.
- Conduct a comprehensive self-governance "audit" of your current workforce development programs – both individually and as a whole – to determine whether and to what degree they (1) reflect your Nation/organization's own needs and values, and (2) advance your own priorities and criteria for success.
- Develop a self-governed plan that includes existing programs and creates new ones where clear gaps exist.
- Methodically redesign existing programs to the maximum extent possible to tailor them to your unique definition of workforce development, the current realities facing the Native community you serve, and its aspirations for the future.
- Demand that programs take calculated risks to innovate to develop strategies, initiatives, and networks capable of addressing your distinct workforce development landscape, challenges, and priorities.
- Provide these efforts with the ongoing political, programmatic, and financial support they need to forge and sustain success.

**ASK YOURSELF**: Five to seven key strategy-informing questions addressing the specific strategic consideration that tribal leaders, workforce development practitioners, and other key decision-makers must ask of their current workforce development approaches based on lessons learned through NCAI's ongoing research on workforce development.

**POLICY TIPS**: Five to seven recommendations addressing the specific strategic consideration that tribal leaders, workforce development practitioners, and other key decision-makers should consider integrating into their workforce development approaches based on lessons learned through NCAI's ongoing research on workforce development.

**DOWNLOAD TOOLKIT HANDOUTS:** NCAI encourages tribal leaders, key decision-makers, staff, and citizens to visit NCAI's online "Tribal Workforce Development" toolkit resource center to download and print individual PDFs of the 15 considerations (like the sample two-page spread featured above) to use as handy visual aids for group discussion and strategy setting. You can access the resource center by clicking on the following link or scanning the QR code: **www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit**

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# GLOSSARY

The following is a list of key terms that appear in the toolkit along with their definitions. These terms are ***bolded and italicized*** the first time they appear in the text on the following pages.

## Workforce Development: A Broad Definition

For the purposes of this toolkit, "workforce development" refers collectively to: the targeted education, training, and related efforts that tribal governments, Native-led organizations, and tribal colleges and universities deploy to equip Native people with the knowledge, skills, experience, degrees, certifications, and connections necessary to access and build rewarding careers that enable them to achieve self-sufficiency for themselves and their families and contribute in the many ways their Native Nations and communities need to thrive socially, culturally, economically, and politically.[1] As detailed in the following pages, this endeavor takes a diversity of forms across the United States, and it also takes on many different names other than "workforce development," including names in the Native languages of the Native communities being served.[2]

## Other Key Terms and Definitions

**ASSETS:** a useful or valuable thing, person, or quality

**BRAIN DRAIN:** the departure of tribal citizens with knowledge, ideas, initiative, and expertise from a Tribal Nation due to its inability to provide them with ample, reliable opportunities to lead productive lives

**BUREAUCRACY:** the governance structures, legal procedures, and administrative systems and protocols that regulate how an organization or government functions, particularly a large organization or government

**BUREAUCRATIC:** a governmental/organizational/programmatic system that is unduly focused on policies and procedures at the expense of common sense, efficiency, and making a positive impact

**CITIZENS:** refers inclusively to the officially recognized "citizens" or "members" of a Tribal Nation

**CLOSING THE LOOP:** concrete strategies Tribal Nations deploy to maximize their return on investments they make in the education and training of tribal citizens, for example tracking and recruiting tribal higher education scholarship recipients for specific jobs within tribal government and enterprises once they obtain their degrees

**CRABS IN THE BUCKET:** an unhealthy dynamic in some communities and workplaces where those who pursue professional development/career advancement opportunities are hindered or criticized by others because of jealousy and other reasons

**CRADLE-TO-CAREER:** strategies tribal governments and other Native-led workforce development entities deploy to provide Native people with robust educational and other systems of support from birth through their careers so they can lead productive lives

**DEPENDENCY MENTALITY:** a belief held by an individual that others (such as the federal or tribal government) should take care of their needs

**GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT:** steady work and income

**INDIAN COUNTRY:** refers inclusively to Tribal Nations and communities and Native people as a whole

**INSTITUTIONS:** the laws, customs, practices, and protocols a group of people establishes to govern their continued existence as a people

**NATIVE:** refers inclusively to all American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people

**PREVAILING WAGE:** the average hourly rate and benefits paid to workers in a specific area and occupation

**PROGRAMS:** refers inclusively to all of the programs and services that a tribal government or other Native-led workforce development entity provides to Native people

**SCHOLARSHIP FOR SERVICE:** a strategy requiring tribal citizens who receive financial support from a Tribal Nation for education and workforce training to work for the Nation for a prescribed duration upon obtaining their degrees/certifications

**SELF-ADMINISTRATION:** refers to tribal administration of workforce development approaches and programs designed by outsiders (typically the federal government) and answerable to outsiders' priorities and criteria for success

**SELF-GOVERNANCE:** refers to the tribal design, implementation, and refinement (i.e., governance) of workforce development approaches and programs that advance tribal priorities and meet tribal criteria for success

**SILO EFFECT:** describes a lack of communication, coordination, cooperation, and/or common goal setting between governmental departments and programs. Silos often result in replication of services, poor quality of services, and inefficient spending of governmental funds.

**SOFT SKILLS:** the interpersonal, communication/listening, time management, conflict resolution, problem-solving, teamwork, motivational, and other skills that individuals need to succeed in the workplace (as opposed to job-specific or "hard" skills)

**TURFISM:** a dynamic in which departments of an organization isolate themselves from one another to protect their departmental territory or "turf," which can make the development and implementation of comprehensive approaches to workforce development difficult

**WORK EXPERIENCE:** limited-term job placements designed to acclimate new workers to professional working environments to improve their chances of obtaining and sustaining permanent employment

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONER:** any individual who directs or works for workforce development and related programs

**WRAP-AROUND SERVICES:** comprehensive, coordinated, "person centered" services that take a holistic approach to preparing individuals to succeed in work – and life

## ACRONYMS

The following acronyms appear as **bolded** text in the toolkit.

**166:** Section 166 (Indian and Native American Programs) of WIOA (DOL)

**477:** Public Law 102-477, the Indian Employment, Training, and Related Services Demonstration Act of 1992 (DOI)

**ACF:** Administration for Children and Families (HHS)

**ACS:** American Community Survey

**AIVRS:** American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (ED)

**BIA:** Bureau of Indian Affairs (DOI)

**BIE:** Bureau of Indian Education (DOI)

**CDFI:** Community Development Financial Institution

**CSBG:** Community Services Block Grant (HHS)

**DOI:** U.S. Department of the Interior

**DOL:** U.S. Department of Labor

**FDPIR:** Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations

**ED:** U.S. Department of Education

**GA:** General, Burial, and Emergency Assistance (BIA)

**HHS:** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

**HUD:** U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

**JOM:** Johnson-O'Malley Act programs (BIE)

**JTPA:** Jobs Training Partnership Act (October 1982)

**LIHEAP:** Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (ACF)

**MOA/MOU:** Memorandum of Agreement/Understanding

**NACTEP:** Native American Career and Technical Education Program (ED)

**NINAETC:** National Indian and Native American Employment and Training Conference

**SOAR:** Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results analysis

**STEM:** Science, Technology, Engineering and Math fields

**TANF:** Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (HHS)

**TCUs:** Tribal colleges and universities

**TERO:** Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance or Office

**WIA:** Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (replaced by WIOA in 2014)

**WIOA:** Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

# TRIBAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:
## *A FIVE-MINUTE INTRODUCTION*

A movement is sweeping across ***Indian Country.***[3] For the past several decades, more and more Tribal Nations have reclaimed their right to govern their own affairs and places and are slowly but surely charting brighter futures of their own making. Wrestling primary decision-making authority away from the federal government, they are "addressing severe social problems, building sustainable economies, and reinvigorating their cultures, languages, and ways of life."[4] In the process, they are affirming what ***Native*** peoples have *always* known – that ***self-governance*** (see pages 10-11) is the *only* policy capable of improving the overall quality of life in their communities.[5]

This movement, often called "Native nation rebuilding," has been described by one prominent Native scholar as "a revolution of the spirit."[6] For most Tribal Nation leaders, employees, and ***citizens***, this process requires decolonizing and redesigning the governance systems and tools upon which their Nations have long relied. This is perhaps nowhere more critical than with ***workforce development*** – how Tribal Nations and communities grow the capacity of their people to lead productive, satisfying lives and contribute meaningfully to their Nations to sustain them for generations to come (see full definition on the previous page). For Tribal Nations, intertribal organizations, **TCUs**, Native-led nonprofit organizations, and other Native-led workforce development entities, workforce development is *not* simply about helping a Native person acquire and keep a job. It's *not* just about reducing the unemployment rate on tribal lands. Across Indian Country, workforce development is about so much more. It's about creating opportunities for Native people. It's preparing them to seize those opportunities through the forging of difference-making careers that strengthen them and their families. It's about revitalizing tribal societies, communities, and cultures. It's about eradicating despair and ***dependency*** and fostering hope and self-sufficiency in their place. As a tribal college president once summarized it, "We are rebuilding Tribal Nations by building Native people."[7]

According to NCAI and others, achieving "success" in workforce development comes down, ultimately, to *what Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities do*. It hinges on their willingness and ability to claim and exercise true ownership over the systems, policies, ***programs***, and services that work to cultivate the minds, skills, and expertise of their people; how those things are structured; and for what overarching purposes. It hinges above all else on *Native innovation from the ground up and the inside out* – Tribal Nations and communities casting off uniform approaches designed by outsiders and creating in their place distinctly *Native* approaches that make sense to them based on their unique cultures, values, challenges, and priorities.

> ***"Innovation is the springboard of the good things that have happened in Indian Country for so many years. It's innovation from the tribal level up that drives [workforce] development..."***
>
> ***- Norm DeWeaver (1935-2021), Former National Representative, Indian and Native American Employment and Training Coalition[8]***

The benefits are proving to be transformational. As NCAI's Policy Research Center concluded in 2012, self-governed "investments in higher education and workforce development have multiple and far-reaching benefits that extend beyond individuals – that equip tribes to exercise their sovereignty as governments and to serve both the socioeconomic and cultural interests of their citizens."[9] As Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities design, implement, continuously assess and refine, expand, and sustain approaches that work for the Native people they serve, they are forging proven solutions to daunting workforce development challenges commonly found across Indian Country. In the process, they are crafting effective "best practice" strategies that fellow Native workforce developers can customize to the specific circumstances and goals of their Native communities.

### The Toolkit: Purpose and Function

This toolkit is designed for tribal leaders, ***workforce development practitioners***, and other key decision-makers responsible for tackling the complex task of evaluating, refining, expanding, and in some cases, completely overhauling the Native workforce development approaches for which they are responsible. This toolkit does *not* focus on the operational aspects of workforce development, such as how to more efficiently run individual workforce development programs day-to-day, better navigate the **477** financial reporting process, or develop greater proficiency using the **DOL WIOA** data management system. Instead, this toolkit seeks to frame and inform strategic decision-making by Native workforce developers at a foundational, nation-rebuilding level. It provides them with a comprehensive lens through which they can identify, develop, and implement effective, sustainable workforce development solutions tailored to their distinct needs and ends.

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: EMBRACING AN ASSETS-BASED APPROACH

Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities possess an incredible array of ***assets*** they can use to build thriving, resilient economies. Below is a list of many of these assets, which can serve as invaluable sources of wisdom, inspiration, ingenuity, strength, and guidance as you work to design, implement, and grow a workforce development approach that works for the Native people you serve.

### *ASSETS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT...*

**THE CREATOR'S GIFTS** – providing Native peoples the intellect, ability, drive, and direction to thrive

**CORE CULTURAL VALUES** – that inform/guide how people behave, set priorities, make decisions, get things done, and prepare to contribute to the Native communities of which they are a part

**NATIVE LANGUAGES** – to express those values and deepen the people's ties to tribal identity, culture, community, and economy

**TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY** – exercising the Tribal Nation's inherent right – in all of its forms – to control its own affairs and determine its own future

**TRIBAL CITIZENS** – their wisdom, knowledge, ideas, skills, experience, and labor

**NATIVE FAMILIES** – kinship and connectedness as fundamental building blocks of individual and community prosperity

**THE COMMUNITY** – the overall direction and collective contributions it provides to inform and drive Native workforce development efforts

**ORAL TRADITIONS AND HISTORY** – the ancestors' original instructions informing leaders, workforce development practitioners, and citizens about how Native peoples traditionally solved problems, forged solutions to advance their priorities, and developed their inherent potential to contribute to their communities in diverse ways

**NATIVE RESILIENCE** – flowing from ancestors who overcame great challenges to ensure the perseverance of Native peoples

**TREATY RIGHTS** – perpetual rights to education, healthcare, and other treaty-reserved assets critical to a thriving community and economy

**TRIBAL GOVERNING INSTITUTIONS** – used since time immemorial to make decisions, solve problems, develop innovations, and foster the inherent potential of Native people to contribute to the community

**TRIBAL LAWS** – written and otherwise that set forth how the Tribal Nation will develop its workforce and for what purposes

**TRIBAL ENTERPRISES** – to employ and grow Native workers

**NATIVE ENTREPRENEURS** – who own and operate small businesses that are integral to a robust, thriving Native workforce and economy

**NATIVE-LED EDUCATION SYSTEMS** – that Tribal Nations and TCUs design and administer to educate Native people in accordance with the cultural values and workforce development priorities of the Native communities they serve

**FINANCIAL RESOURCES** – that Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities have at their disposal – particularly discretionary resources they can use as they see fit – to develop Native workforces in the ways they see fit

**NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS** – partners such as youth-serving non-profits and Native CDFIs that train and support Native workforces, enhance their financial capability, and help them to grow their personal and familial assets

**OTHER ALLIES** – external partners – such as technical assistance (TA) providers – that support the Tribal Nation's workforce development efforts in accordance with the Nation's wishes

**A YOUNG AND GROWING LABOR FORCE** – tribal citizens – both on the reservation and off – the nation can cultivate to methodically grow a flourishing tribal economy over time

### CHALLENGES TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The workforce development challenges facing tribal governments, Native organizations, and tribal colleges and universities are arguably more daunting and complex than those facing other governments anywhere else in the world. However, as this toolkit illustrates, these challenges are in no way insurmountable. For a handy worksheet exercise that will help you identify, prioritize, and address the specific challenges you and the Native people you serve face, please visit the following link or scan the QR code to the right: **www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit**

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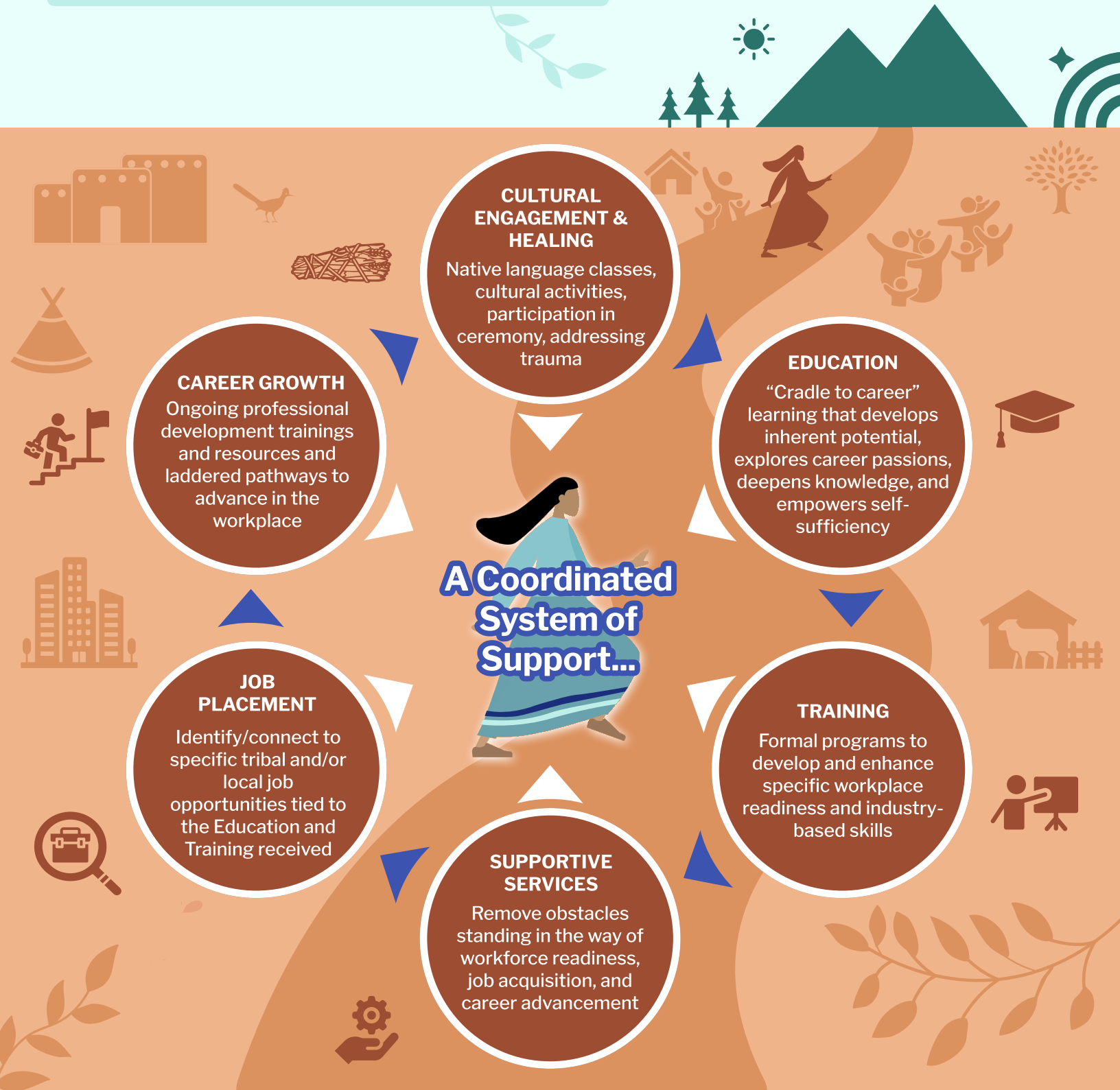
# Workforce Development's Ultimate Goal:

## Holistic Support for Self-Sufficiency and Thriving Nations

**Empowering the individual and their family to travel their chosen path to self-sufficiency and wellbeing and contribute to the Tribal Nation in the many ways it needs.**

**THE TRIBAL NATION:**
**Empowered Individuals, Community Self-Sufficiency, Thriving Communities**



# **Public Law 102-477:** A Holistic Workforce Development Pathway

Public Law 102–477, known simply as "477", is a federal law enabling Tribal Nations and intertribal consortia to merge federal program funds of their choosing from 12 agencies into a single plan, program, budget, and report – approved by DOI – that support their design and administration of self-determined, holistic workforce development approaches. Below is an overview of the agencies and key programs currently featured in 477 plans (as of 2024), and the benefits more than 300 Tribal Nations generate through 477.

## DOI

*KEY 477 PLAN PROGRAMS:*

- Adult Basic Education (BIE)
- Consolidated Tribal Grant Program (BIA)
- Custodial Care of Adults (Homemaker Services) (BIA)
- General, Burial, and Emergency Assistance (BIA)
- Higher Educations and Scholarships (BIE)
- Indian Business Incubator Program (BIA Office of Indian Economic Development)
- Indian Child Welfare Act (BIA)
- Johnson O'Malley (BIE)
- Job Placement and Training (BIA)
- Living Language Grant Program (BIA)
- Indian Child Welfare Act (BIA)

## Commerce

*KEY 477 PLAN PROGRAMS:*

- Building Equitable Native Economies Project (Minority Business Development Agency)

## Education

*KEY 477 PLAN PROGRAMS:*

- Native American Career and Technical Education
- American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Alaska Native Education

## DOL

*KEY 477 PLAN PROGRAMS:*

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Section 177 (Adult & Youth)
- National Dislocated Worker Grants (Six Types)

## 1 Plan Program Budget Report

## DOJ

*KEY 477 PLAN PROGRAMS:*

- CTAS Purpose Area 3 - Guided Path to Wellness
- Mno Bmadzejek Reentry & Diversion
- Office of Violence Against Women Grants to Tribal Governments
- OJJDP Tribal Youth Program (Purpose Area 9)
- Tribal Victims Services Set-Aside

## HUD

*KEY 477 PLAN PROGRAMS:*

- Indian Housing Block Grant

## USDA

*KEY 477 PLAN PROGRAMS:*

- FDPIR

## HHS

*KEY 477 PLAN PROGRAMS:*

- Child Care and Development Fund (Discretionary, Mandatory, Construction/ Major Renovation)
- Community Services Block Grant
- Native Employment Works
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance
- Family Violence Prevention and Services
- Child Welfare Services (Promoting Safe and Stable Families)
- Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services (Title IV-B-1)
- Marylee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families (Title IV-B-2)

*NO PROGRAMS INCLUDED IN 477 PLANS YET.*

# 477 Benefits Reported by Tribal Nations

- Programmatic activities advance *tribal* rather than federal priorities (bolstering sovereignty)
- Holistic, Nation-defined participant services
- A single, efficient intake system ("one-stop")
- Reduces federal paperwork (up to 90%)
- More staff time spent delivering direct services
- Participants are primarily responsible for their success through individual plans they co-design
- Reduces and streamlines financial reporting
- Increases funding flexibility by merging program funds
- Generates discretionary income through placement of funds in interest-bearing account
- Fuses workforce with economic development (up to 25% of 477 $ can be for economic development)
- Strengthens communication/coordination between departments/staff by breaking down silos

# DEVELOPING NATIVE WORKFORCES: WHO SHOULD DO WHAT?

In a self-determined, holistic Native workforce development system, everyone involved plays critical roles and works *together* in a coordinated fashion.

## TRIBAL CITIZENS

- Help Tribal Nation craft its definition of "workforce development" and set strategic priorities to enact it
- Work for tribal departments and programs to advance those priorities
- Support the Tribal Nation's system providing them the workforce development and related services they need
- Fulfill the obligations of the workforce development and related services they receive
- Inform the integration of tribal culture and core values in those services

## TRIBAL LEADERS

- Set strategic workforce development priorities with citizens' input
- Ensure priorities align with and advance their Nation's overarching nation-rebuilding goals
- Develop tribal laws, policies, and administrative mechanisms to advance those priorities
- Build their Nation's data capacity and develop tribal laws to protect/advance its data sovereignty
- Create and support an impartial mechanism for resolving personnel grievances
- Ensure equitable delivery of workforce development and related services to all tribal citizens
- Hire and delegate authority to qualified staff to administer services
- Grow and retain staff through professional development and merit-based career advancement
- Work with staff to break down programmatic silos that hamper efficiency and effectiveness of services to ensure their coordination in a participant-centered, "wrap-around" system
- Encourage and reward program administrators and staff to develop and implement innovative workforce development solutions
- Co-design with programmatic leaders a process for regular reporting and communication featuring clear roles and accountability between the two groups
- Make targeted workforce development investments in key fields needed to grow Nation's economy (and secure funding for those investments)
- Institute tribal service and/or employment requirements for citizens who receive financial support from Nation for higher education/training

## TRIBAL YOUTH

- Complete secondary education and pursue post-secondary education (college/trades)
- Embrace opportunities to explore future careers at a young age
- Obtain degrees/certifications to secure jobs in Nation's priority fields
- Start businesses catering to their passions and community needs
- Create/participate in tribal youth councils

## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

- Uphold Public Law 102-477's mandate supporting self-determined Native workforce development
- Adequately fund Native-led workforce development efforts based on the Native population's particular education, training, and related needs
- Generate and share Native workforce data in partnership with Tribal Nations and Native organizations

## PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF

- Evaluate/redesign workforce development programs to ensure they advance Nation's priorities, strengthen tribal culture/values, and support the community's mental/spiritual wellbeing
- Secure diversified funding base to drive workforce development priorities (and avoid accepting funding that undermines them)
- Build Nation's capacity to generate/analyze data to assess workforce development landscape, citizens' needs, and program effectiveness (using partners where needed)
- Grow partnerships with tribal colleges and universities, employers, and other partners to provide workforce development and related services in the fields and ways the Nation needs
- Continuously educate community to deepen its understanding of available services and how they foster individual/familial self-sufficiency

## TRIBAL TERO OFFICES

- Enforce tribal TERO laws to ensure qualified tribal citizens receive hiring preference for local jobs
- Coordinate with Tribal Nation and other Native workforce development entities to ensure their education/training programs align with local/regional employers' needs
- Partner with federal, state, and local workforce development entities and unions to expand citizens' access to training and jobs

## TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

- Partner with Tribal Nation and other Native workforce development entities to align curricula, degrees, and certifications with their workforce development priorities
- Support Native workforce data efforts and capacity building

## NATIVE NON-PROFITS AND CDFIS

- Assist Tribal Nation with delivery of key workforce development and related services (particularly off-reservation)
- Train/invest in Native entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses
- Enhance financial capability of Native workers through financial literacy and asset-building trainings

## OTHER TRIBAL NATIONS

- Partner with Tribal Nation to provide certain workforce development and related services where it makes sense (ex: intertribal consortia and joint 477 Programs)
- Share effective strategies with the Nation that it can adapt to its own purposes

## TRIBAL/AREA EMPLOYERS

- Help design Native workforce education and training programs to ensure participants can successfully compete for their job openings

## STATE GOVERNMENTS

- Provide Tribal Nations and other Native workforce development entities their fair share of state and federal pass-through funding
- Provide access to training and technical assistance and forge intergovernmental agreements to fill service gaps

## PHILANTHROPY

- Provide Tribal Nations and other Native workforce development entities with long-term, flexible funding to develop innovative solutions tailored to Native people's distinct needs

# SELF-GOVERNANCE

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

The growing body of research on Native nation rebuilding identifies "practical sovereignty" – the assertion of Native decision-making power – as one of the five main keys to successful, sustained economic and community development.[1] When it comes to workforce development – an integral part of economic and community development – sustained success depends, above all else, on tribal *control*: the willingness, ability, and unrelenting commitment of a Tribal Nation to seize and exercise authority over the programs and activities that develop its human capacity. More and more Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities (such as Native non-profit organizations and TCUs) are recognizing this fact – and *acting* on it.

Taking control is an essential first step, but taking control of what exactly? For many, achieving practical sovereignty in workforce development means taking control of federal, state, and other programs designed by outsiders for other places, populations, and purposes. These typically ignore the uniquely complex conditions in Native communities and fail to consider and address the distinct workforce development needs and priorities of Native community members. As one might expect, these uniform, top-down, and "outside-in" approaches have a poor track record of workforce development success, mainly because they are not meaningfully designed, guided by, or primarily accountable to those they are meant to serve. As one tribal workforce development practitioner explains, "Many of the grants and contracts that we have to administer are framed in what it would look like in a major urban city in America. That's not our reality."[2] These programs also define and measure success based on nationally standardized performance indicators that often aren't relevant to the particular challenges, values, and goals of Native communities. In addition, at an institutional level, they tend to embrace the status quo and avoid taking risks, which stifles the development of new workforce development strategies to replace inefficient and ineffective ones.

As decades of Indian Country experience illustrate, simply taking over administration of these programs won't change how, and toward what ends, they function. And it can improve their effectiveness only so much. The challenge for tribal and Native organizational leaders and key decision-makers is how to build a truly *self-governed* workforce development approach, either from scratch or more commonly by moving beyond simply administering programs in the same way that others did previously to *fundamentally redesigning them*. As one tribal leader frames it, "What are we doing differently in this time of self-determination, when supposedly we are in control, different from the times that we weren't?"[3]

> ***"No right is more sacred to a nation, to a people, than the right to freely determine its social, economic, political, and culture without external interferences. The fullest expression of this right occurs when a nation freely governs itself."***
>
> ***– JOSEPH DELACRUZ (1937-2000), FORMER PRESIDENT, QUINAULT INDIAN NATION[4]***

This approach is empowering. As one workforce development practitioner whose nation has embraced this challenge concluded, "We are no longer victims of our history. We are now impacting and directing where we are going as a tribe."[5]

It also *works better*, generating tangible, life-changing, positive outcomes for Native people that externally imposed approaches have proven wholly incapable of producing. Public Law 102-477 is a prime example. Created by Congress in response to decades of Indian Country advocacy to center self-determination in federally supported Native workforce development (see infographic on page 7), 477 has produced "increased job placements, much higher hourly wages, and nearly universal positive employment and education outcomes"[6] among participants across the 300 Tribal Nations who are taking advantage of the program.

To take true ownership of their workforce development systems, Tribal Nations and Native organizations must embrace the "grassroots" process[7] of "uprooting the limitations and programmatic silos that federal approaches have created. They must thoroughly assess whether their current approaches are effective and culturally appropriate, and what their findings mean for how they should change them."[8] To bolster their efforts, the federal government must no longer dictate to Indian Country how it should do workforce development. It must instead support Tribal Nations and Native organizations as they invent or reinvent strategies that work best for those they serve.[9] According to one tribal college president, "Flexibility works – enabling tribes to do what we're good at doing. We know our problems intimately. We also know the solutions."[10]

## ASK YOURSELF

- Where do our workforce development programs come from? Who designed them and for what purposes?
- Do they reflect the values and needs of our community? Do they advance the long-range priorities of our Tribal Nation?
- How do these programs measure whether their efforts are effective? Do these performance criteria/metrics reflect *our* definition of what workforce development "success" looks like?
- Do other governments (federal, state, local) limit or interfere with our ability to develop our Native workforce in the ways we see fit? In what ways?
- Is our overarching workforce development approach truly self-governed? How about the individual workforce development programs we administer? Who has the final say on how we operate, who we serve, and how we serve them?
- What will it take to make them self-governed? How can we make them successful based on how we define what success looks like and how to measure it? What laws, policies, processes, and infrastructure do we need to create and implement to get there?
- Do we have the human capacity (leaders/staff with the experience and technical know-how) to claim control of, redesign, implement, and sustain a self-governed approach to workforce development?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Citizen Potawatomi Nation (CPN)

Determined to "design what works for us,"[1] in 1996 CPN took full ownership of the federally funded workforce education, training, and related programs serving its citizens and other local Native people. By creating a 477 plan, it merged these once-siloed programs into a single, tribal approach that holistically assesses the needs of each 477 participant and their family and empowers them to achieve self-sufficiency through a seamless, integrated system of "hand-up"(versus "handout") supports.[2] Utilizing a single intake system that creates an ease of access to culturally relevant services, CPN's 477 program is reducing "dependency on public assistance programs and reducing the effects of poverty on the Tribal Service Area population" by familiarizing Native workers and future workers with rewarding careers in various fields and preparing them to successfully pursue those careers.[3] Prior to 477, CPN had to turn some people away because of the eligibility and funding restrictions of the individual federal programs it administered. Today, its self-determined approach flexibly leverages dollars to provide customized services to each 477 participant based on their particular challenges and career aspirations. Other benefits include reduced administrative costs (which frees up more dollars for direct services), the increased effectiveness of those services, reduced joblessness among 477 participants, and an enhanced ability to create jobs – in part through a partnership with CPN's **CDFI** to help participants become small business owners.[4] Through cooperative agreements with four neighboring Tribal Nations, CPN has expanded its 477-based services to eligible Native people across six Oklahoma counties.[5] "Pushing the integration envelope,"[6] in recent years CPN added to its 477 program federal funds from LIHEAP, **CSBG**, Safe and Stable Families, and Reentry and Diversionary (which helps former felons reintegrate into the workforce and has produced a recidivism rate under two percent to date).[7] As CPN explains, moving its people towards self-sufficiency starts with "understanding your own tribe's distinct needs [and] the needs of your people, which is something that a federal, uniform approach to workforce development can't possibly account for."[8]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/cpn.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Margaret Zientek, Workforce and Social Services Director, Citizen Potawatomi Nation, mzientek@potawatomi.org

## Swinomish Indian Tribal Community (SITC)

For decades, Swinomish confronted an oral health crisis of epic proportions: 68 percent of its community members saw their dental problems go untreated, the rate of tooth decay among youth was four times that of white people, and SITC members who were treated received care from "traveling dentists performing painful procedures in a doublewide trailer."[1] In response, SITC exercised its sovereignty and self-regulation of healthcare services to bring a solution established by Tribal Nations in Alaska to its community in the lower 48 states: dental health aid therapists (DHATs).[2] SITC spent two years redesigning the Swinomish Dental Program and developing the first tribal Dental Health Provider Licensing Code.[3] The first Swinomish DHAT started seeing patients in 2016, and a year later Washington State recognized Tribal Nations' authority to license DHATs on tribal lands.[4] Over the past decade, SITC has become "a state leader in access to dental hygiene,"[5] with its DHATs providing roughly 50 primary dental prevention and treatment services under the supervision of a licensed dentist, dramatically increasing SITC members' access to routine and preventative care and reducing wait times for patients from months to same-week and even same-day appointments.[6] To develop its DHAT workforce, SITC initially partnered with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium[7] to train its DHAT providers, and in 2022 it launched the *dəxwxăyəbus* Dental Therapy Education Program, a rigorous, accredited, three-year DHAT training curriculum delivered with Skagit Valley College.[8] SITC also expanded its regulatory authority[9] to not only license *everyone* who works in its clinic – including its dentists, DHATs, and dental hygienists – but also those who *train* its dental therapy providers.[10] SITC provides regular trainings to maintain "competent provider" status for all of its licensed providers that emphasize cultural responsiveness and meet state requirements for continuing education and license renewals.[11] Growing a template any Tribe can follow[12], SITC has drastically improved access to "high quality, culturally competent, primary oral health care," eliminating the traumatic treatment experiences members long endured.[13]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/sitc.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Dr. Rachael Hogan, Dental Director, Swinomish Dental Clinic, rhogan@swinomish.nsn.us

## POLICY TIPS

- Build a working history of where your workforce development programs come from, how and why they were designed, and how they were meant to operate and for what purposes. Update this history as you take full ownership of these programs and redesign them to meet the specific workforce development needs of the Native community you serve.
- Conduct a comprehensive self-governance "audit" of your current workforce development programs – both individually and as a whole – to determine whether and to what degree they (1) reflect your Nation/organization's own needs and values, and (2) advance your own priorities and criteria for success.
- Develop a self-governed plan that includes existing programs and creates new ones where clear gaps exist.
- Methodically redesign existing programs to the maximum extent possible to tailor them to your unique definition of workforce development, the current realities facing the Native community you serve, and its aspirations for the future.
- Demand that programs take calculated risks to innovate to develop strategies, initiatives, and networks capable of addressing your distinct workforce development landscape, challenges, and priorities.
- Provide these efforts with the ongoing political, programmatic, and financial support they need to forge and sustain success.

# CULTURE

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

As with Native nation rebuilding generally, culture (i.e. "cultural match") plays a vital role in self-determined, effective workforce development solutions.[1] Tribal Nations that: (1) integrate their distinct cultures, core values, lifeways, and languages in concrete ways into their workforce development approaches, and (2) center the strengthening of those things as primary intended outcomes of their approaches enhance their ability to grow their human capacity in a positive, sustained direction. As discussed on pages 10-11, this is particularly critical when taking over programs administered by the federal and state governments, as those programs don't speak to tribal cultures or tap into their transformative power as mechanisms for overcoming challenges, strengthening families and communities, and guiding program participants down self-defined paths to prosperous futures.

It's no coincidence, then, that as Tribal Nations have reclaimed control over their governance systems, more and more have recast their workforce development approaches to place tribal cultures at their functional cores. This can take many forms, from core values-based customer service ("caring for our own") to providing program participants with tangible options to participate in cultural activities or education along with workforce education/training. The following examples illuminate the endless possibilities:

- The Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation program of a Tribal Nation in Montana asks applicants if they would like "the assistance of a person involved with Native healing or Spirituality to be involved with your rehabilitation planning?"[2] Most have embraced the opportunity.
- A Native non-profit organization in Alaska enacts two core tribal values in administering its undergraduate scholarship program, awarding funding based not on need, but on merit through applicants' demonstrated knowledge of and commitment to tribal culture.[3]
- A Tribal **TANF** program in California negotiated with **ACF** a revised definition of eligible work activities to "accept cultural participation" as countable work hours, a change enabling those participants to stay in program compliance *and* fulfill their cultural obligations, including taking Native language classes and participating in the Tribal Nation's annual "Indian Days" event.[4]

Such approaches recognize that those who seek workforce education, training, and related services often struggle with psychological trauma and cultural alienation that can only be remedied through a real connection to – and reliance on – their culture as the wellspring for personal and professional empowerment. As one Native workforce development practitioner explains, "When tribal members were taken away and their families split up and their children sent to boarding schools, they lost their culture. We're finding that the culture can play a huge role in helping people heal and become self-sufficient."[6]

> ***"It's about creating those relationships that matter, that keep people coming back. We're not just building a workforce; we're building a family."***
>
> ***– HANNAH SEYMOUR, HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR, COWICHAN TRIBES[5]***

The culture question demands that Tribal Nations determine: (1) where and how to infuse culture (teachings, values, lifeways, behaviors, your Native language, etc.) into your workforce development approach; (2) the culture you seek to foster through that approach and what it says to your people about what your Nation values and will value moving forward; and (3) the culture you wish to grow within your workforce and the community at-large through that approach. As the Native Governance Center sees this endeavor, "By utilizing a care-based approach centered in Indigenous values, human resources professionals and tribal leaders can meet the diverse needs of their employees and relatives to ultimately strengthen their nation. Embracing the interconnectedness of accountability, culture, history, community, and government fosters a working environment that holistically and systemically cares for its people and keeps politics in its place."[7]

For many Tribal Nations, enacting their answers to the culture question involves specific measures designed to uproot the entrenched dependency some citizens have on government and seed personal and familial self-sufficiency in its place. Growing this culture can be achieved in many ways, including by: giving clients a "hand-up versus a hand-out" by, for example, requiring them to give something (community service, etc.) in return for the services they receive; forging work environments rooted in personal and cultural humility, mutual respect, and merit-based advancement; and attaching culture and service requirements to scholarship awards.

## *ASK YOURSELF*

- What cultural teachings and values does our Nation impart through its workforce development approach? Through its delivery of specific workforce development and related services? Are these readily understandable to our people?
- Where do the curricula our programs use to educate and train our people come from? Do they reflect and teach our Nation's culture, values, and language? If not, how can we customize the curricula we use to integrate those things in thoughtful ways?
- How are we working to build a culture of collaboration among those working in our tribal government and enterprises? What concrete steps can we take to enhance that culture?
- Do we provide program participants with formal "Cultural Engagement & Healing" opportunities (see page 6) to help them emotionally and spiritually as well as professionally? What should we be doing that we currently aren't?
- Are our educators and trainers steeped in our Nation's culture? How can we build their cultural knowledge?
- How do we hold participants accountable to the commitment our Nation is making in them through the services it provides?
- What core cultural competencies do our programs instill in their participants? When they complete the education and training programs we provide, do they understand how to apply them personally and professionally?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Cowichan Tribes

Recognizing "our behaviors in the workplace, how we collaborate, and how we serve the community all could be enhanced," in 2018 the Cowichan Tribes in British Columbia overhauled its human resources (HR) policy.[1] "Embedding cultural heritage into the fabric"[2] of its organization, Cowichan's revamped HR policy ensures its 500 staff members – 80 percent of whom are Cowichan or other First Nation citizens – "operate as *nuts'amaat shqwaluwun* (people working together with one mind respectfully) guided by the teachings of our ancestors (The Cowichan Teachings)."[3] Among the teachings employees must uphold are *Tl'i' to' mukw' mustimuhw* ("Each person is important"), *Hwial'asmut ch tun' s-ye'lh* ("Take care of your health"), and *Yath ch 'o' lhq'il'* ("Be positive").[4] Central to the HR policy is its "Commitment to Culture and Language," which encourages employees "to participate in and incorporate culture and Hul'q'umi'num' language whenever appropriate," which includes twice-weekly language and culture classes and wellness classes that a growing number attend, and standing access to Cowichan's Cultural Coordinator to deepen their "knowledge of cultural protocols."[5] The policy also features the "Cowichan Syuwun Leave With Pay" provision, which provides employees up to 15 days of paid leave to support their spiritual initiation in the longhouse, and up to five days of paid leave to employees who sponsor them.[6] Committed to "taking care of our community's caretakers"[7], Cowichan also provides employees regular "psychological safety" trainings and safe spaces for hard conversations between them.[8] In addition, it administers a lateral violence prevention policy that promotes "developing and maintaining respectful relationships with those around us," which has helped to reduce Cowichan's annual number of workplace conflict investigations from 25 previously to just four today.[9] Further reflecting that Cowichan is building "a place where people want to work"[10], the Tribes' annual staff turnover rate has decreased by more than half since 2018 to 4.3 percent, which is considerably lower than the average turnover rate among employers across Canada.[11] As Cowichan explains it, "We're not just building a workforce; we're building a family."[12]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/cowichan.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Hannah Seymour, Director of Human Resources, Cowichan Tribes, Hannah.Seymour@cowichantribes.com

## Tohono O'odham Nation (TON)

For decades, O'odham elders needing skilled nursing care, long-term assisted living support, or related services had to travel long distances to facilities outside of TON's vast reservation, where they received care isolated from loved ones and the O'odham culture that sustained them physically and spiritually.[1] In response, TON established the Tohono O'odham Nursing Care Authority (TONCA), which in 2002 launched the award-winning Archie Hendricks, Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility, which has a central reservation location easily accessible to tribal residents.[2] In 2013, TONCA opened an assisted living residence next door. Both facilities enact TONCA's mission to provide tribal elders with "dignified living in an environment that preserves our traditional Himdag"[3] – defined as the culture, way of life, and values "uniquely held" by the O'odham people.[4] Committed to developing a culturally competent workforce "from within the community"[5] capable of providing culturally responsive care, TONCA gives hiring preference to TON members and prioritizes them in awarding financial assistance to "defray tuition costs and other related educational expenses" to employees seeking professional development and career advancement.[6] It also requires new employees – O'odham *and* non-Native – to complete a two-hour "O'odham Culture Inservice" orientation introducing the O'odham language, traditional foods and medicines, and cultural perspectives on death and dying.[7] To ensure the staff can converse with its O'odham-speaking patients and residents, TONCA provides a basic O'odham language training to the non-speakers it employs and it recently launched a compensation program to incentivize employees to take free Tohono O'odham Community College courses to deepen their O'odham language fluency.[8] It also conducts a quarterly cleansing ceremony for staff, patients, and residents, and hosts an O'odham medicine person weekly who works with staff upon request to support their wellbeing.[9] Growing its capacity to provide care "in accordance with our traditions"[10], TONCA will soon begin training medical translators, who will be dispatched to area hospitals to interpret for TON members with limited English language fluency to ensure they receive proper care in those facilities as well.[11]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/ton.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Ross Wilkoff, Administrator, Archie Hendricks Sr. Skilled Nursing Facility, rwilkoff@toltc.org

## *POLICY TIPS*

- Identify the core cultural values you want to shape the structure and delivery of your workforce development and related services. Assess and restructure programs accordingly, and train your political leaders, programmatic leaders, and staff about them.
- Work with program participants on long-range personal and professional goal setting (with achievable milestones) to help them focus and plan beyond their immediate needs and challenges.
- Make social emotional development a standard feature of your programs to enhance clients' personal resiliency.
- Infuse your Nation's history, culture, and values into your workforce education and training curricula. Consult tribal elders and other culture keepers to enrich the curricula's design.
- Offer employees the option to take regular Native language and culture classes as paid work time (or require it); integrate those classes into your workforce education and training programs.
- Hold focus groups with elders and other citizens to learn if your programs are hitting the cultural mark and refine accordingly.
- Seed a culture of civic obligation by incentivizing program participants to contribute to the Nation through assigned community service projects, community-based ***work experience*** placements, etc.

# CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Concerned its workforce development programs and policies were not *precisely* aligned with the needs and goals of its existing and prospective clients, a few years ago, a Native non-profit organization serving two Tribal Nations in California undertook a "Tribal Labor Force" study of their workers and would-be workers to gain a detailed, real-time picture of their employment, health, family composition, education, job skills, housing, and income status. The organization then used the study's findings to refine its existing workforce development programs and policies and develop new ones that cater directly to the distinct, documented workforce training needs and local job opportunities of each Nation's citizens.[1]

This pilot project – designed to be a template for others across Indian Country to use – amplifies the critical importance of placing Native people being served by Native workforce development efforts at heart of the purpose, design, delivery, refinement, and growth of those efforts. Termed "citizen engagement" in this toolkit, this ongoing, iterative process is vital to ensuring that workforce development programs reflect and uphold the will and values of Native people and understand and address their specific personal and communal workforce development challenges and priorities. Simply put, if workforce development programs are to work best for Native people, they must be owned and driven by Native people.

In putting the "self" – Native people – in self-determined and self-governed Native workforce development approaches, Tribal Nations and other Native entities are deploying various innovative strategies that are predicated on *listening* to the Native communities they serve; *applying* what they have learned in the form of new, refined, or overhauled programs; and *educating* those communities about the changes they have made and why:

**Listening:** Tribal Nations and other Native workforce development entities must systematically work to secure the input and feedback of their participants, prospective participants, and the Native community at-large about how their programs should be structured and administered, for what community-rooted purposes, how their programs are working, and how they can work better. This learning endeavor should deploy a variety of strategies – such as community surveys, participant focus groups and questionnaires, one-on-one interviews, and larger community-based strategic planning processes – to regularly update a crystal-clear picture of the service community's workforce challenges, skills, and aspirations.

**Applying:** Tribal Nations and other Native workforce development entities must prioritize at an institutional level the routine analysis of the input and feedback they receive from the people they serve. They must then apply their findings to adapt, enhance, and expand the services they provide to meet the people's complex and evolving needs. Doing it every so often when a new grant application for federal or state funding happens to be due isn't good enough. They must comprehensively evaluate and refine their entire approaches on a regular and frequent basis if it is to provide compassionate, culturally relevant, person-centered workforce development services not just today, but tomorrow and for years to come.

> ***"In order to change, you really need to know what it is that your community wants and to respect what their thoughts are and what they want for the future."***
>
> ***– PATRICIA RIGGS, FORMER DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, YSLETA DEL SUR PUEBLO[2]***

**Teaching:** Tribal Nations and other Native workforce development entities must continuously educate the individuals they serve as well as the broader Native community in a variety of ways (websites, social media, email listservs, community events, reports to tribal council meetings open to the public, annual reports, etc.) about: (1) the workforce development services they offer; (2) changes or additions to those services based on the people's input; (3) how those services are positively impacting the community; and (4)how they are concretely advancing the community's long-range economic, cultural, social, and political goals. This process must also convey the types of jobs the community needs most – both today and over the long haul – and how the workforce development approach will prioritize the people's development of the specific skills they need to secure and flourish in those jobs through targeted education and training. Looking long-term, this process must also work deliberately to move the community's collective mindset away from "poverty" towards "prosperity"[3] by teaching community members that: (1) they all have inherent potential that their Tribal Nation and others are committed to developing; (2) they all have much to contribute to the community (knowledge, skills, experience, and ideas) to grow its prosperity and self-sufficiency; and (3) they have a sacred obligation to make those contributions as tribal citizens.

## ASK YOURSELF

- How are we working on a regular basis to obtain: (1) input from the Native people we serve about their workforce challenges, skills, and goals; and (2) feedback from them about the effectiveness of our workforce development efforts and how they could be improved? Are the mechanisms we use adequate for capturing the will of the people and applying what we learn from them?
- What steps can we take to more fully center and heed the voices of Native workers and would-be workers in our services?
- What do we need to learn from the Native workers and would-be workers we serve that we currently are not learning?
- Do we have sufficient capacity and a formal process for comprehensively analyzing the participant/community input and feedback we obtain and adapting and expanding our programs accordingly? If not, what steps can we take to get there?
- How regularly and in what ways do we share comprehensive updates about the progress our workforce development efforts are making with the broader community?
- Are the top political and programmatic leaders of our Tribal Nation/organization actively involved in educating the Native community we serve about the purpose and nature of our workforce development efforts and the long-range goals they are designed to achieve? How can we get them more involved?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Coeur d'Alene Tribe (CDAT)

In the mid-2000s, CDAT faced a troubling education and workforce development landscape: just a third of its youth graduated high school, a high percentage of younger working-age tribal members worked and lived elsewhere, and the Tribe had little control over what its people learned and how.[1] In response, in 2007 its Department of Education (DOE) created the "Education Pipeline," a ***cradle-to-career*** support system for CDAT members as they move from one educational stage to the next, with the ultimate goal to have them become productive, culturally grounded members of the local community.[2] Enriched with programmatic innovations ever since, the Pipeline instills in tribal members an abiding commitment "to serve as tribal advocates"[3] for the Coeur d'Alene people, land, and waters – and prepares them to fulfill that commitment. This includes CDAT's schitsu'umsh Scholars Program, an immersive learning experience for students in grades 8-12 during the school year that "deepens [their] relationship with their homeland, while understanding how legal and political conflicts impact environmental and community health."[4] Featuring "Scholarship Saturdays" and intergenerational mentoring sessions, the program raises students' "critical consciousness" as "positive change agents through their academic achievement."[5] DOE also offers a summer internship program for middle and high school students similarly rooted in Coeur d'Alene's history and core values, among them "Membership" – that "we be responsible, informed members…prepared to lead and serve."[6] Increasingly equipped with "a strong sense of who they are"[7], the number of CDAT students obtaining college degrees has tripled since 2018, with a growing number pursuing graduate school.[8] To further nurture its people's civic readiness, CDAT has forged curriculum co-design **MOUs** with several colleges and universities; for example, CDAT and other area Tribal Nations partnered with Washington State University to create the Tribal Nation Building Leadership Program, which develops students' "leadership skills and knowledge grounded in cultural principles, practices, and values."[9] CDAT also has developed professional development pipelines in two critical need fields (teacher education and healthcare), and its Department of Natural Resources is hiring additional tribal members to help CDAT restore and revitalize its land and waters.[10]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/cdat.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Dr. Chris Meyer, Director of Education, Coeur d'Alene Tribe, chris.meyer@cdatribe-nsn.gov

## Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

For years, Red Cliff's workforce development efforts were hampered by poor federal data that painted an inaccurate picture of its workforce and hindered its ability to secure adequate funding to grow that workforce in self-determined ways.[1] In response, in 2018 Red Cliff conducted its first Tribal Census of reservation households to "support program design," "assess the efficacy of newly developed programs, attract funding from a diverse array of sources, and… deepen cooperation between tribal leadership and tribal departments and programs."[2] It also gathered precise data about Red Cliff's "employment landscape, challenges, and opportunities."[3] Deployed over several months, the Census generated a 97 percent response rate through a campaign featuring online and paper survey options, Census staff going door to door to help Band members complete surveys, promotional door hangers, gift cards to tribal businesses, and larger raffle prizes for participating.[4] Among its key data points: a 23 percent unemployment rate, available jobs highly concentrated in Red Cliff's programs and casino, Band members' strong desire for "new, different, or additional employment," and pervasive childcare and transportation challenges that hindered training and employment.[5] The Census directly informed Red Cliff's member-driven, 20-year Comprehensive Plan, which includes goals of partnering with higher education institutions to create education and training opportunities for Band members, recruiting recent Red Cliff college graduates for tribal jobs, instituting effective employee retention strategies, and creating a "no wrong door" approach to workforce development service delivery across governmental divisions.[6] Administered again in 2023 to generate longitudinal data, the Census has enabled the Band to increase its federal funding to advance its priorities, notably: building an Ojibwe language teacher/cultural practitioner workforce, targeted investments to cultivate small business owners, expanding its child care options beyond center-based care, establishing a 477 Program, and hiring an Education Division Administrator to lead that effort.[7]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/redcliff.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Douglas Jennings, Planning Administrator, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, douglas.jennings@redcliff-nsn.gov

## *POLICY TIPS*

- **Listening:** Administer a formal consultation process with the community to develop a community-based definition of the ideal Native *citizen* (not just worker) your workforce development approach will cultivate and how they will contribute to the community.
- **Listening:** Regularly convene public hearings, focus groups, and program participant advisory groups to learn how effective your workforce development efforts are and how they could be improved.
- **Listening:** Use "captive audience" opportunities to obtain key input and information from the community (mandatory questionnaires when tribal citizens update their tribal enrollment, booths at community events, etc.).
- **Applying:** Conduct routine "program enhancement" surveys of program participants and incentivize them to participate by providing modest rewards (gas vouchers, gift cards, etc.); share results with programmatic *and* political leaders to refine programs.
- **Teaching:** Implement multi-pronged, ongoing marketing campaigns to inform the community about your new and revamped workforce development initiatives, how they work, and how they will benefit them individually and collectively.
- **Teaching:** Develop a formal social media policy to share key program updates and job openings with the community in real time.
- **Teaching:** Deploy concrete strategies to document and share stories of successful program participants.

# STRATEGIC VISION

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

A few years ago, the leaders and education directors of several Tribal Nations met with board members of the public K-12 school district that was educating most of their Nations' youth. Among the Nations' pressing concerns was the fact the school system – despite serving so many Native students – employed few Native teachers. So did the school system have a plan to recruit more Native teachers? "No," was the answer. But then the question was posed to the Tribal Nations present: "What are you doing to encourage and prepare your own people for careers in education?" They responded, "*We don't have a plan either.*" This conversation made the tribal representatives realize their Nations' workforce development activities weren't intentionally advancing what they had identified as a strategic priority – and the need to connect the two. The Tribal Nations and school district have since instituted a plan to jointly train and recruit local Native teachers in partnership with area college teacher preparation programs.

Across Indian Country, the success of nation-rebuilding efforts hinges on such strategic vision, or as some scholars have called it, "strategic orientation."[1] In the realm of workforce development, vision is forged when the Native community in question has a clear, widely understood sense of the future it seeks to create for itself – Native people teaching their own, for instance – and makes decisions about how to build its human capacity based on the long-term priorities the community considers vital to creating that future.

For example, one Tribal Nation has structured its workforce development activities to advance its overarching goal of molding tribal citizens capable of contributing to the nation throughout their lives, from "cradle through career" and beyond.[2] Another prioritizes on-reservation citizens in its higher education scholarship funding to support its strategic commitment to reversing ***brain drain***, ensuring it has the local human capacity it needs to accomplish its long-term nation-rebuilding goals. Another has forged a 10-year strategic plan that positions workforce/entrepreneurship development as one of the plan's three primary pillars and the vehicle for advancing the other two pillars: tribal governance and economic development.[3] Meanwhile, an inter-tribal non-profit organization explicitly gears all of its youth-based workforce development programming to cultivate not only "a sustainable tribal workforce of respected Native American scientists and technicians that serves the tribes' salmon management programs," but also nationally renowned Native faculty "in areas of science and technology to support fisheries and coastal-margin ecosystem management" for generations to come.[4]

As a Tribal Nation charts its strategic vision for a prosperous future based on its own, culturally rooted definition of prosperity, it must place workforce development at the functional core of how it will go about making that vision a reality. Conversely, as the Tribal Nation crafts its overarching workforce development approach and the specific activities that comprise it, the Nation must do so with that greater, *national* purpose in mind. As a former TCU president once explained, "Sometimes tribal government, as it creates a plan, does not make a correlation between that plan and the capabilities, needs, and competencies of the local tribal population. If we don't put those two together, then the best laid of plans...are not going to work."[6] Consequently, Tribal Nations and the other Native-led entities must always be answering in practice the question, "How are we cultivating and leveraging the inherent potential of our Native people to forge the brighter future we seek for ourselves?" This is a multi-generational proposition requiring a multi-generational approach. It demands Tribal Nations and other Native entities:

> ***"A strong Tribal economy is grounded in a healthy workforce that is well educated, entrepreneurial in spirit, and diverse. Investment in people and their economic well-being is the most important element of economic resiliency and sovereign governance."***
>
> ***– NEZ PERCE TRIBE, COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (2022-2027)[5]***

- marry long-range workforce development strategies to their long-range community and economic development priorities so they build the right human capacity to achieve those priorities;
- focus on preparing people to *build careers* and not just *get jobs*, which will enhance upward mobility, individual and familial self-sufficiency, and community prosperity over time;
- diversify the careers they train people for beyond public sector careers that don't create jobs to private sector careers (e.g., working in tribal enterprises or as business owners) that do;
- thoughtfully define the *reach* of their workforce development approaches, namely whether/how they will serve tribal citizens living outside of tribal lands and to what ends; and
- ensure their long-term priorities drive funding for their workforce development efforts and not the other way around.

## ASK YOURSELF

- Does our Nation have a vision and plan for what it wants its future to look like 25 years now? How about 50-100 years from now? If so, how is it preparing its people to help it reach that destination?
- Looking ahead one generation, what should our local Native workforce look like? What should it be capable of doing, and how should it be strengthening the community?
- What is the multigenerational mission of our workforce development approach? Does it explicitly speak to and advance in targeted ways the long-range communal goals of our community? If not, how can we refine our mission to do so?
- Do we have a comprehensive, long-term workforce development plan? If not, why not? What would it take to develop and implement one, and for tribal leaders, workforce development practitioners, and citizens to truly own, support, and drive it?
- Does our workforce development approach prioritize the development of Native people's skills, experience, employability, and career advancement in specific fields that our community has deemed most important? If not, how can we change that?
- As a tribal leader/workforce development practitioner, are the decisions I make and the work I do each day building the Nation's human capacity to further its long-range priorities?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Change Labs

A Native-led non-profit serving the Navajo and Hopi communities, Change Labs was created in 2019 to grow a vital yet often overlooked component of a thriving Native workforce: entrepreneurs. Its mission is to help entrepreneurs overcome the systemic barriers they face to "build thriving ventures that strengthen our communities and our economic sovereignty."[1] At the outset, it developed a comprehensive "Theory of Change" to foster small businesses on tribal lands by cultivating what nourishes them: (1) social capital (access to peers, mentors, and business coaches/support organizations), (2) human capital (entrepreneurs' education, experience, and knowledge), (3) financial and physical capital (tangible assets like loans and equipment that entrepreneurs need to operate their businesses), and (4) social/economic agency (the traits an entrepreneur needs to act on their skills and assets and "successfully navigate business activities").[2] Implementing its Theory of Change, Change Labs set six long-term goals, including becoming a community-recognized hub for starting businesses, creating a staff team with deep knowledge about the issues facing local entrepreneurs, and educating elected tribal and community leaders about the policy solutions needed to address those issues.[3] To achieve them, Change Labs established its Business Incubator and Kinship Lending programs, which trains entrepreneurs, provides them low-interest loans for business start-ups, and connects them to other resources.[4] Recognizing small business success depends on the commercial environment, it also conducted a study of the constraints of "Doing Business on the Navajo Nation," finding it is 2-3 times more expensive and takes seven times longer to start a business on tribal lands than in nearby border towns (data it using to advance tribal policy change).[5] Growing its ability to build "an entrepreneurship ecosystem from the ground up"[6], Change Labs opened its first physical "E-ship Hub" for entrepreneurs in 2023, with a second slated for 2025.[7] Fostering 76 small business start-ups to date, it recently partnered with the Navajo Nation to deploy $13.3 million in SSBCI-based loans, and plans to expand its lending to add a "second-stage" loan program to foster business growth.[8]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/changelabs.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Heather Fleming, Executive Director, Change Labs, heather@nativestartup.org

## Pascua Yaqui Tribe (PYT)

Confronting an unemployment rate five times higher than the State of Arizona's rate, tribal jobs heavily concentrated in tribal government and its two casinos, and a tribally-owned construction company with more work than it had qualified workers, PYT took action.[1] Enacting its operational mission to "envision, invest, and employ"[2], the Tribe's Pascua Yaqui Development Corporation (PYDC) merged funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and several other federal sources to establish and outfit its state-of-the-art Career Pivot Centers.[3] The Centers are designed to serve as a "Field of Dreams"[4] for construction training where previously "nobody local was offering it."[5] Currently featuring four pieces of heavy equipment and eventually training simulators found nowhere else in the rapidly growing Tucson area, the Centers provide industry certificate trainings in heavy equipment operation and construction, and will soon add property management certification, property and cyber security, facilities maintenance, and real estate certification (PYT and PYDC also plan to add a solar tech training program at the Centers in the future to prepare PYT members for careers in that high-demand field).[6] PYT members who complete Center trainings are then channeled into jobs with the Tribe's construction company, its Housing and Facilities Management departments, and PYDC's partner employers, where they earn annual salaries more than twice the median household income on the PYT reservation.[7] PYDC also rents out the Centers to other training providers to use their skid steer, backhoe, loader, forklift, excavator, and other equipment at affordable rates, reinvesting the income these rentals generate back into the Centers' training programs.[8] PYDC has also partnered with Central Arizona College and the nearby Tohono O'odham Nation's college to have them provide college credit to the Centers' heavy equipment operation trainees, making them more marketable and capable of career advancement over the long run.[9] Recognizing "there will always be a demand for these workers"[10], PYDC is positioning the Centers as a "hub for construction in Tucson" that will "help our community for seven generations."[11]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/pyt.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Daune Cardenas, CEO, Pascua Yaqui Development Corporation, daune.cardenas@pydcorporation.com

## *POLICY TIPS*

- Treat workforce development as a *multi-generational* effort: Don't focus only on Native people who need jobs and income now – ensure your approach consciously works to foster the prosperous community you seek to create over the long run.
- Establish and connect your workforce development activities to advance/achieve specific priorities contained in you Nation's long-range community and economic development plan. If you don't have such a plan in place, make sure workforce development – and your specific role – becomes a primary consideration in its formation.
- Define the breadth of your workforce development approach to advance that plan (serving citizens living off-reservation, etc.)
- Define the concrete strategies and principles your workforce development approach will embrace to enhance the ability of the Tribal Nation(s) you serve to capably exercise their sovereignty.
- Assess the relationship between those entities who are developing the local Native workforce and those developing the local Native economy and identity and implement concrete strategies to strengthen that relationship so the two work in concert.
- Expand the array of careers your approach supports based on the Nation's current and future needs (and build the infrastructure – housing, transportation, etc. - to support it). Prioritize careers that can create additional job opportunities.

# INTEGRATION

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

The governance and service delivery systems of many Tribal Nations and Native organizations have long been plagued by an insidious dynamic often called the ***silo effect***, which is an enduring legacy of outsiders like the federal or state governments calling the shots and supporting workforce, economic, and community development the ways *they* see fit in Native communities. The silo effect fuels a lack of communication, cooperation, coordination, and collective goal-setting and advancement between the various departments and programs in tribal government and with other Native organizations serving the community. It sustains a status quo within Tribal Nations and Native organizations where the norm is for programs to work alone, with no requirements or incentives to work *together*.

This dynamic is particularly pervasive in workforce development. Since the 1950s, the federal government has devised and launched – often without substantive input from Tribal Nations and communities – a host of disconnected initiatives and programs designed to develop the Native workforce. Some have been exclusively confined to Indian Country (e.g., **NACTEP**, **477**), while others include Native people as part of larger national policy mandates (e.g., **JTPA**). Some are broad (e.g., WIOA), while others target specific population demographics with particular workforce challenges, needs, and goals (e.g., Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation). Typically, however, they were designed by federal policymakers and bureaucrats as stand-alone programs with no structural or institutional commitment to collaborate with other federally funded programs serving Native communities. Worse yet, they are administered by a multitude of different federal agencies (**ED**, **DOI**, DOL, **HHS**, etc.) with no policies or processes in place to systematically coordinate their efforts to ensure they collectively serve Native communities effectively.

Over the past six decades, this dynamic has produced fragmented tribal government and Native organization bureaucracies, where programs dedicated to various aspects of workforce development do their work separately, redundantly, or at cross-purposes. To complicate matters, some Tribal Nations have taken over "administrative and service provision functions without thinking through how the various pieces of their growing government structure should work together."[1] The drawbacks of this dynamic are pervasive, such as duplicating services, poor service quality, the wasteful spending of limited financial resources, and needlessly limiting the number of Native people being served. And because programs rarely communicate or work together, they can't comprehensively address community needs, holistically assess and support the workforce development needs of individual Native people, or grow what does work across the organization.

> ***"Once staff understand the advantage to their programs and the people they work with, they become a lot more open to the idea of integration."***
>
> ***– KIM CARROLL, FORMER GRANTS & COMPLIANCE DIRECTOR, CAREER SERVICES, CHEROKEE NATION[2]***

Conversely, research by NCAI and others finds that Tribal Nations and Native organizations who develop *integrated* systems that coalesce workforce development and related activities around a singular set of self-defined goals enhance their ability to make life-changing differences for Native people.[3] This requires eradicating programmatic silos and, often, consolidating programs into larger, centralized programs or "umbrella" departments or divisions.

For Tribal Nations, it also demands structural coordination between that system and other parts of tribal government, notably its economic development arm (and tribal enterprises), education department (to ensure a "cradle through career" workforce development continuum), and social service programs (**GA**, **LIHEAP**, **TANF**, etc.). For example, more and more are leveraging 477 "to develop and execute a shared vision for how the resources can be applied most effectively based on their geographic and labor market contexts...It is also a valuable example of how public systems can be aligned and services streamlined when budget barriers are reduced."[4]

How a Tribal Nation creates such a system is *its sovereign choice* and should be based solely on *its* needs. If, for example, a federal program can't *legally* be part of 477, it doesn't mean you shouldn't merge it into your system in another way if it makes sense *to you*.[5] Deploying a self-designed system can "eliminate redundant service provision, realize complementarities and synergies among services, gain efficiencies, and leverage savings from more streamlined client processing to expand service provision."[6] It also ensures that mission-critical staff work in lockstep to advance the Nation's big-picture objectives. Most importantly, *it works better for the people*, as an integrated system providing person-centered, ***"wrap-around" services*** enables you to comprehensively assess all of a Native person's individual and familial needs and instantly connect that person to the suite of services they need to get on the right path.

## ASK YOURSELF

- Do we have a singular workforce development mission that all of our programs are charged with advancing *together*?
- Is/how is the silo effect currently impacting our workforce development approach, and what can we do to address it?
- Do any of our workforce development or related programs practice ***turfism***, and how can we neutralize that dynamic by requiring or strongly incentivizing programs to work together so we can achieve intergration?
- Are our workforce development and related programs working together to the degree necessary to successfully advance our long-range workforce development priorities? To provide person-centered, wrap-around services effectively to people in need?
- Do leaders and staff of our workforce development and related programs (GA, TANF, etc.) meet or communicate regularly to coordinate shared work and eliminate duplication of services? What mechanisms can we create to enhance that coordination?
- If we were to design our own, coordinated workforce development system of support for Native people (see page 6), what would that system look like, and why/in what ways would it be fundamentally different from the approach we currently have?
- What steps do we need to take to create such a system? How can we marshal the political will, technical expertise, and community support necessary to take those steps?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Blackfeet Nation

Launched in 1965 as the Blackfeet Nation's workforce development arm, Blackfeet Manpower became the country's first certified Native American One-Stop Center in 2007. It did so to consolidate its resources to more effectively address the pressing needs of Blackfeet members on and around Blackfeet's reservation, which contended with a 70 percent unemployment rate. Today, Manpower provides a comprehensive set of interconnected education, training, work experience, job placement, family strengthening, and supplemental services "under one roof"[1], many of which are included in Manpower's 477 Plan.[2] Comprising most of its annual budget, Manpower's blended 477 funds enable it to prioritize "planning and delivering services instead of maintaining individual service budgets"[3] and flexibly direct resources to its areas of greatest need. Manpower provides its centralized services at its main campus in Blackfeet's population hub of Browning and two satellite offices serving Blackfeet's outlying communities.[4] Manpower's "ease of accessing services"[5] is exemplified in its universal intake application, administered by a single case manager who assesses each client's job-readiness challenges and then connects that person to the customized, culturally grounded suite of services they need to address them.[6] Manpower maintains MOUs with several tribal entities to ensure community members' needs are seamlessly served; for example, Blackfeet's Child Support Enforcement Program automatically channels its clients to Manpower to determine what workforce development and other related services they require.[7] The One-Stop Center also provides specialized services – including transitional housing – to members of the armed forces to support their transition from active duty to veteran life, and serves citizens of other Tribal Nations through a TANF service contract with the State of Montana.[8] Manpower's staff and partners contribute client data to a shared system that tracks clients' progress, how its services are performing, and how they can be improved.[9] To further increase service effectiveness, Manpower recently adopted a universal case management approach where case managers are cross-trained in all services so any one of them can immediately work with any new client, "instead of being connected to a specific case manager based on service need."[10]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/blackfeet.pdf
***CONNECT:*** George Kipp IV, Director, Blackfeet Manpower, george_kipp@yahoo.com

## Red Lake Nation (RLN)

A leader in the tribal self-determination movement, RLN established its own workforce development programs in the mid-1970s.[1] However, for the next 25 years, these programs remained largely disconnected from one another due to their different federal and state funding sources; they also struggled to holistically address RLN members' distinct workforce development needs or fully align with their cultural values and lifeways. In response, in 2000 RLN launched Oshkiimaajitahdah ("A New Path"), a consolidated approach that educates families "to discover their strengths as individuals"[2] by "breaking down the barriers" that stand in the way of self-sufficiency.[3] Under Oshkiimaajitahdah's umbrella are 22 programs – six within RLN's 477 Plan and the other 16 seamlessly run as side-by-side programs.[4] A "true one-stop"[5], Oshkiimaajitahdah provides "fully integrated" workforce development and related services "at all stages" through a single, centrally located facility "where community members who are unemployed or underemployed can prepare for work."[6] These services are coordinated through weekly meetings of all connected programmatic leaders and Oshkiimaajitahdah's universal TribeVue case management system, which enables all staff to update and track each client's progress in real time. Oshkiimaajitahdah heavily emphasizes facilitating "the growth of business, investment and jobs," which receives "the highest priority for the use of all available employment and training resources."[7] Its streamlined approach flexibly channels resources into solutions tailored to community needs, such as the hiring of a career development specialist who connects clients with area off-reservation employers and teaches them how to start their own businesses.[8] It also has launched targeted trainings in auto repair through its full-service auto shop (where clients learn the trade servicing tribal vehicles) and food production through food producer trainings and its Ashangewin Catering (where they learn about food-based businesses).[9] Oshkiimaajitahdah recently expanded TANF to a four-county service area surrounding RLN.[10]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/rln.pdf
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## *POLICY TIPS*

- Evaluate the degree of collaboration between your workforce development and related programs to ensure they are coordinating with one another. Identify gaps and weaknesses and implement steps to strengthen their working relationships.
- Build an overarching institutional "culture of collaboration" within your workforce development system that rewards working together and centering Native people in service delivery (and discourages "the administration of *distinct* programs").[7]
- Build "inter-agency" teams across programs to provide holistic, wrap-around services to those in need of workforce education, training, and other supports. They should meet regularly to design and advance joint work, assess progress, and craft solutions.
- Assess how your people access services to gauge how easy/helpful a process it is for them. Establish a uniform mechanism through which they can access all of their needed services at first contact.
- Develop strong operational linkages between your main workforce development programs and **TERO**, TANF, and other related programs so that you can comprehensively address your people's needs.
- Design a long-range plan for an integrated system and build it step by step, program by program, as you learn from experience and build your capacity (remember: it doesn't need to happen all at once).

# INSTITUTIONS

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Two decades ago, one Tribal Nation in the Southwest was struggling with high staff turnover, an inconsistently enforced and routinely politicized personnel grievance process, and low morale among its government employees. In response to these challenges, in 2011 the Nation established its Workforce Excellence Initiative, a culturally grounded approach to enhance employee retention and professional growth, improve staff morale, and ensure that all employees "have the resources they need to thrive."[1] At the core of this initiative was the Nation's establishment of a "progressive," impartial personnel policy that handles minor personnel grievance issues within its administrative structure; serious ones are resolved by an objective third-party grievance committee that works outside of employees' direct chains of command.[2] Not only has the initiative enhanced the Nation's ability to retain and cultivate valuable staff, but it also has relieved the Nation's political leaders of the demand of expending invaluable time and energy on personnel disputes, freeing them up to focus more intently on advancing the Nation's long-range priorities.[3]

> ***"As sovereign nations, Native nations have the authority to establish their own employment laws…Some of these interconnectedness-centered policies include promoting a healthy work-life balance, centering traditional cultural practices in policies, and offering a Tribal preference for hiring…"***
>
> ***– NATIVE GOVERNANCE CENTER[4]***

This story and others across Indian Country clearly demonstrate that the ***institutions*** (constitutions, laws, codes, policies, procedures, administrative mechanisms, reporting/communications structures, etc.) that a Tribal Nation uses to govern itself play a pivotal role in its ability to forge and administer an approach to workforce development capable of achieving its definition of success. Simply put, these institutions comprise the rules of the road that a Nation chooses to live by as it builds a brighter future for itself, in large part by developing its human capacity to accomplish that all-encompassing task.

When these institutions aren't well thought out – or when they were created by someone else to advance someone else's objectives (e.g., the federal government) – they tend to provide a weak or unstable foundation upon which to build workforce development success (or do anything else the Tribal Nation seeks to do). Conversely, when the Nation thoughtfully and purposefully designs these institutions with accountability, consistency, culture, fairness, transparency, and the Nation's strategic vision in mind, it fosters the governmental and programmatic stability and deep institutional memory and knowledge that the Nation needs to realize its long-range human capacity-building goals.

It follows, then, that as Tribal Nations engage in nation rebuilding, they are dedicating significant time, energy, thought, and action to (1) assess the origins and functionality of their institutions, and (2) take steps to strengthen them or create new ones so that their governance systems are capable of achieving their strategic objectives. Through constitutional reform, code development, new or revised laws, revamped administrative policies and procedures, and other institutional measures, they are building a firm foundation upon which to craft and sustain innovative, self-determined approaches to developing Native workforces.

Among its many benefits, such institution building empowers their ability to create "comprehensive social service systems that offer efficiencies, expand available resources, and give [them] greater flexibility and capacity to effectively serve diverse client needs."[5] It also helps them cultivate and retain the human capital they need to refine, strengthen, and grow those systems over time. Finding, keeping, and growing capable people to develop a workforce depends not just on competitive pay, but "on creating a working environment that encourages professionalism, processes disputes fairly and effectively, and keeps politics in its place…The presence of such a system…can be a critical factor in encouraging top-quality people – tribal citizens or not – to invest time, energy, and ideas in the future of the nation instead of going to work someplace else."[6]

Strong institutions are also imperative in ensuring that the workforce development services themselves are fair, consistent, and make sense to those in need of them. As one tribal leader put it, "Building accountability and transparency of the rules ends up being key to having equitable service delivery and equitable systems. And for our [tribal] members, the expectation that it doesn't matter who you elect, the level of service you receive and your opportunities are the same."[7]

## *ASK YOURSELF*

- Following the elections/appointments of our political leaders, is there a seamless transition of authority from one administration to the next? Or does it prompt mass dismissals of tribal employees who didn't vote for the victors? If the latter, how does that impact our workforce development services? What institutional changes can we make to ensure a seamless transition?
- Are our Nation's workforce development services provided equitably to all of its citizens? Or is the fair and consistent provision of those services hampered by interference from political leaders?
- Does our Nation have an impartial mechanism capable of resolving hiring and firing disputes and personnel grievances within tribal government and enterprises based on the merits of each case?
- Are our education code, policies, and enforcement mechanisms capable of advancing our workforce development priorities?
- Does our Nation have a procurement law and policies that provide tribal citizen/Native entrepreneurs with preference for securing tribal contracts, enabling them to grow their businesses? Are they properly and consistently administered?
- If our Nation has a 477 Program or is considering developing one, does it have the necessary institutions (such as a comprehensive set of 477-specific policies and procedures) in place to effectively administer that program?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Gila River Indian Community (GRIC)

In 2012, GRIC became the first Tribal Nation in the U.S. to receive a DOL Career Pathways (CP) grant. GRIC used the grant as a springboard to develop a nationally acclaimed workforce development system customized to the the Community's distinct needs and priorities, its employers, and workforce, with a particular focus on five industry sectors: Government (e.g., training tribal firefighters), Construction, Medical, Small Business, and Hospitality (with a focus on Culinary).[1] Eager to maximize a return on GRIC's workforce investments, in 2011 the GRIC Council instituted a human resources policy granting automatic hiring priority to GRIC's WIOA participants who complete training and then excel in their work experience placements.[2] When GRIC launched CP a year later, the policy covered CP participants (who also are WIOA participants). Those who meet the policy's criteria bypass GRIC's standard screening process for hiring, providing them a bright-line path from their work experience placements to permanent employment working for GRIC.[3] For example, CP Construction sector participants are assigned to GRIC's Building and Maintenance Department and when a participant performs well in their work experience placement, the Department's director issues a request to GRIC's Human Resources Department to do a direct hire. Once approved, the participant's work experience placement essentially "becomes de facto on-the-job training."[4] This strategy benefits not only those hired through the policy, but also tribal employers who save the cost of advertising job openings and expending staff time to review applications, conduct interviews, and select the top candidate for each position.[5] In addition, hiring WIOA participants enables GRIC to use WIOA dollars for work experience wages, saving its participating departments money they otherwise would have to spend from their own budgets.[6] After several years of successful placements, the GRIC Council expanded the policy in 2021 to extend to participants across all of GRIC's Employment & Training programs.[7] Meanwhile, Gila River's enterprises have adopted the same preferential hiring practice for Community members who complete successful work experience placements within their operations.

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/gric.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Lana Chanda, Director, Employment &Training Department, Gila River Indian Community, lana.chanda@gric.nsn.us

## Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO)

In 2017, LLBO member Levi Brown took part in the Native Governance Center's Native Nation Rebuilders Program, a two-year leadership training experience providing Indigenous changemakers "with Indigenized tools and frameworks they can use to help rebuild their nations."[1] Through the program, Brown developed an action plan to address a troubling fact – that "Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe civics is underrepresented and in most cases absent from all levels of educational institutions."[2] Called the Leech Lake Civics Training initiative, the plan quickly gained community support from LLBO's Local Indian Councils (LICs) and a governmental partner in its Human Resources Department.[3] Recognizing the "study of the political rights and responsibilities of citizens and of the operations of the government" is "essential to a vibrant and robust society"[4], in 2019 the LLBO Reservation Business Committee passed a resolution requiring "all new Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe employees including Tribal Council members to complete the Leech Lake Civics course and receive certification."[5] Taught monthly, the four-hour training empowers LLBO staff to ably serve the Band by grounding them in Leech Lake's culture, traditional governing institutions, colonization's enduring impacts, and how the LLBO government functions today.[6] It also teaches the responsibilities each LLBO employee is expected to fulfill, including: upholding LLBO's laws and policies, working for the betterment of every tribal member, safeguarding LLBO's institutions "because the institutions are the people," and how their specific roles advance LLBO's nation-rebuilding priorities.[7] The 1,000+ employees who have completed the training to date are now "better equipped to make and implement decisions in accordance with tribal goals and cultural values."[8] Meanwhile, LLBO's Gaming Enterprises and other businesses now require new hires to complete the training, which is also provided to community members, Leech Lake Tribal College, LICs, and local school districts upon request with increasingly regularity.[9] Recognizing "an informed nation is a strong nation"[10], LLBO leaders have requested the launch of a "second-tier" curriculum to deepen employees' understanding of Leech Lake Civics in 2025.[11]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/llbo.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Levi Brown, Developer and Instructor, Leech Lake Civics Training, levi.brown@state.mn.us

## *POLICY TIPS*

- Assess and revamp your current governing institutions with the Nation's overall strategic vision and its long-term workforce development priorities in mind. Develop new institutions where gaps exist.
- Create inclusive human resources policies that fairly address the diverse needs of *all* of your citizens (college graduates, those with no GED, single parents, seasonal subsistence practitioners, formerly justice-involved citizens, individuals with disabilities, etc.).
- Build "intentionality" into the Nation's hiring processes by including "transparent, unbiased checks and balances to ensure staff prioritize the right fit for a position, regardless of personal connections"[8]; ensure you *always* follow these processes.
- Develop a strong TERO/procurement ordinance giving tribal citizens and other local Native people priority for locally available jobs and tribal contracts, and appoint an independent body (e.g., an ombudsman) to monitor/ensure its proper enforcement.[9]
- Enact laws regulating labor and employment relations that advance the Nation's values and policy priorities[10], and ensure you have the administrative/judicial structures in place to implement them.
- Establish a strong child support enforcement ordinance to ensure affected parents have the financial resources they deserve.
- Develop a usury law to protect tribal citizens and other local Native people against predatory lenders.

# LEADERSHIP

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

As explained in "Institutions" (pages 20-21), establishing strong rules and governance structures to administer them is vital to a Tribal Nation's ability to design, implement, and sustain an effective workforce development approach. But equally important is establishing clearly understood and respected roles for those leading the design and administration of that approach, namely the Nation's political leaders and programmatic leaders (chief administrative officers, department heads, program coordinators, etc.). What responsibilities do each have, and how do they work in concert to shape and advance the Nation's strategic objectives for human capacity building? Who should exercise what leadership roles, and how should they complement one another?

While defining and playing these roles would seem a simple proposition, many Tribal Nations have long suffered from "role confusion" due primarily to federal policies that defined these roles for them and the organic, often rapid growth that many tribal governments have experienced since the 1960s.[1] This dynamic is often evident among political leaders, whose roles are "unclear, ill-defined, or simply unlimited."[2] In such situations, they decide and do *everything* because there is nothing preventing them from doing so; they have done it that way for so long; and the Nation's programmatic leaders, staff, and citizens have come to expect it of them. Consequently, political leaders' time and energy is spent putting out the day's fires, solving everyone's problems, juggling too many issues, micromanaging tribal programs and businesses, and fixating on every little detail. Meanwhile, programmatic leaders and staff wait around for political leaders to act, knowing any efforts to design and implement better solutions to the Nation's challenges likely will be overridden by the political leaders. Overall, no one is forging a "strategic vision" for the Nation, leaving it "uncertain of where it wants to go or how to get there."[3]

More than three decades of research demonstrate this formula is unworkable overall for Native nation rebuilding. It is also ill-equipped to support the sustained exercise of the visionary, transformative leadership by political leaders and programmatic leaders, which is crucial for crafting innovative workforce development approaches that can stand the test of time. Fortunately, through constitutional reform, organizational restructuring, and new policies and procedures supported by capable systems to administer them, Tribal Nations are evaluating, revamping, clarifying, and upholding the fundamentally distinct yet complementary roles of political and programmatic leaders (see pages 8-9), enhancing their ability to design, launch, and sustain self-determined, holistic, and progressive workforce development approaches in the process.[4]

> ***"The breadth of tribal government is so huge: environmental, public safety, education – there is no magic wand that makes you know all of this stuff once you are elected…Well, your magic wand is the people you bring in to help you and the ones that are there already…Let them do their job…"***
>
> ***– KAREN DIVER, FORMER CHAIRWOMAN, FOND DU LAC BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA[5]***

The "Developing Native Workforces: Who Should Do What?" infographic on pages 8-9 delineates the key roles that tribal leaders and program administrators and staff need to perform day in and day out to define and achieve the strategic workforce development priorities of the Tribal Nations they serve. For example, it is the job of tribal leaders to set those priorities with input from tribal citizens, while it is the job of program administrators and staff to forge and administer programs designed to advance those priorities. As one former tribal chairman explains it, "An effective leader has to be humble…Don't micromanage. Surround yourself with people smarter than you. You hire these people to do a job – let them do their job."[6]

As the work of a growing number of Tribal Nations reveals, setting a strong, sustainable leadership foundation requires starting young with those who will one day take over the reins of their workforce development efforts. One Tribal Nation in Oklahoma, for example, concerned its college students were not "armed with the cultural and political knowledge they need to become the leaders they were born to be," established a six-week, summer "crash course" that develops their leadership skills by immersing them in all aspects of the Nation's government – including key tribal departments, tribal legislative sessions and board meetings, and the Nation's enterprises – so they can learn and prepare to play key roles in service to the Nation in the near future.[7] Meanwhile, another Tribal Nation in Arizona established a tribal youth council nearly 40 years ago that advises the Nation's government on a range of issues including education and workforce development and enhances council members' "understanding of and participation in tribal public service."[8]

## ASK YOURSELF

- What is the extent of the involvement of our Nation's political leaders in the day-to-day provision of our workforce development and related services? Do they micromanage/interfere?
- How is it impacting the efficiency and effectiveness of those services? How is it impacting our ability to design and implement more effective workforce development strategies and grow those strategies over time?
- Are our Nation's political leaders dedicating adequate time – and do they have adequate information and data – to make informed, strategic decisions about how best to develop our workforce and in what specific fields?
- How is our Nation holding its programmatic leaders accountable for: (1) providing quality workforce development services *equitably* to our people, and (2) making quantifiable progress on our long-range workforce development priorities? Is it working?
- How are our programmatic leaders role modeling the behavior/performance our Nation needs to advance those priorities?
- How do our political and programmatic leaders work in concert to set and advance those priorities? What principles and mechanisms can we put in place to strengthen that relationship?
- How is our Nation preparing our next generation of political leaders and programmatic leaders to take over the reins?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Potawatomi Bands of Southwest Michigan

In 2019, Western Michigan University (WMU) adopted a formal statement recognizing its location within the ancestral territory of the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians, Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi, and Pokagon Band of Potawatomi.[1] The statement led WMU to establish its Native American Affairs Council (NAAC), which the bands leveraged to tackle a longstanding challenge: the lack of locally available, tribally informed, and culturally relevant leadership development curricula for their emerging political and programmatic leaders.[2] Through NAAC, the bands partnered with WMU to co-design and "co-govern" its Graduate Certificate in Tribal Governance, a graduate-level course series officially endorsed by the bands and tailored to their specific histories, governance systems, and governance and economic development capacity-building priorities.[3] The program provides "a comprehensive understanding of the legal and cultural history" of the bands, their treaty rights and governance systems, their business entities, and how they relate to other governments.[4] It also "develops hands-on skills to assess and address the economic, managerial, and societal challenges of tribal governance"[5], with a specific emphasis on the skills tribal leaders and senior-level administrators and managers need to do their jobs effectively.[6] The bands each fill five slots in each program cohort, with their governments and enterprises nominating (1) existing employees to participate as part of their ongoing professional development and (2) community members who display professional promise; their enrollment costs are covered by tribal higher education scholarships. Any remaining slots are made available to non-Native professionals employed by local governments and organizations that work with the bands.[7] Participants are chosen based on the focus area of that year's cohort (tribal government, gaming enterprises, or non-gaming enterprises) and they must collaboratively design "service-learning" capstone projects to implement on the bands' behalf upon program completion.[8] Many graduates have then run for tribal elected office or been promoted into program director or senior manager roles within the bands' governments and enterprises.[9]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/potbands.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Sam Morseau, Tribal Council Secretary, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, Sam.Morseau@PokagonBand-nsn.gov

## Santa Fe Indian School (SFIS)

In 1977, the All Pueblo Council of Governors assumed control of SFIS from the federal government.[1] Recognizing many young Pueblo people were pursuing higher education and taking jobs elsewhere when "their skills were very much needed at home"[2], key Pueblo leaders subsequently pushed SFIS to establish its Leadership Institute, whose mission includes "[transforming] the impacts of externally-developed policy on Tribal community institutions by cultivating emerging intergenerational Indigenous leaders"[3] committed and prepared to make lifelong contributions to their Pueblo communities.[4] Among the Institute's programs is its Summer Policy Academy (SPA), a four-year leadership development and public policy training program established in 2007 and consisting of two-week sessions the first two summers. SPA Year One introduces rising high school juniors to tribal, state, national, and international policy issues, who then travel east the following summer to Princeton University and Capitol Hill where they form teams to formulate and present policy solutions "harmonized with our traditional values"[5] that address issues directly impacting their communities.[6] In SPA Year Three, students serve internships with Pueblo government departments and programs, state legislative offices, and other local placements where they apply their SPA learnings and advance the policy solutions developed the previous summer. In Year Four, SPA participants serve as junior faculty for the incoming Year One cohort and staff for the Community Institutes, the Leadership Institute's hallmark convenings.[7] Ninety percent of SPA participants eventually attend college, with many obtaining bachelor's and graduate degrees before returning home to support their communities in the critical ways SPA envisioned.[8] Invoking the Pueblos' deeply rooted "planting and farming culture"[9], SPA is well on its way to achieving its goal of cultivating 500 "Pueblo thought leaders" over the program's first 25 years, leaders who are ready to embrace "the sacred and inherent responsibility of sustaining our Indigenous life ways, while drawing upon our western knowledge so that we are successful in generating a better quality of life for our people today and into the future."[10]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/sfis.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Dr. Carnell Chosa, Co-Director, SFIS Summer Policy Academy, ctchosa@sfis.k12.nm.us

## *POLICY TIPS*

- **Political leaders:** Frame and prioritize workforce development as a vital pathway to the Nation's long-term prosperity through (1) ongoing messaging to tribal employees and citizens and (2) strategic decision-making.
- **Political leaders:** Make community-informed, strategic decisions about the Nation's overarching workforce development priorities and delegate the day-to-day authority to programmatic leaders and staff to implement them.
- **Political leaders:** Mandate/encourage programmatic leaders to take calculated risks to develop innovative programmatic solutions and commit to grow solutions that work and learn from those that don't.
- **Programmatic leaders:** Hire top-notch qualified staff with particular expertise. Give them the authority to do their jobs.
- **Together:** Depoliticize tribal workplaces and the provision of workforce development services.
- **Together:** Establish a formal process for regular communication and reporting that sets clear roles and fosters mutual accountability between political leaders and programmatic leaders.
- **Together:** Identify and fill service gaps based on ongoing community feedback; discard or overhaul ineffective services.
- **Both:** Establish formal policies for succession planning for programmatic leaders and leadership transition for political leaders.

# FUNDING

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

With limited funding for workforce development, one Tribal Nation had to get creative. Relying on a modest **HUD** grant, it established a "workforce crew" to support its housing construction team. Supervised by a licensed contractor, the workforce crew trainees – all Nation citizens – receive on-the-job training, helping to construct dozens of homes to date. This cost-effective arrangement has enabled the Nation to build more houses than it otherwise could, and also equipped the trainees with marketable skills that will make them highly employable on and around the reservation.

This story evokes a daunting reality facing most Tribal Nations (and other Native workforce development entities) as they build self-determined systems to develop Native workforces the ways they see fit: the challenge of inadequate financial resources. Federal funding is critical, and the federal government has trust and treaty responsibilities to provide Tribal Nations with ample funding to advance their workforce development priorities. However, with each new fiscal year, the federal government inevitably fails to provide them with enough dollars to do so. Given the uncertain long-term federal budget outlook – not to mention Indian Country's growing population – the situation isn't likely to improve anytime soon. Meanwhile, state dollars tend to be a hit-or-miss proposition for most Tribal Nations, as they typically must compete with non-Native local governments for a small percentage of modest funding pools. Consequently, Tribal Nations must think and work outside the box to marshal the financial resources they need to build their human capacity – and target those resources for maximum impact. Simply put, Native ingenuity is the name of the game. Below are some proven strategies for tackling this challenge:

> ***"Every single dollar that comes into the Nation, we want it to be strategic, we want it to be effective, and we want it to hit those core issues that are the top priorities of the Nation."***
>
> ***– FAWN SHARP, FORMER PRESIDENT, QUINAULT INDIAN NATION[3]***

- **Strategic vision:** Tribal Nations need to forge a strategic vision governing why and how it will develop their workforces (see pages 16-17) and use it as a primary decision-making lens to assess what funding sources to pursue; what sources to avoid because they will restrict tribal self-determination, innovation, and flexibility; and where and how they should fit together.[2]
- **Discretionary revenues:** Tribal Nations can't afford to rely on the federal and state governments alone for workforce development funding. While easier said than done, they need to: (1) increase their funding allocations for workforce development from the existing revenue they generate through tribal taxes, enterprise profits, TERO fees, and/or passive investments; and (2) create new streams of discretionary tribal revenue specifically for workforce development that don't come with the restrictive strings often attached to federal and state dollars. For example, one Tribal Nation's apprenticeship program has become so highly regarded across its region that the Nation is planning to admit and train non-Natives to generate revenue to help its program become more financially self-sustaining.
- **Funding diversity:** Securing dollars from multiple sources enhances Tribal Nations' ability to deftly merge small pools of money into a larger, more resilient funding base that can more flexibly and comprehensively meet their citizens' needs.
- **Coordinating funding:** Coordinating sources across tribal programs (and with tribal partners) – which many Tribal Nations achieve by creating 477 programs – enhances their ability to: (1) efficiently spend the funding they have by eliminating any duplication of services, (2) identify and capitalize on cost-saving opportunities, and (3) collectively leverage funding sources with in-kind contributions and volunteerism to strengthen and expand the provision of workforce development services.[4]
- **Supplementing funding:** More and more Tribal Nations are making targeted investments of tribal dollars to supplement federal grant funding to expand programs that are working well, increasing the number of people they can serve.
- **Reducing administrative costs:** This can be accomplished in many ways, notably by consolidating programs and streamlining federal reporting requirements (see pages 7 and 18-19).
- **Casting the widest net possible:** Tribal Nations should leave no stone unturned in their search for flexible funding (federal, state, foundation, etc.) that can enhance their efforts. For example, while philanthropy historically has invested little in Indian Country (with less than 0.3 percent of their collective dollars going to Native-led organizations[5]), over the past few years a growing number of foundations are making targeted investments in Native-led workforce development efforts.[6]

## ASK YOURSELF

- Which of our workforce development funding streams come from external, non-tribal sources that limit how we wish to use the money? How can we increase the discretionary revenue we control to make our approach more self-determined and flexible?
- Do we have an effective process in place whereby our political and programmatic leaders can evaluate and determine whether a specific potential funding source for our workforce development efforts is worth pursuing? If not, how can we create one?
- What current workforce development program costs could be reduced or eliminated through in-kind contributions or donations of goods, services, time, and effort by our existing or potential partners?
- Where/how could we strategically supplement federal and state funding with modest investments of tribal dollars to strengthen our workforce development services and provide them to a greater number of tribal citizens and other local people?
- Which outside funding sources (e.g., foundations serving our state or region) would fund our approach on our terms?
- Do we have meaningful relationships with regional or national foundations who have an institutional commitment to support Indian Country and/or workforce development? If not, how can we cultivate those relationships? Who should we start with?[7]
- How can we use on-the-job trainees and work experience participants provide to reduce the costs of communty projects?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)

In the late 1990s, CSKT confronted an unemployment rate hovering around 50 percent.[1] Its disjointed assortment of federal grant and other social service programs – run by more than 20 separate agencies, each with its own priorities – was failing to reduce that rate. In response, CSKT's Tribal Council consolidated these programs into a single new entity: the Department of Human Resource Development (DHRD). At the outset, the DHRD faced daunting obstacles, including generating adequate funding, creating enough work experience placements for clients, and solving their transportation challenges. Finding initial success in using Tribal TANF dollars to purchase two vans to transport clients to their work experience placements, the DHRD then built a tribal transit system to meet the extensive transportation needs of its clients and the broader CSKT community. To fund this ambitious plan, in 2007 the DHRD secured Tribal Council approval for an ingenious proposal: it would become owner-operator of a local gas station to generate revenue DHRD Transit could use to provide matching dollars for the state transit grants upon which it relied. In addition to cycling its profits back into DHRD Transit, the gas station also provides work experience placements to the "unemployable class" (those with poor work histories, former felons, etc.) on the reservation, providing them starter jobs as gas attendants; others take placements as cashiers, baristas, food handlers, and laundry attendants at the DHRD Transportation Hub's convenience store and laundromat.[2] Turnover is high among these positions as DHRD clients find permanent employment with the DHRD and other local employers impressed with their newfound job skills and performance. Meanwhile, DHRD Transit mitigates the considerable cost of maintaining its vehicle fleet by using its own auto repair shop, which also provides additional work experience placements and job opportunities to DHRD clients and affordable vehicle maintenance and repair services to community members. DHRD Transit and the Department's other innovative strategies have helped to reduce CSKT's unemployment rate to single digits as of 2024.[3]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/cskt.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Natalie Kenmille, Community Support Division Manager, CSKT, Natalie.Kenmille@cskt.org

## Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)

Like other Tribal Nations across the country, NPT operates a Tribal Employment Rights Office (TERO) that enforces tribal laws and provides services to ensure "Nez Perce citizens have their rightful share of employment, training, and other economic opportunities."[1] Exercising NPT's sovereignty, its TERO charges a fee of 3.5 percent on construction- and forestry-related project contracts and subcontracts exceeding $15,000 within its jurisdiction.[2] Unlike many other Tribal Nations whose TERO fee revenues go into their general funds with a portion then reallocated back to their TERO offices, NPT law mandates all funds "received from TERO fee payments shall go into a revolving fund to be used by the TERO Office to pay for the implementation of [NPT's] Ordinance."[3] This approach has helped NPT TERO to be 100 percent fiscally self-sufficient, enabling it to use five percent of its annual budget to support its TERO Commission and 10 percent of its TERO Fee revenue on "Service to Participants," which includes purchasing work attire and safety gear for clients and covering the costs of their Heavy Equipment and Commercial Driver's License trainings and training-related lodging and meals.[4] With its TERO FEE revenue covering its base operating budget, NPT TERO strategically pursues other funding sources to launch targeted workforce development initiatives that NPT leaders and citizens have deemed most important. These include the Tribal Youth Apprenticeship Program (TYAP), which NPT TERO established in 2023 to advance NPT's strategic priority to "expand Career Technical Education (CTE) and academic credit offerings for area secondary students."[5] Funded in part by TERO Fee revenue and heavily supported by recurring grants from the State of Idaho, TYAP runs a five-week heavy highway construction academy twice a year that provides local youth ages 16 to 24 with hands-on, industry-relevant skills; many are subsequently hired by local employers, including NPT's Housing Authority and several construction companies.[6] NPT's budgetary approach also has enabled NPT TERO to build up a $4 million reserve fund, which can cover its annual operating budget for three years should other funding sources dry up.[7]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/npt.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Melvin Wheeler, TERO Director, Nez Perce Tribe, melvinw@nezperce.org

## POLICY TIPS

- Ensure your strategy drives the money, not vice versa: to avoid "mission creep," review your existing workforce development funding sources to identify if/how they restrict your ability to advance your strategic priorities how you see fit. Adjust accordingly.
- Create a "funding alignment" committee to assess new funding opportunities against those priorities.
- Encourage your workforce development programs to innovate and strategically allocate additional dollars to grow what works. Provide your programs with seed money to design and pilot new and innovative workforce development strategies.
- Identify cost-savings that can be created across your programs through the targeted use of work experience participants, administrative consolidation and streamlining, in-kind contributions, etc.
- Develop/expand your 477 Program to enhance your financial flexibility, grow your discretionary income for workforce development, reduce the administrative costs of your programs, and increase funding for economic development.
- Cultivate tribal citizen-owned small businesses, which create jobs and expand your Nation's taxable commercial activity.
- Establish modest sales, gross receipts, and/or other taxes on commercial activity to increase discretionary revenues.
- Negotiate updated grant agreements with federal agencies to enhance your flexibility to spend dollars on what *you* need most.

# DATA

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Years ago, one Tribal Nation, unhappy with the lack of progress its citizens who relied on TANF were making, took over administration of the program from the state. It initiated its own assessment of its newly inherited TANF clients, discovering that a full 40 percent of them had disabilities, and most of those had learning disabilities. The data also confirmed that these disabilities often factored into clients' failure to comply with program requirements, which resulted in fines and, in turn, a spike in dire need applications by those clients. Now, these clients get routed to the Nation's Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation program upon intake for the specialized support they need to prepare for employment.

Meanwhile, an intertribal organization that provides workforce development services to Native people looking to build careers in a specific field conducted the latest in its ongoing series of comprehensive studies evaluating the evolving state of the collective Indian Country workforce in that field. Among the study's key findings: half of the staff among tribal workforces were 50 years of age or older, less than two percent were younger than 30 years of age, those workforces needed a 65 percent increase in staff, and many Tribal Nations offered "uncompetitive" salary and benefit packages.[1] In response to these "staggering workforce statistics," the organization developed a multifaceted strategic plan to work with its member Tribal Nations to recruit, train, and retain field-specific professionals and technicians "to address current and anticipated [workforce] shortfalls."[2]

These examples illustrate what Tribal Nations have long understood: *assessment* – what is being evaluated, how, how often, by whom, and for what ultimate purpose – matters. The data that results from it can make all the difference between an ill-informed and shortsighted approach to workforce development and a well-informed, strategically driven, and impactful one. A primary reason for the former is that outsiders – primarily the federal and state governments – have long sat in the driver's seat when it comes to generating data about Native people, specifically the progress made by those who access workforce education, training, and related services.

The inherent shortcomings of federal data sources – the U.S. Census, **ACS**, and the various criteria the federal government uses to measure its definition of program "success" – are many and well-documented. For example, they are ill-equipped to gauge the true severity of the challenges facing tribal workforce development, nor do they properly account for those "invisible" tribal citizens who aren't looking for work; what skills and education they may have; and what skills, education, and support they need to reconnect to the job market and secure and sustain employment.[4] As one workforce development practitioner explains, "Conditions affecting Indian workers in reservation markets can often be very different than those for non-Indians in urban areas, differences which are not recognized in standard labor market research efforts."[5] Because federal data doesn't accurately capture Indian Country's labor force realities, federal decision-makers struggle to devise effective policies – or properly support Tribal Nations' solutions – to address them. In addition to poor data quality, the federal government has proven wholly incapable of regularly generating real-time data documenting the rapidly evolving Native workforce, a workforce that may look very differently from one Tribal Nation to the next. For example, despite a Congressional requirement to produce the American Indian Population and Labor Force Report every two years, the federal government has failed to produce one for over a decade, in part because it refuses to include data generated by Tribal Nations.[6]

> ***"We now go above and beyond federal requirements to see what we need to be collecting and analyzing to see the change that we know is needed here."***
>
> ***– ELVA "COOKIE" ALLAN, DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC INITIATIVES & DEVELOPMENT, COEUR D'ALENE TRIBE[3]***

For Tribal Nations and other Native workforce development entities to develop effective local workforce development approaches, they need to drive the data that informs them. Since they know their own communities and conditions best, they are best positioned to collect the data and assess what it means for them. Because it's *their* people and futures at stake, they know the right questions to ask – questions that outsiders wouldn't think to pose – and they also know best how to interpret (and to what ends) the answers the people provide to those questions. Leading in this way also enables them "to incorporate cultural, contextual, and political concerns in program evaluation," and it enhances "self-determination over program activities."[7]

## ASK YOURSELF

- Does our Nation regularly assess the true unemployment rate of tribal citizens in and around our reservation, including those who can work but aren't seeking employment (and why)? What would it take to develop such a mechanism?
- How do our workforce development and related programs collect, analyze, and share participant data? Are these data streams stored and maintained in a centralized database that provide us a complete picture? If not, what steps do we need to take?
- How often do we conduct a comprehensive assessment of our programs' effectiveness based on participant outcomes and refine our programs accordingly? Is it frequent enough, and does it capture everything we need?
- What data partnerships do we need to create/strengthen with other Tribal Nations, TCUs, other academic institutions, our TERO office, tribal/area employers, and others to support our ability to create the longitudinal workforce data picture we need?
- Considering our Nation's long-range economic and community development priorities, what kinds of jobs will we need 5-10 years from now? How many? How are we preparing our people to fill them?
- How many Native people is our workforce development approach serving? Is it serving everyone it should? Given our growing population and strategic priorities, how many will it need to serve 5-10 years from now? How will we grow our capacity to keep pace?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS


## Mountain | Plains Regional Native CDFI Coalition

During the COVID-19 pandemic, nine Native CDFIs across North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming formed the Mountain | Plains Regional Native CDFI Coalition to "leverage [their] collective knowledge, skills, assets, and partnerships to build equitable platforms that support thriving Native economies in the region."[1] In 2022, the Coalition secured a landmark U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) investment to implement "a holistic, five-year strategy to reimagine and actualize capital systems that center relationship, reciprocity, and resilience."[2] Based on their anecdotal experiences, Coalition members had identified "the shared challenge of hiring qualified individuals from our own communities"[3] as a major obstacle to achieving this strategy, but to develop targeted solutions to overcome it, they needed a clear, data-informed picture of this complex human capacity challenge.[4] Using EDA funding, the Coalition commissioned a workforce needs assessment so "innovative solutions to support the Indigenous Finance Industry workforce could be explored."[5] The assessment revealed: (1) the CDFIs' greatest staff training need areas were business counseling/planning/management, loan underwriting, data management/reporting, and grant writing; (2) area training programs were "generally not CDFI-specific"; (3) workforce wrap-around services like childcare and housing were vital for recruiting quality employees; and (4) to fully service their communities, Coalition members would need to grow their combined workforce by 46 percent.[6] In response, the Coalition forged a plan "to develop and hire from a regional pool of Native finance professionals"[7], including creating a Native CDFI-*customized* curriculum, cultivating partnerships with area TCUs to co-develop a specialized certificate program, and offering existing and prospective employees its own training course.[8] In just a few years, the Coalition "has made significant strides"[9] in achieving its long-range strategy, onboarding more than 30 "quality and trained employees"[10] across the nine CDFIs and the new CDFI they jointly created, and expanding its peer-to-peer learning network beyond executive directors to management-level staff, resulting "in leveraged capital that would not have been available individually."[11]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/cdfi.pdf
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## Osage Nation

Osage has long engaged in strategic planning, but until recently it had "limited information about its citizens, making it difficult to assess" their needs.[1] Committed to using all available tools "to distill the needs of our Osage people and… respond accordingly"[2], in 2022 the Osage Nation Congress established the Osage Nation Census, to be conducted every five years.[3] After consulting more than 50 Osage department directors and all three governmental branches about the data needed to better serve Osage members, Osage's Self-Governance and Strategic Planning Department launched the Census in 2023.[4] Deployed for two months to Osage members nationwide and around the world through community meetings, an "aggressive social media campaign," and gift card and raffle incentives, the Census generated more than 3,900 responses.[5] Containing more than 80 questions, the Census included questions critical to understanding the Osage people's workforce development needs, such as educational attainment level, employment status and field, barriers to continuing education, and job training interests.[6] While Osage leaders entered the process believing Osage members were predominantly "needs-based," results showed more of an "assets-based"[7] population, with 58 percent of Osages employed full-time, 15 percent owning businesses, nearly half with a bachelor's or advanced degree, and an unemployment rate under seven percent.[8] Using this comprehensive data, Osage is now working to: (1) efficiently geotarget the delivery of workforce development services to particular locations showing heightened needs, (2) refine the policies and procedures governing those services, (3) channel additional resources into higher education initiatives "to build an independent, competitive workforce," (4) develop financial literacy and other educational resources for local schools to preempt the emergence of "needs-based dynamics," and (5) launch new workforce training initiatives in high-growth fields such as aerospace.[9] To elevate the impact of its Census data, Osage recently signed an **MOA** with the U.S. Census Bureau, becoming the first Tribal Nation to have its data recognized and accepted by the Bureau, "ensuring Osages are fully represented on a federal level."[10]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/osage.pdf
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## *POLICY TIPS*

- Evaluate the data your workforce development and related programs collect, about and for whom, and for what reasons. Assess how useful it is for informing your long-range workforce development priorities and creating/redesigning programs to advance them.
- Assess your workforce development and related programs and the linkages between them using a **SOAR** data analysis: Are they individually and collectively capable of achieving our definition of workforce development "success"?[7] Do they foster innovation?
- Dedicate permanent funding for staff, operations, and technology to drive the Nation's data efforts.
- Build a centralized data system that collates real-time workforce data from across your Tribal Nation and its enterprises to create a comprehensive picture of the Nation's workforce and its most pressing education, training, and related service needs.
- Institute a regular tribal census (conducted at least every five years) that gauges citizens' current workforce readiness and what education, skills, and experience they need to acquire to contribute to your Nation's building of a prosperous future.
- Develop a picture of the current and projected tribal/area labor market – and a process for updating it. Engage tribal/area employers to gather data about their long-range labor needs.
- Partner with area Tribal Nations, TCUs, other academic institutions, and others to help with data design, collection, and analysis.

# REMOVING OBSTACLES

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Several years ago, one Tribal Nation in the Southwest launched a new approach to developing its workforce in several fields where its labor needs are greatest. Its excitement was soon tempered, however, by a high dropout rate among its initial training program participants. Its analysis revealed that 68 percent of them did not possess the baseline academic competencies their training programs require. In response, the Nation initiated "Coaching," an intensive approach to case management in which program staff work one-on-one with participants to develop and implement individualized plans to raise them to the proficiency levels necessary to tackle the programs' academic demands. It also added tutoring to help participants learn how to study and master the course content. It then took another, extraordinary step: it assigned staff to take the same courses as its clients to "get a bird's eye view of what is going on," specifically what caused their failure and contributed to their success.[1]

> ***"We try to reach to the root of what's causing people to be unsuccessful in their life and we take our time…We want to [provide] a tool that they can put in their toolbox and use every day of their life."***
>
> ***– JOYCE COUNTRY, FORMER EMPLOYEE SERVICES SOCIAL WORKER, SISSETON-WAHPETON OYATE[3]***

This story is indicative of what NCAI has observed among effective workforce development approaches across Indian Country: Tribal Nations and other Native workforce development entities doing whatever it takes to help the Native people they serve overcome the obstacles (see "Challenges" at the bottom of page 5) that hamper their ability to complete training, secure employment, and build a career. But designing such "outside the box" strategies requires that Tribal Nations do their due diligence to understand exactly how pervasive these obstacles are among those they serve, how they manifest themselves in each individual's life, and how programming can be precisely crafted to attack them.

It also demands that Tribal Nations not get distracted by the symptoms these obstacles produce but instead target their root causes. For example, if program participants are routinely late for training or work, it may not be because they have a poor work ethic. It may instead be due to a lack of access to reliable transportation or childcare, or any number of other factors. Each person's story and set of challenges is different, requiring a customized solution that empowers that person to overcome them. Consequently, Tribal Nations must develop flexible workforce development approaches that provide their people multiple pathways to reach their chosen career destinations at a pace they can handle. These approaches must acknowledge that for many, the challenge is not just learning how to do a specific job, but *how to work* – and *how to live*. As one workforce development practitioner explains, ultimately it's "helping people get healthy to deal with opportunity."[2]

For example, years ago one Tribal Nation in the Great Plains, struggling with a 70 percent turnover rate among its tribal member-employees, established its "Developing Productive Employees" training program to equip tribal members who had lost or were in danger of losing tribal government and enterprise jobs with a "toolbox" of healthy coping and ***soft skills*** they can use to thrive in the workplace, including "emotional intelligence," managing stress, and "communicating for success."[4] The award-winning program not only reduced the employment turnover rate among participants, it also decreased their reliance on tribal social service programs like TANF.[5]

As Tribal Nations design innovative solutions to help their citizens neutralize the root causes of the specific education, training, employment, and career advancement obstacles they face, they must be strategic, selective, and inquisitive. They simply can't tackle all of these obstacles all at once on their own, given the typically limited financial resources available to them. Over and above channeling as many tribal, federal, and state dollars as they can to support new and expanded obstacle-removing strategies, they need to systematically identify and build relationships with other Tribal Nations, philanthropic organizations, employers, Native non-profit organizations, and others to secure additional dollars and gain access to in-kind contributions of various types to support the cause. Tribal Nations also need to actively seek out and learn from other Nations who have devised effective solutions for reducing the prevalence of certain common obstacles (housing inaccessibility, lack of transportation and childcare, alcohol and drug abuse, poor credit, etc.) confronting their workforces. Finally, they need to make a concerted effort to publicly share how their strategies are transforming the lives of Native workers to attract additional resources from philanthropy and other funders to grow those successes.

## *ASK YOURSELF*

- Thinking about "Data" (pages 26-27), is our Nation gauging how particular workforce challenges impact our people? Do we collect data to track how these challenges impact specific subsets of our population (single mothers, justice-involved citizens, etc.)?
- How severely is a lack of reliable transportation and quality childcare impeding the ability of tribal citizens to train and work? Have we developed programmatic solutions to address these issues and are they effective?
- What types of supports do our program participants need to succeed at training and work? Do they include coaching? Mentoring? Supplemental tutoring? Soft skills training? Other types? Do these need to be *ongoing* supports?
- How are financial challenges (poor credit, no savings, predatory payday and car loans, etc.) negatively impacting the ability of our people to train and work, and what targeted strategies can we deploy to help them overcome these challenges?
- Do our workforce development programs work closely with our social service programs (e.g., through a 477 program) to triage each individual and develop a customized plan of support in partnership with them? If not, what must we develop to ensure they do?
- For newly employed citizens, are we assessing how they are adjusting to work life? What supports are available to them as they navigate new workplace stresses and adversity?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR)

Located in rural northeastern Oregon, CTUIR long struggled with a lack of transportation options that prevented its members from accessing local and regional training and employment opportunities and made it difficult for reservation-based businesses to attract employees and customers. As one CTUIR official described the situation, "In some cases, it was harder for tribal members to get to the job site than to get a job or even housing."[1] In response, in 2001 CTUIR launched the award-winning transit system Kayak Public Transit, which provides free bus rides to CTUIR members and the general public across 19 reservation and neighboring communities in northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington, an area spanning more 7,000 square miles.[2] Enacting CTUIR's vision for regional mobility for tribal members throughout its historic lands[3], Kayak has systematically grown the geographic reach of its operations over the past 25 years through a creative pooling of U.S. Federal Transition Administration, Oregon Department of Transportation, and Washington Department of Transportation grants and contracts, supplemented by CTUIR general funds "to fill gaps as needed."[4] A "testament to regional collaboration, dedication and determination, and finding robust solutions to common challenges"[5], Kayak has proven instrumental in increasing CTUIR members' and other area residents' access to training and employment, as well as creating jobs of its own.[6] Logging nearly 68,000 rides in 2023 alone, Kayak provides "a significant cost savings" by providing no-cost, reliable transportation to job commuters and other riders who otherwise would have to pay for it.[7] In 2024, Kayak launched an EV shuttle service to provide safe transportation to CTUIR employees and tribal members between key locations within its sprawling and busy tribal campus.[8] Building on its partnerships with nearby counties and towns, Kayak plans new routes in the near future, which will enable CTUIR members to affordably commute even longer distances to work and train while still residing in and around the Umatilla reservation.[9]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/ctuir.pdf
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## Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI)

A decade ago, EBCI confronted an epidemic of overdose-caused fatalities among its members.[1] In response, in 2015 EBCI's Cherokee Indian Health Authority (CIHA) commenced universal screening of its patients to determine the prevalence of substance misuse and launched Analenisgi (an integrated behavioral health program) and Kanvwotiyi (a residential substance abuse treatment center) to treat them.[2] In tandem, EBCI TERO established the Mother Town Healing Program (MTHP), a groundbreaking, "recovery-centered" workforce development program to "assist EBCI enrolled members in recovery by providing a safe and supportive working environment, training for necessary job skills, and discipline to re-enter the workforce in a positive manner."[3] MTHP recognizes job readiness and steady employment as essential to *sustained* recovery[4], accepting individuals who are 90 days sober and enrolled in Analenisgi's therapeutic services.[5] For the first 5-9 months, participants are paid to work five days per week on community projects such as landscaping, home improvement projects for EBCI members, and tending to MHTP's community garden; time not working is spent in recovery classes, learning life and job skills, developing adaptive behaviors, and goal setting.[6] Those who demonstrate "progress and readiness" are then placed in three-month paid internships with EBCI programs and other MTHP partner entities.[7] Successful interns are often hired by their internship sites; some also become Peer Mentors to incoming MTHP cohorts.[8] MTHP provides participants with modest financial assistance to initially help them make ends meet, work clothes and boots (through a partnership with Cherokee Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Services), and two nutritious meals each day (through a partnership with CIHA); it also helps them remove common employment barriers.[9] MTHP boasts a 74 percent program completion rate, with 86 percent of program graduates still working and in recovery, building on the firm foundation of job skills, healthy life skills, community/cultural reconnection, and sense of purpose that MTHP instilled in them.[10] To strengthen MTHP clients' odds of success, EBCI TERO is spearheading Project Phoenix, an initiative to amend the EBCI Code of Ordinances to expunge clients' non-violent and drug-related convictions so they can more easily obtain tribal employment.[11]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/ebci.pdf
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## *POLICY TIPS*

- Design/invest in culturally grounded healthy coping and soft skills trainings to complement the hard skills education and training you provide; build partnerships with TCUs, online training providers, and others to reduce the cost of these trainings to the Nation.
- Build training cohorts of citizens facing similar challenges to create peer-based systems of support. Enlist successful former program participants serve as role models for – and mentors to – current ones.
- Build a "coalition partnership" (see page 36) to provide a public transportation system to your citizens for work/training commuting. Engage partners such as community colleges to relocate or expand key education/training programs to your community.
- Ensure your workforce development programs coordinate with your childcare and other social services to address the specific challenges impacting program participants; expand your childcare services beyond center-based care to increase their options.
- Build mechanisms and partnerships to help tribal citizens address their financial hardships (court fines, past due bills, etc.) and grow their personal assets, which is proven to strengthen their employment prospects. If possible, create a low-interest loan program to insulate them against predatory lenders.
- Co-design support mechanisms with tribal and area non-tribal employers to address tribal citizen-employees' specific challenges.

# TARGETED SOLUTIONS

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Wrestling with a high dropout rate among its high school students that hampered their ability to enter and thrive in the workforce later in life, one Tribal Nation in the Pacific Northwest decided to make a preemptive move. It created a summer "pre-employment" training program for tribal youth ages 13-15 that promotes the development of personal accountability, work ethic, and "pride in community."[1] This "hands-on" initiative encourages participants to stay in school by teaching them a "multitude of transferable skills they can apply to later employment" for the Nation or elsewhere.[2] A growing number are doing so, with many moving on to higher education.[3]

This Nation is among many who realize that if they are to develop their human capacity to create brighter, self-determined futures, then they need to start young. Taking action, they are developing "first-chance" academic and workforce preparedness programs[4] that target youth at an early age, providing them chances to: explore different careers (and the hard work required to build them); cultivate their desire, confidence, and ability to pursue them; and deepen their appreciation of their role as tribal *citizens*. These strategies (internships, fellowships, summer camps, job shadowing, etc.) help to raise Tribal Nations' expectations of their young people, elevate young people's expectations of themselves, and support young people as they strive to meet those expectations. They also affirm to young people and other citizens that *everyone* has valued roles to play in building a brighter future for the Nation, regardless of who they are, how young or old they are, where they are, their current situation, and the specific workforce challenges they face. They just need support to develop their inherent potential to play those roles.

The federal government's design of workforce development programs for Indian Country has taught us that one-size-fits-all approaches don't work well for Tribal Nations given their distinct workforce challenges and objectives. Tribal Nations are finding success when they take the reins and develop targeted, customized solutions that address *their* individual circumstances, places, goals, and communities. These solutions appropriately take many forms and serve many purposes, but NCAI's research illuminates three trends – solutions that: (1) serve particular groups within the Nation by neutralizing the specific workforce challenges that impact them in certain ways; (2) build particular skills and expertise among the Nation's citizenry that address its critical needs and advance its long-range priorities; and (3) identify the structural trouble spots that inhibit workforce development/growth and design structural interventions to tackle them. The following is a list of some common types of targeted workforce development solutions that NCAI has observed growing across Indian Country:

> ***"We want to reach and teach young people that are still in grade school, middle school, and high school so by the time they get out of high school they should have an idea, a plan as to what direction they want to go."***
>
> ***– ALEX YAZZA, JR., FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OWENS VALLEY CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER[5]***

- **Single parents:** to help them overcome often significant childcare and financial challenges
- **Justice-involved tribal citizens:** re-entry programs to support their successful reintegration into Native communities
- **Veterans:** to help them adjust to life after the service and train for and build post-service careers
- **Individuals with disabilities:** to navigate their specific obstacles to prepare for and sustain employment
- **Dislocated workers:** to transition them following job losses into new, sustainable careers through training in high-demand fields
- **Emerging leaders:** leadership training to cultivate and prepare the next generation of political, programmatic, and community leaders that teaches about the Tribal Nation's history, constitution, governance system, and the appropriate roles they must play
- **Mid-career professionals:** who need specialized professional development to advance further in their careers and ascend to leadership roles in their fields
- **Field-specific education and training:** to build the skills of tribal citizens in the specific fields their Nations have deemed vital to managing and protecting their lands and resources, revitalizing their cultures, strengthening their governance systems, developing their communities, and growing their economies
- **Research capacity development:** training Native people to serve as researchers to help Tribal Nations generate, analyze, and use the data they need
- **Citizen entrepreneurs:** to grow the private sector economies of Tribal Nations through Native-owned small business development, which creates jobs and keeps dollars circulating within Native communities

## ASK YOURSELF

- What steps are we taking to (1) assess the particular workforce challenges facing specific segments of our tribal citizenry and (2) design customized solutions to address them? Are there specific groups we are missing?
- What existing funding sources could we draw from to support these new solutions? If we don't have the funding in hand, what new funding sources should we pursue to support them?
- What specific skills and experience does our Nation need most now and in the future based on our community and economic development priorities? Based on the regional labor market forecast? Are/how are we cultivating those skills and experience among our people to prepare them to thrive in careers in those priority fields?
- What are we doing to cultivate tribal citizens to become employers as well as employees (by becoming owners and operators of small businesses? What steps can we take to build a system of support that can prepare them to successfully play that role?
- How is our Nation partnering with local college(s), Native CDFIs, and other partners to develop specialized curricula geared towards our priority fields or particular community groups and their learning challenges? How can we grow these partnerships?
- Are there cost-effective workforce development solutions our Nation could create by partnering with other Tribal Nations?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## MIGIZI

Based in Minneapolis-St. Paul, MIGIZI was established in 1977 to counteract "misrepresentations and inaccuracies about Native people in the media."[1] In the five decades since, it has evolved into a multifaceted "hub for youth empowerment"[2], providing "a strong circle of support" that helps Native youth graduate high school, pursue post-secondary education, and forge their career paths.[3] MIGIZI's Cultural Leadership Academic Wellbeing program for middle and high school students provides in- and after-school supports including tutoring, homework help, cultural immersion activities, and college tours.[4] Meanwhile, its two career pathway programs offer Native students targeted, culturally responsive career exploration and job training in two high-demand fields: media and green energy.[5] MIGIZI's First Person Productions internship "empowers young people to be the next generation of Native storytellers" by learning new and innovative media practices[6], while its Green Tech Institute internship equips youth "with tools and knowledge to work within the fast-growing green energy and construction sector."[7] Interns are paid $13.75 an hour, and MIGIZI will soon launch an initiative connecting their internship grads with paid internships with partnering local employers.[8] The annual number of MIGIZI interns has quadrupled over the past several years, due in large part to the organization's cultivation of a diversified funding base featuring philanthropic and individual donors, contract revenue from area school districts, investment earnings, and State of Minnesota grant dollars.[9] MIGIZI's philanthropic partners include Best Buy, which helped finance the Teen Tech Center, an interactive space where youth ages 13-18 engage in hands-on learning in robotics, coding, 3D modeling/printing, and film and music production, to name a few.[10] In 2024, to support its growing internship programs, MIGIZI created four Youth Lead Assistant positions, which are filled by MIGIZI alumni attending college who work 20 hours per week facilitating career pathway activities and serving as peer leaders.[11] The largest summer employer of Native youth in the Twin Cities, MIGIZI boasts an exceptional 85 percent high school graduation rate by its participants.[12]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/migizi.pdf
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## Muscogee Nation (MCN)

Concerned the State of Oklahoma wasn't doing enough to prepare its people who were leaving prison for life outside of it, MCN established its Reintegration Program (RIP) in 2004. Committed to protecting the public by "re-invest[ing] positive citizens back into our communities"[1], RIP provides its clients an array of restorative support services rooted in Muscogee culture.[2] These include pre-release needs assessments, GED acquisition, life skills and vocational training programs, resumé preparation, college tuition assistance, behavioral/mental health supports, legal services, work clothing and tools, financial assistance for housing and groceries, and job placement services – whatever each client needs to avoid reoffending, get a job, and build a career.[3] RIP clients must work or be actively pursuing employment; when not working, they must "pay it forward" by volunteering to perform community services, from mowing tribal elders' lawns to picking up roadside trash.[4] In 2021, RIP launched its Fiber Optic Technician (FOT) program, which teaches 15-participant cohorts trade-critical skills in the high-growth field.[5] After eight weeks, trainees complete four-week paid internships before seeking employment. FOT boasts a 100 percent job placement rate for its graduates, who can make upwards of $100,000 a year working for RIP's network of employers.[6] Trainees who need housing reside *and* train at RIP's campus, which features a 36-bed transitional living facility for eligible RIP clients, "state-of-the-art educational and vocational training" classrooms, and RIP's administrative headquarters.[7] RIP also recently opened a call center on site to employ RIP clients while they reside there. By eliminating all of the barriers – such as a lack of transportation – standing in the way of participants' success, RIP makes its exceedingly difficult for them to fail, which explains the 6.9 percent recidivism rate among RIP clients (dramatically lower than Oklahoma's 15.6 percent rate).[8] Following the *McGirt v. Oklahoma* Supreme Court decision, RIP expanded its services to support justice-involved MCN members *during* their sentencing processes, which has enabled many to avoid prison by completing RIP-customized diversionary plans.[9]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/mcn.pdf
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## *POLICY TIPS*

- Assess how severely specific workforce development challenges (see "Challenges" worksheet exercise on the bottom of page 5) are impacting certain groups in your Nation and design/refine your programs to comprehensively combat them.
- Use your Nation's long-term priorities and tribal/regional economic growth forecasts as primary decision-making criteria to target your workforce development investments in specific ways (e.g., by supporting tribal citizens to obtain bachelor's and master's degrees in business administration and then hiring them within your tribal economic development corporations and enterprises).[6]
- Develop stand-alone initiatives that provide your youth with academic and workforce preparedness training and opportunities for career exploration before they reach high school. If necessary, develop partnerships to defray the cost of doing so.
- Create a specialized program to engage unemployed, working-age tribal citizens who are not actively looking for work to: (1) identify the challenges inhibiting their employment, and (2) help them overcome those challenges so they can secure area jobs.
- Develop targeted, family-strengthening workforce development approaches that address obstacles faced by program participants' family members (e.g., a disabled elder requiring in-home care) to give participants the best chance of career success.
- Develop a coalition partnership (with TCUs, CDFIs, etc.) to cultivate aspiring citizen-entrepreneurs to become business owners.

# CLOSING THE LOOP

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Years ago, one Tribal Nation in the Northeast established a higher education scholarship program to help its young people defray the costs of attending college. But there was a catch – if they agreed to accept a scholarship from the Nation, they had to return to their reservation community upon obtaining their degrees to work for the Nation for at least two years. According to a leader of that Nation, "Our underlying goal was that they would come home and during those two years they would find a sweetheart, start a family, settle down, and never leave. It's working."[1]

Another Tribal Nation in Alaska does something similar with its higher education scholarship program for similar reasons, requiring the students it supports to come home upon graduation to work with the community's youth for at least one summer (in exchange for the $500 scholarship they received each semester while in school). This not only enables the college graduates to reconnect to their Nation's culture and lifeways (which is especially critical for those who grew up outside of the community), it enables the youth they work with to expand their visions of "what is possible," inspiring them to "likewise pursue higher education."[2]

***Scholarship for service*** is a growing Indian Country strategy. In another example, a Tribal Nation in the Southwest requires students to work for its economic development corporation or one of its subsidiaries for one year for each year of financial support they receive. When they are not in school, they are placed in paid internships to gain practical experience learning the business ropes.[3] Meanwhile, another Nation in the Upper Midwest has launched a highly selective program that fully supports three tribal citizens in obtaining a master's degree in tribal administration and governance on the condition that they work for the Nation for two years for every year they are in school. If they don't complete the three-year degree, then they must repay the Nation the tuition dollars it spent on them.[4]

These and other strategies speak to the importance – not just financial, but more importantly economic, social, and cultural – of Tribal Nations making concerted efforts to get a significant and lasting "return" on the investments they are making to develop their people (whether through vocational training, scholarship funding, paid fellowships and internships, or other ways). All things being equal, the majority of those people would prefer to work and live in their tribal communities.[5] Tribal Nations can ***close this loop*** by deploying strategies specifically designed to fully tap into the human capacity they are cultivating with the typically limited resources they have. For example, they can create a strong system of economic incentives (financial support for education, automatic hiring or hiring preference, competitive wages, etc.) aimed at keeping tribal citizens at home or attracting them back home once they have finished the college degree, certificate, or credentialing programs they have supported them in completing. More and more Tribal Nations are taking it a targeted step further by supporting citizens in obtaining degrees, certifications, credentials, tangible skills, and hands-on work experience in their most urgently needed fields (e.g., natural resource management, finance, healthcare, education, etc.) and then directly channeling those individuals into specific positions working for tribal government or tribal enterprises in those fields where they directly apply what they've learned on their Nations' behalf.

> ***"However long it takes to go to school, you're going to give those years back to your tribe by signing off on the contract we have for you. If it takes you four or five years to get that accounting degree, you're going to give four or five years back to your tribe."***
>
> ***– CHRISTOPHER MUÑOZ, CEO, TIGUA INC.[6]***

Closing the loop demands that Tribal Nations retain their working career professionals not only through strong hiring and financial incentives, but also through quality-of-life incentives. For example, if your Nation wishes to establish a scholarship-for-service initiative to leverage the Native talent you are developing, but there is no quality local housing for career professionals, quality local schools for their children, or public transportation system for those living outside the community in nearby towns, you will have a hard time attracting and retaining that talent. Supporting that quality of life requires Tribal Nations to make significant investments in both Native professionals *and* the community infrastructure needed to support them.

But these types of investments are more than proving their worth, because closing the loop not only strengthens Tribal Nations' ability to benefit from their human capacity in targeted ways that address community needs and advance their nation-rebuilding priorities, it enables more tribal citizens to participate in culture and community, enriching and strengthening them over time.

## ASK YOURSELF

- How are we providing our citizens opportunities to pursue careers working on the Nation's behalf using the education, skills, and experience we are supporting them in obtaining? Are we training them to leave our community when we need them to stay?
- Where do our higher education scholarship recipients reside? What degrees/credentials are they acquiring? Who is benefitting from their newly acquired education, skills, and experience? Do we have a system in place to track and recruit them?
- What education, skills, and experience do our off-reservation citizens possess? What do we have/need to have in place (senior-level positions, competitive salaries/benefits, quality housing and schools, etc.) to recruit them home to serve the Nation?
- What specific positions in tribal government and tribal enterprises are most critical to our Nation's future, and do we have a targeted plan to designate and train individual citizens to capably fill those positions?
- Do our tribal government and enterprises have remote work policies enabling tribal citizens who live outside of the community to work for those entities? Should we create such policies?
- Does our Nation have a handle on the local, non-tribal jobs that are available and will become available over the next several years? What are we doing to prepare our citizens for — and then connect them to — those jobs?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Navajo Nation

In 2016, seeking to address a critical shortage of qualified Navajo doctors to provide quality, culturally appropriate healthcare to its growing population, the Navajo Nation forged an MOU with the University of Arizona's Colleges of Medicine (UA) to create the Navajo Nation Future Physicians' Scholarship Fund. The agreement – which the two parties renewed in 2022 for another five years – gives financial aid (through scholarships provided by Navajo's Department of Diné Education that are matched with equal funding awarded by UA) to fully cover the tuition, fees, and related academic support costs for up to seven Navajo scholars each year as they work towards obtaining a pre-medical degree at UA's Tucson and Phoenix campuses.[1] "Designed to prepare students from rural and economically challenged parts of Arizona to qualify for entrance to medical school"[2], the initiative prepares future doctors to provide care in critical-need areas of Navajo community-based healthcare specialization such as internal medicine, family medicine, obstetrics, and pediatrics.[3] Fund recipients who obtain the pre-medical degree – seven Navajo Nation citizens have done so to date – earn guaranteed admission to UA's Doctor of Medicine program and then move on to multi-year medical residencies either with Indian Health Service or hospitals in other parts of the country.[4] They then are required to return home to the Navajo Nation to provide care to their fellow citizens, delivering the Nation a vital return on the significant educational investment it has made in them.[5] As UA sees Navajo's commitment to the Fund's beneficiaries, "They are investing in you, and the way that you can repay them is serving the community."[6] Nearly a decade after its establishment, the Future Physicians' Scholarship Fund is enabling Navajo students "to fulfill their aspirations of becoming physicians, while serving as role models for Navajo youth who want to follow in their footsteps."[7] In 2023, Navajo signed a similar MOA with UA to train Navajo citizens to become licensed medical veterinarians, addressing a critical shortage on the reservation.[8]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/navajo.pdf
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## Yakama Nation

In the early 2000s, Yakama Nation relied entirely on outside utility companies to provide power to the tribal government, tribal businesses, and reservation residents – a situation producing "no value" for the Yakama people.[1] In response, the Yakama Tribal Council created Yakama Power (YP) to "provide low-cost electric power"[2] to reservation power users. Serving 132 customers when it launched in 2006, today YP provides electricity to more than 3,000 customers (roughly a third of the reservation market), and in 2024 it became the first tribal entity in the U.S. to sell renewable energy directly to the federal government.[3] Driving YP's remarkable growth over the past two decades is its formal commitment to employ as many Yakama tribal members as possible to advance the "construction, management and operation of providing electric power."[4] To train them, YP established a nationally renowned apprenticeship program for journeymen and linemen primarily using revenues generated through its operations and supplemented by philanthropic funding.[5] To ensure the "highest quality of workers," the program requires its apprentices to achieve an academic standing of 80 percent in all courses, which is higher than the industry standard of 70 percent.[6] Of the 21 apprenticeship program graduates to date, 19 subsequently gained employment with YP, earning high-paying, ***prevailing wages*** that "don't exist elsewhere on the reservation" and are competitive with surrounding utilities, which helps to explain the utility's incredibly low staff turnover rate.[7] As of 2024, of YP's 34 employees, 28 are Native (including 22 enrolled Yakama members), and the utility features two all-Native line crews with a third in the works.[8] Demonstrating to the community the return on the Nation's investment, YP purposefully schedules its line crews to perform line and pole repairs along reservation roads during tribal members' morning and evening work commutes so they can observe firsthand tribal self-sufficiency in action – Yakama providing for its own.[9] To advance Yakama Nation's renewable energy priorities, YP is doubling the size of its apprenticeship program to train tribal members to become low-voltage electricians specializing in renewable energy and then hire them.[10]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/yakama.pdf
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## *POLICY TIPS*

- Identify and recruit young citizens to consider particular careers that your Nation has identified as priorities and support them in obtaining degrees in those fields.
- Establish tribal service and/or employment requirements for citizens who receive financial support from the Nation for higher education or other professional development programs.
- If aligned with your values, provide on-reservation citizens preference for the finite higher education scholarship funding you have, as they are more likely to stay/return home to work post-degree.
- Gear your workforce development programs to build human capacity in the particular fields where local jobs (including those with non-tribal employers) are (or will soon become) most plentiful.
- Implement a tracking system to follow degree-seeking citizens and match them to those jobs.
- Create a remote workers initiative to connect local tribal citizens with remote work-based jobs with non-tribal employers based outside of the community so they can work and live at home. Invest in the technological infrastructure they need to do this work.[7]
- Create a long-term professional development program to replace senior-level, non-Native employees with Native ones.[8]

# CAREER ADVANCEMENT

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

For many Tribal Nations, the challenge of moving their citizens from the unemployed side of the ledger to the employed side feels like a Herculean task – significant obstacles to employment faced by their citizens, an inadequate number of meaningful employment opportunities for those who overcome those obstacles, and limited financial and other resources for the Nations to work with to develop their workforces. For workers and would-be workers in those Nations, the idea of building a rewarding, good-paying career over the course of decades may feel "out of reach."[1]

Yet, more and more Tribal Nations are crafting thoughtful, long-range strategies that make employment only the first goal – not the ultimate goal – of their workforce development approaches. Consciously moving from a "poverty mindset" to a "prosperity mindset,"[2] they are working deliberately to seed a culture and expectation of professional advancement among their people and throughout the tribal government and tribal enterprises that employ many of them. They are doing so by not simply preaching its importance, but putting in place concrete mechanisms to incentivize it, nurture it, and create opportunities for it. For example, one Tribal Nation in the Southwest, eager to grow "our own future [gaming] executives rather than recruiting outside of the organization,"[3] created a program through which selected employees spend a whole year as full-time apprentices rotating through several gaming departments to learn the management ropes so they can eventually take the place of the non-Native executives that currently oversee the Nation's gaming operations. Meanwhile, in Alaska, one Tribal Nation awards up to $1,000 per year to employees for specialized training related to their work, which represents not just an investment in them, but an investment "in the infrastructure and capacity of the tribe itself."[4] Another Tribal Nation in the state pays most of the cost of tribal employees pursuing master's degrees in fields "deemed critical to community success."[5]

Creating a culture of and formal pathways for career advancement by Native people within tribal entities – as well as with non-tribal employers – is easier said than done. It begins with methodically fostering the mindset shift mentioned above in both subtle and direct ways, as well as:

- developing roadmaps for advancement (i.e., "career ladders") for existing, prospective, and future employees (i.e., youth) that enable them to identify and visualize the career futures they desire and the formal professional development steps they must take over time to achieve those futures;
- educating current, prospective, and future employees about the relevant, locally available professional development opportunities the Tribal Nation provides, those it otherwise will financially support, and those offered by the Nation's partners and other entities;
- setting high expectations and standards of accountability for ongoing professional development through continuing education and training to support employees' advancement through the tribal government and enterprise staff ranks;
- establishing and funding formal and specialized programs through which committed employees can take advantage;
- institutionalizing in workforce education, training, and related programs a paradigm shift in their operational philosophy to prioritize ongoing career advancement for those they serve (with their securing of employment as only the *first* step in that long-term process); and
- neutralizing the ***crabs-in-the-bucket*** dynamic that exists in some Native communities that socially discourages ambitious working professionals from pursuing advancement opportunities or undermines them when they take advantage of those opportunities.

> ***"We really have to think about how we incentivize and support our people to grow within our own Nation."***
>
> ***– TANYA FIDDLER, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIVE CDFI NETWORK[6]***

Creating this culture benefits tribal citizens who follow these roadmaps as well as the Nation as a whole, enabling it to: (1) expand its human capacity and institutional expertise to do its work more efficiently and effectively; (2) create more jobs; and (3) achieve its long-term economic, social, cultural, and political goals. It also strengthens the resiliency of tribal government and enterprises because everyone knows what they need to do in the organizations to advance – and they will be more likely to stick around because they know their commitment to working hard, performing well, and learning on the job is sure to pay off down the road. This, in turn, enhances the Nation's ability to grow the resiliency and proficiency of its workforce over the long run.

## ASK YOURSELF

- How is our Nation incentivizing and nurturing career advancement among its governmental and enterprise employees? Have we created well-defined and clearly understood career advancement ladders that we are supporting our employees in climbing?
- What types of professional development/continuing education options does our Nation provide its employees? Do we cover any of the costs? How can we grow partnerships with TCUs, online training providers, and others to affordably expand these options?
- If an employee chooses to do professional development or continuing education, does our Nation provide that person release time or paid time off? Is it organizational policy, or case by case? If the latter, how can we develop a comprehensive policy that enhances the ability of employees to learn and train while on the job?
- What criteria does our Nation use to decide who gets promoted, receives raises, is assigned greater responsibilities, etc.? Is it length of service and job performance? Does professional development factor in, and how can we elevate its importance?
- Do we have an informed understanding of the competitive salary/benefit packages we need to offer to retain those advancing employees we are elevating through our ranks by supporting their on-the-job education and training?
- How pervasive is the crabs-in-the-bucket dynamic in our Nation's workplaces and what are its effects? How can we neutralize it?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Chickasaw Nation

In the early 2000s, non-traditional Chickasaw students looking to build rewarding careers faced a conundrum. Many worked jobs "where advancement was no longer possible," and "their job limited the time and flexibility to go back to school, while family and financial obligations made it exceedingly difficult to pursue higher education after work."[1] In addition, they typically didn't meet the minimum qualifications for jobs in the Chickasaw Nation's government and enterprises.[2] In response, in 2006 the Chickasaw Nation created the School-to-Work Program (STW), which works to create "a nation of educated and highly trained professionals who can meet the demands of today's workforce."[3] STW enables participants to earn the degrees and certifications they need to advance by enabling them to spend part of the workday attending classes while also receiving on-the-job training within the Chickasaw Nation's government departments and enterprises. To ensure they can support their families, students are paid for a full 40-hour work week. According to one participant, "The hours I put in at school are part of my 40-hour week. I have more hours to give to my family now."[4] Of the 365 people who have completed STW since its inception, 341 of them have secured full-time employment, and 217 work for the Chickasaw Nation.[5] Established as a stand-alone program, STW is now a key component of the Chickasaw Nation Employment Access Division, created in 2018 to "provide stepping stones to long-term employment for Chickasaw citizens."[6] The Division's other "advancement-focused"[7] training programs include Toksali SMART (which helps youth ages 14-21 "develop healthy and productive work behaviors necessary for success in today's labor markets") and the Chickasaw Institute of Technology (which provides targeted training in high-growth fields such as construction, electrical, HVAC/R, plumbing, and Certified Nursing Assisting).[8] Recently, the Chickasaw Nation partnered with the State of Oklahoma to launch its Driver Education Training Program, which equips participants with the necessary skills to obtain driver's licenses, enhancing their employment prospects.[9]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/chickasaw.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Danny Wall, Director, Career Guidance, Chickasaw Nation, Danny.Wall@chickasaw.net

## White Earth Tribal and Community College (WETCC)

Seeking to address a "critical gap"[1] in locally accessible training programs in the rapidly growing field of solar energy, in 2020 WETCC partnered with the Rural Renewable Energy Alliance (RREAL) to create a solar energy certificate training program hosted by the college for White Earth Nation members and other area residents.[2] The 50-hour, hands-on program teaches participants the basics of the solar photovoltaic field so they can then pursue "family-sustaining careers" in this high-demand regional occupation.[3] Participants learn on the job working on projects under development by local energy companies both on and off-reservation.[4] To ensure its program graduates are highly marketable and well-positioned for career advancement, in 2022 WETCC completed a rigorous process to become a North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP) testing site, enabling program graduates to then take a NABCEP certification exam for Solar Associates that will "allow them to earn higher wages" without having to leave home (when graduates become NABCEP certified – which is considered the "the gold standard for solar installers"[5] – they can more than double their wages from $20 to $43 per hour).[6] Recognizing "clean energy and energy sovereignty go hand-in-hand"[7] WETCC's Customized Education Department works closely with the White Earth Nation government and its weatherization task force to coordinate development of a Nation-wide clean energy plan and grow the tribal labor to implement it. To further expand its multi-tiered professional development approach in the field, WETCC is partnering with a state-based clean energy non-profit to secure state funding to build a state-of-the-art Trades Building – complete with a renewable energy design lab – on its campus to train students in a variety of high-demand, skilled careers including solar, energy auditing, HVAC, plumbing, electrical work, and traditional Anishinaabe trades.[8] According to WETCC, the building will advance the college's commitment "to keep Indigenous students, post-graduation, in surrounding communities that struggle with limited wages and a lack of resources."[9]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/wetcc.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Bridget Guiza, Customized Education Coordinator, White Earth Tribal and Community College, bridget.guiza@wetcc.edu

## *POLICY TIPS*

- Map the career pathway-based continuing education and professional development options you and others make available to your employees, what they cost, and how many employees need them. Budget accordingly and forge partnerships to reduce the costs.
- Prioritize creating career ladders in key governmental departments and enterprise divisions to develop the Nation's capacity in the areas it needs most to achieve its long-range, strategic priorities.
- Establish a dedicated budget to provide a certain number of days of annual paid educational leave to employees pursuing college degrees or professional credentials[7]; tie those investments to employees' commitment to remain in their jobs for a prescribed period.
- Dedicate permanent, stand-alone funding for professional development and continuing education programs so it doesn't become a periodic luxury of departmental budgets, provided only when times are good.
- Create management-level apprenticeship opportunities that enable tribal citizens to gain critical skills necessary for moving beyond low-paying, entry-level positions. Deploy retiring government and enterprise staff as mentors to those taking their places.
- Revise position descriptions to explicitly convey to employees your Nation's expectations for their ongoing professional development and career advancement, and how employees' specific roles directly advance the Nation's long-term priorities.

# PARTNERSHIPS

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Several years ago, a Native CDFI in South Dakota engaged in an information-gathering process with Native-owned and other residential construction contractors doing business on the Indian reservations across the state. Through this process, it learned that the lack of "employment-ready" Native construction workers as well as certified residential inspectors and qualified appraisers was slowing the pace of new home construction in those communities and, in turn, their ability to grow their businesses and the number of local jobs they provide.[1] Armed with this knowledge, the CDFI then launched a targeted project to train and place Native people in those jobs in the residential construction industry; the project features formal commitments from 10 of these contractors to hire dozens of project participants once they complete their training.[2]

Meanwhile, four Tribal Nations in northern California – each too small to do so on their own – recently banded together to co-develop and launch a six-week pre-apprenticeship program for low-voltage electricians, which is designed to serve as a springboard for preferred entry into full apprenticeship programs so their tribal citizens can take full advantage of the rapidly growing number of clean energy job opportunities across the region. The program also partners with a local electrical workers' union and tribal apprenticeship program in the Midwest to assist with delivery of the program's curriculum.[3]

These examples and a growing number of others from across Indian Country are testaments to the fact that Tribal Nations and other Native workforce development entities simply can't go it alone if they are to achieve their long-range workforce development priorities. Almost without exception, they individually don't possess all of the capacity, expertise, strategies, and resources necessary to provide the holistic "system of support" (see infographic on page 6) that Native people need to flourish from cradle through career, which is why they must coordinate their workforce development efforts with a thoughtfully assembled constellation of both internal and external partners. Below are common partnerships they're building and why:

- **Tribal enterprises:** to coordinate education, training, and ongoing professional development of tribal citizens to take jobs in those businesses and advance through the ranks.
- **Other Tribal Nations:** to pool resources to provide specialized education and training opportunities to their citizens; share program, labor force, and labor market data; share qualified labor for available jobs; learn programmatic best practices; and develop MOUs to consolidate service provision.
- **Other governments:** such as federal and state agencies to access their data, share tribal needs and data, connect citizens with support mechanisms and employers, provide them access to otherwise unavailable education and training services.
- **Colleges/universities:** to co-develop and administer post-secondary education and training programs and industry-recognized credentials customized to tribal priorities and tribal citizens' needs; provide online learning spaces and options; and assist with tribal needs assessments and data gathering.
- **Local/regional employers:** to inform them about tribal citizens who have the qualifications they need and align education/training curricula to cultivate the skills they require for employment.
- **Native CDFIs:** to coordinate workforce education and training efforts, provide targeted training and ongoing support for tribal citizen-entrepreneurs, and strengthen financial management skills of employed tribal citizens and those seeking work.
- **K-12 schools:** to share data/assessments about tribal students and provide a quality, culturally relevant curriculum and supportive environment to ensure continued learning.
- **Non-profit organizations:** to expand internship and fellowship opportunities and labor unions to provide targeted training for in-demand fields and job placement upon graduation.
- **Coalition partnerships:** featuring multiple partners to create comprehensive support systems for citizens and holistic solutions that advance the Nation's distinct workforce goals.

> ***"Our ultimate goal is to build relationships with employers so when they have opportunities for hiring people or want to talk subsidized employment, we're the first place they call."***
>
> ***– RYAN HOWARD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OWENS VALLEY CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER[4]***

These partnerships provide Tribal Nations with greater policy and decision-making control; expand education, training, and job opportunities; better leverage limited dollars; and enhance their capacity to do self-determined workforce development.

## ASK YOURSELF

- What partnerships do we need to create an effective workforce development approach capable of achieving our long-term priorities? What do our tribal leaders, senior administrators, and program staff need to do to forge these partnerships?
- Evaluating our partners and potential partners, do we have a firm grasp on what they each can contribute and where that should fit within our workforce development approach?
- In what ways could our workforce development efforts be enhanced through formal partnerships with other Tribal Nations? What structures are required to create and maintain those partnerships?
- Is our Nation working closely with TCUs and other higher education institutions serving our people to ensure they provide the customized degree and credentialing programs they (and the Nation) need most?
- Do we have a formal working relationship with area Native CDFIs to coordinate local, Native-owned small business development?
- Are we actively engaging the Workforce Investment Board, industry associations, and unions in the area to develop/provide the training curricula and work experience opportunities our people require and then connect successful trainees with area jobs?[5]
- Is our Nation's TERO office partnering with area employers to hire qualified tribal citizens? If not, why not?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Inter-Tribal Ecosystem Restoration Partnership (ITERP)

Managed by the non-profit Lomakatsi Restoration Project, ITERP systematically builds the technical, managerial, and administrative capacity of participating Tribal Nations in rural Oregon, Idaho, and northern California to sustainably advance their ecosystem restoration priorities on their ancestral lands through tribal workforce training and the creation of related jobs "and tribal community business infrastructure."[1] Working with Lomakatsi's Native staff, each participating Nation customizes the workforce training curricula that its eligible citizens receive in its tribal priority areas, which include wildland firefighting, forest restoration, watershed and wetland restoration, invasive species management, and cultural resource monitoring.[2] Through intensive, hands-on training, participants earn nationally recognized professional certifications and learn how to use Traditional Indigenous Ecological Knowledge principles to responsibly steward the land as their ancestors once did.[3] A federal Indian Youth Service Corps partner, Lomakatsi's most rigorous training option is its Tribal Ecological Forestry Training Program, in which ITERP-connected trainees become full-time, paid Lomakatsi employees for one year, during which they obtain a comprehensive suite of professional certifications and receive wrap-around support services to set them firmly on the path to career success.[4] Successful trainees are then channeled into ecological restoration jobs with their Tribal Nations, relevant federal agencies, and Lomakatsi itself. Through ITERP, Lomakatsi also partners with Tribal Nations to support some trainees in starting profitable businesses in the ecological restoration industry.[5] In addition to workforce training, participation in ITERP expands the ecological restoration funding available to Tribal Nations who often lack the capacity to successfully pursue funding themselves, as Lomakatsi applies on their behalf and then "awards back" funding to support each Nation's priority ecological restoration projects, including the creation of critical staff positions that are typically filled with tribal citizens trained through the ITERP initiative.[6] For its participating Tribal Nations, ITERP provides tribal citizens with "education, experience, and a foot in the door" to the ecological restoration field on their own lands, things they otherwise would need to move away to gain.[7]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/iterp.pdf
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## Native Workforce Partners (NWP)

Like the rest of Indian Country, COVID-19 severely disrupted service delivery by Native workforce development entities across New Mexico. Determined to enhance and expand their services as Native communities recovered economically from the pandemic, these entities banded together in 2022 to form NWP.[1] Established through a LANL Foundation seed grant, NWP consists of 12 WIOA Section **166** programs in New Mexico and at Ysleta del Sur Pueblo in Texas and four New Mexico-based 477 programs.[2] Its purpose is to empower its members' institutional capacity and know-how and leverage its collective voice to strengthen state policy and increase available resources through structured collaboration.[3] With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and technical assistance from New Mexico Community Capital, in 2023 NWP developed a strategic plan with key goals, among them: (1) supporting the professional development of its members' program staff; (2) increasing knowledge sharing between members about effective program design, administration, and evaluation; and (3) increasing members' access to funding opportunities to enhance and expand their programs.[4] NWP launched its regular training series in 2024, with topics including strengths-based leadership, project management, case management, organizational-level critical thinking, and team building (future topics include understanding labor market trends and data analysis/reporting).[5] Meanwhile, through quarterly meetings, NWP has fostered a solid partnership with the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, targeting 2025 for an MOA signing to create a mechanism for regular, genuine consultation between the parties with an eye towards ensuring NWP members receive an equitable share of state workforce development dollars.[6] NWP also plans to develop specialized Native youth programming and produce videos and digital stories educating philanthropy about the impacts its members make and how it could grow those impacts (e.g., increased high school graduation, credential attainment, and long-term employment rates) through greater investments in them.[7]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/nwp.pdf
***CONNECT:*** Bernadette Panteah and Rosemary Reano, Native Workforce Partners, hello@nativeworkforcepartners.org

## *POLICY TIPS*

- Conduct a "partnership audit" to identify: (1) your informal and formal partnerships, (2) how they could be strengthened and for what reasons, and (3) where you need new ones and what people, time, and resources it will take to develop and steward them.
- Create a "resource bank" of education, training, and support services that your partners and potential partners provide that your people can rely on to prepare for, obtain, and sustain employment (be sure to include non-profits and professional associations).
- Identify what needed services are currently unavailable to your people and identify and establish partnerships with entities that can provide those services.
- Engage area non-tribal employers to determine the skills they need and design your workforce education/training curricula to build those skills. Offer them incentives (i.e. tax breaks and other subsidies) to hire tribal citizens for work experience placements or permanent employment. Have your TERO office partner with them to channel qualified citizens into available positions.
- Partner with technology providers to access the online learning infrastructure your Native students and trainees need.
- Institutionalize partnerships to ensure their sustainability through formal MOU/MOAs, regular meetings/information sharing, and ongoing education about the partnerships' purpose.

# SUSTAINABILITY

## FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Years ago, a Tribal Nation in Oklahoma developed a set of educational videos that teach about the history of its 477 Program, how it has transformed lives (through the words of 477 participants themselves), and how the Nation will continue to grow this tool to move its people "toward self-sufficiency."[1] The Nation uses the videos as part of its ongoing trainings for existing staff and orientation for new hires.[2] Meanwhile, another Tribal Nation in Arizona established a permanent advisory council to support its development of long-term workforce development strategies.[3] Composed of key members of its education and workforce development staffs, as well as representatives from its primary industry sectors, the council meets regularly to evaluate and refine the Nation's sector-based training programs to enhance their accessibility, effectiveness, and cultural synergy.[4]

As these examples illustrate, it's one thing to develop a practical workforce development approach that addresses tribal citizens' needs and advances their Nation's strategic priorities as they currently exist. It's quite another to sustain that approach over the long haul. As Tribal Nations build track records of workforce development success, more and more are now tackling the challenge of how to systematically grow that success so that it benefits them not just today, but well into the future. As they engage this task, some common ingredients of "sustainability" are emerging that can shorten the learning curve for other Nations (and other Native workforce development entities) that are following in their footsteps:

- **Accountability:** Success – and the ability to sustain it – hinges on the accountability mechanisms (regular program assessments, employee performance agreements, outcomes-based budgeting, regular "refresher" trainings for staff, comprehensive orientation programs for new hires, ongoing education of the community about the purpose of workforce development programs and how they work, etc.) that a Tribal Nation puts in place to ensure everyone (leaders, employees, program participants, other tribal citizens) that contributes to or relies on its workforce development approach lives up to their end of the bargain. This matters not just for meeting the requirements of new grants, but more importantly for achieving the Nation's long-term workforce development goals.
- **Adaptability:** According to one intertribal organization, workforce development "is a complex, multi-layered issue that is best treated…as an iterative process that will be modified and adjusted over time."[5] A Nation's workforce development programs must adapt in real time to meet the distinct needs and goals of each participant it serves to be effective. To be sustainable, a Nation's overall workforce development approach must be institutionally adaptable over time to: (1) maintain alignment with the Nation's evolving strategic vision and long-term priorities; (2) refine programs based on new info and data and expand what is working; (3) proactively assess and address emerging obstacles (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in federal funding levels); (4) capitalize on staff's deepening experience and know-how; (5) account for a growing population; and (6) forecast and adjust to changing labor market conditions and needs to ensure its workforce itself is adaptable.

> ***"You're battling all the time, but you have to keep looking at ways that you can set the infrastructure and the ways your workforce development [approach] will continue to grow."***
>
> ***– MARGARET ZIENTEK, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, WORKFORCE & SOCIAL SERVICES, CITIZEN POTAWATOMI NATION[6]***

- **Institutionalizing communication:** Building effective mechanisms for regular communication and coordination between political leaders, programmatic leaders and staff, and community members fosters a common understanding of – and support for – the Nation's approach, how and why it works, how it's changing to better serve the people, and how it advances the Nation's long-term goals. For example, "cross-training" of programmatic staff so they understand how other components of the Nation's workforce development approach function is a proven strategy for building this understanding.[7]
- **Formalizing partnerships:** Workforce development-focused partnerships often emerge organically out of necessity, but they must be formalized through MOU/MOAs, long-term funding agreements or contracts, or other strategies if they are to support the Nation's approach over the long run.
- **Institutionalizing innovation (and success):** No Tribal Nation gets it exactly right out of the gate with its new approach. A bedrock institutional commitment to innovation enables a Nation to determine what's not working and design better ways forward. Cultivating and retaining top-notch programmatic leaders and staff equipped with the technical expertise, institutional memory, and confidence from learned experience to innovate is vital.

## *ASK YOURSELF*

- Does our Nation have a long-range strategic plan for growing and sustaining our workforce development approach and its component programs? What would it take to create one?
- What metrics do we track to evaluate the operational effectiveness of those programs and determine how to strengthen them? Did we come up with these metrics, or did someone else? What else should we be using?
- What accountability mechanisms do we use to drive exceptional staff performance in our workforce development programs?
- How do we educate new tribal leaders/employees with key roles in our workforce development approach about how and why that approach works? Do we provide them an initial orientation? Do we offer a refresher training for existing leaders/employees?
- Is our technological infrastructure (hardware, software, etc.) adequate for supporting the growth of our workforce development approach and how we are working to make that approach more holistic and more capable of measuring our success over the long run? What technological capabilities do we most need that we don't currently possess?
- Does our Nation have a firm grasp on how fast our population is growing? If so, what does it mean for how we need to grow our workforce development approach? If not, what steps should we take to track that growth to inform our strategic decision-making?

# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

## Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC)

Operating one of the country's longest-running and most dynamic 477 programs, CITC provides "whole family wraparound services"[1] – including education, training, career development, job placement, and a growing array of support services – to roughly 4,000 Native people annually so they can achieve "their personal and professional potential."[2] Intent on sustaining its organizational capacity to ably serve its growing service population well into the future, in 2020 CITC launched its Generative Leadership (GL) approach, designed "to create transformative growth opportunities for Our People while ensuring that CITC remains a leading employer."[3] Advancing CITC's strategic objectives of Recruitment, Development, and Retention, GL systematically enacts CITC's commitment to succession planning by identifying and training the next wave of capable executives and senior administrators through a "peer-to-peer and multi-generational" learning approach.[4] Under GL, CITC's existing "high-level" leaders (executive leadership, senior directors, and directors) are required to identify employees "with high potential who have the ability, motivation, aspiration, and engagement" to develop and advance into the organization's high-level positions.[5] Each identified employee then completes – with guidance from the high-level leader who supervises them – a "Leadership Development Plan Form" where they list the particular competencies (such as strategic and systems thinking, problem-solving and decisiveness, and emotionally intelligent leadership) they will develop to qualify for and thrive in the specific high-level positions they seek to eventually inhabit, the steps they will take to develop them, the resources they will need, and how they will measure progress.[6] Once the employees launch their GL plans, their supervising high-level leaders regularly engage them to evaluate their progress, help them work through challenges, and ensure their ultimate success.[7] Demonstrating the GL model's early returns, the current senior directors of CITC's Legal and Human Resources Departments and directors of its Clare Swan Early Learning Center, President's Office, and Education Assistance Department all advanced from their previous manager positions to their present roles through the GL process.[8]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/citc.pdf
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## Tulalip Tribes

Created in 2001 by Tulalip's TERO Vocational Training Center (TVTC), TVTC Construction is the first Native-run pre-apprenticeship program recognized by the State of Washington.[1] Offered twice a year to enrolled citizens of federally recognized Tribal Nations and their spouses, parents, and descendants, this free, "hands-on" program features a rigorous 16-week curriculum through which students obtain industry-critical skills and certifications for well-paying, high-demand jobs such as carpenters, electricians, mechanics, and plumbers.[2] Graduates are required to apply to at least three local apprenticeship programs, where they are accorded "preferred enrollment and advanced placement" through MOUs between TVTC and its union partners.[3] Key to the program's success is TVTC's "two-generational approach," which fosters success in the workplace and the family by connecting the student's family members – first and foremost their children – to services and organizations "beneficial to family health, well-being and economic success."[4] This begins with TVTC's comprehensive evaluation of the resource needs of each eligible applicant's family through TVTC's two-generational assessment, which asks a range of questions about their children's academic progress, health, and economic security.[5] Based on the new student's answers, TVTC provides them customized referrals to the "culturally responsive," two-generational services that Tulalip and TVTC's partners provide, such as early learning enrollment, library services, healthcare, afterschool programs, parenting classes, and programs addressing childhood trauma – all with the goal to bolster children's educational and, eventually, career success.[6] To "reinforce the intergenerational focus of building skills and 'going to work'"[7], TVTC provides students opportunities to directly role model for their children, with a hallmark of the program its "Family Day" event, where TVTC students work side by side with their children to create and design bookshelves, planters, desks and other products.[8] Illustrating the long-term benefits of TVTC's two-generational approach, many of these children have subsequently completed TVTC's summer Youth Class and then enrolled in the TVTC Construction program as their parents once did.[9]

***LEARNING LINK:*** https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/tulalip.pdf
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## *POLICY TIPS*

- Regularly assess your programs to determine how effectively they are advancing your workforce development priorities.
- Based on those assessments, target additional resources to replicate the success of well-performing programs across the organization, and design innovative solutions to refine and strengthen those programs that aren't performing as well.
- Ensure incoming political leaders develop strategies to grow and sustain successful workforce development initiatives (instead of eliminating them simply because they were created and/or supported by their predecessors).
- Regularly "cross-train" staff to grow institutional knowledge and resiliency across your workforce development system.
- Institute a transition memo policy requiring key programmatic staff leaving the organization to transfer critical institutional knowledge about how your workforce development programs work to those taking their place.[8]
- Recognize programmatic leaders and staff "for their hard work...and create succession plans for employee transitions."[9]
- Set long-term, incremental targets to increase the overall percentage of tribal citizens/other Native people comprising your Nation's governmental and enterprise workforce; task your workforce development programs to assist with meeting those targets.[10]
- Develop a concrete sustainability plan to grow funding and staff and provide higher-quality services to more people.

# TRIBAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: RELATED RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

NCAI has created an online "Tribal Workforce Development" resource center featuring a comprehensive suite of related resources for further learning about how to build self-determined, holistic, and sustainable approaches to developing Native workforces. This includes resources delving deeper into the 15 strategic considerations featured in the toolkit, as well as each of the 30 Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities whose innovative approaches and strategies are shared in the toolkit.

We invite toolkit users to visit the online resource center at **www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit** or by scanning the QR code to the right. Also presented below is a sampling of key related resources featured on the online resource center.

SCAN ME

## GENERAL NCAI RESOURCES

NCAI "Tribal Workforce Development" Decision-Framing Toolkit (Version 1.0)

NCAI YouTube Channel: Workforce Development

NCAI Policy Research Center Tribal Insights Brief: Higher Education & Workforce Development: Leveraging Tribal Investments to Advance Community Goals

NCAI Federal Policy Brief: Empowering Tribal Workforce Development (Version 2.0)

Northwest Area Foundation: Self-Determination Drives Success in Tribal Workforce Development: An Interview with NCAI

Welfare, Work, and American Indians: The Impact of Welfare Reform: A Report to the National Congress of American Indians

## NCAI WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDIES

NCAI Partnership for Tribal Governance (PTG) Innovation Spotlight: Coeur d'Alene Tribe

NCAI PTG Innovation Spotlight: Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

NCAI PTG Innovation Spotlight: Gila River Indian Community

NCAI PTG Innovation Spotlight: Ysleta del Sur Pueblo

## OTHER KEY RESOURCES

Native Governance Center: Rebuilding Tribal Human Resources (video)

Native Nations Institute: Karen Diver: Nation Building Through the Cultivation of Capable People and Governing Institutions (video)

Native Nation Building TV: "A Capable Bureaucracy: The Key to Good Government" (video)

Workforce Grantmaking in Native Nations and Communities: Supporting Native Workforce Development: A Guide for Funders

New America: Blended Funding Supports Streamlined Service Delivery for Native Nations: A Look at Public Law 102-477

## FEDERAL RESOURCES

DOI BIA Division of Workforce Development: About the 477 Program

DOI BIA: How Public Law 102-477 Can Create Economic Opportunities

DOL Indian and Native American Programs

ACF: Tribal Employment Pathways: Designing an Employment Program

Center for Indian Country Development: Native American Labor Market Dashboard

## SHARE YOUR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INNOVATIONS AND SUCCESS STORIES WITH NCAI!

We want to hear from you! To grow its Workforce Development initiative as a useful resource for Indian Country, NCAI invites Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce development entities to share your workforce development innovations and success stories with us by visiting **www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit.**

### ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This toolkit was produced by NCAI as part of its project examining innovative tribal and other Native-led approaches to developing Native workforces. The project and this toolkit are made possible through the ongoing support of the Northwest Area Foundation. This toolkit was developed by Ian Record (Former Vice President of Tribal Governance and Special Projects, NCAI) and Coby Klar (Communications Specialist, NCAI).

### ENDNOTES & RESEARCH CITATIONS

To provide a concise toolkit that is broadly accessible to tribal leaders, workforce development practitioners, and other interested stakeholders, NCAI features the endnote numbers in the toolkit itself, but provides the actual endnotes in a separate online document. To access the section-by-section endnotes for the entire toolkit, please visit **www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit**.

### SUGGESTED CITATION

National Congress of American Indians, ***Tribal Workforce Development: A Decision-Framing Toolkit (Version 2.0)***, Washington, DC, 2025.

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