

Recommendations for Developing and Maintaining Tribal Relationships



- **Creativity** – “When collaborating with Native American organizations, unique welfare and Social issues combined with a distinct lack of precedent in collaboration demand a high amount of creativity in each stage of relationship development.”
- **Patience** – “In the Native Community, introduction is extremely important. It is also important to allow time for broad introductions of many Tribal members. Often, the “official” Tribal leaders will not be the first contact with the Tribe, at times it may be the “Elders” or other traditional members of the Community who can provide the information needed to build a strong collaboration. It is important to be willing to take the time to sit and talk with the members of the Tribe presented. Successful collaboration requires flexibility and understanding as well.”
- **Preparation and Planning** – “It is important to research the particular Tribes and Tribal cultures involved in the proposed collaboration” including asking about customs in a respectful way, knowing Tribal leaders names, governing structures.
- **Respect** – “By far, the most important aspect of successful collaboration with the Native American Community is sincere respect. It is crucial to be aware of the “Head of State” status that the Chief or Governor of the Tribe has. Remember that Native American women, people, and Tribes are the experts on their own lives. Mr. Rivera suggested walking into a collaboration with sincere sentiments, stating implicitly and explicitly that the goal is “to listen, understand, and learn to help.”

Conference Summary Serving Native Americans with the Barriers to Self-Sufficiency of Domestic Violence and Substance Abuse held in Dallas, Texas August 16-18, 2000 Workshop: Developing and Maintaining Effective Networks with Native American Service Providers, Panel Moderated by: Jose Rivera, Consultant, DHHS, SAMSHA

Members: Brenda Hill, Sacred Circle; Peggy Bird, Mending the Sacred Hoop; Rosemary Shaw, Director of Counseling Services, Osage Nation; Wayne Weston, Cangleska, Inc. <http://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/pdf/dallas2.pdf> retrieved 12/6/04)

Promising Practices for Supervisors for Engaging Tribes on Behalf of Tribal Youth

Who To Contact First?*

- Make a personal phone call followed up by a letter and email to the nearest designated Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) representative or Tribal contact.

Here are questions you will want to ask:

- Is there anyone in the community that has a special interest in the needs of tribal foster youth?
- Who do people go to for advice in working with tribal foster youth and young adults?
- Who at the health center is working with ICWA and can assist identifying tribal youth eligible for IL services?
- Who should I contact at the tribal council about our project and what is the best way to approach them?

First, begin to develop and cultivate contacts with the local Indian health center, social service programs, and become familiar with your local tribe. It may be that giving a presentation at the local tribal council is recommended. You may need to submit a written request and provide information about your project to the tribal secretary who will put you on the agenda. Be brief and keep tribal youth the center of your presentation. Solicit support, input and guidance.

What If I'm NOT Native?

- Learn as much as you can about the local tribe(s), especially their history and relationship with federal and state programs.
- Take the time to learn about the key tribal organizations.
- Show that you are committed to being part of the community: attend community functions (fiestas, pow wows, cultural gatherings, health fairs, etc.).

Engagement Strategies

1. Native Americans have an oral history tradition.

- Face to face interaction is important. While today's technology facilitates communication in a variety of ways, it is culturally congruent to have face to face interaction, particularly on difficult matters. Regular face to face meetings should be considered. Additionally, initial meetings held on tribal land demonstrates a willingness to engage at sites that are significant to the tribes.
- Traditional meeting formats may be off-putting to some tribal members. The give-and-take discussions maybe a new format for many tribal members. Consider engaging in a talking circle format, and negotiate communication strategies that are comfortable for both parties. Consider engaging in tribal traditions that open and close meetings, such as prayer, sharing of food and smudging.

2. There is a history of deep distrust of government, particularly of governments' effort to "help" Native American children.

- Recognize that ICWA was in response to tribes being decimated with the removal of children from their tribes. Today, many of those children that had been removed in the fifties and sixties are today's elders, or part of the formal governing structures of the tribes. They may harbor painful memories, unresolved issues and anger, for what happened to them as children. Establishing long term relationships will help in re-establishing trust with Native Americans.
- Recognize that first attempts at collaboration may be met with "resistance", that is phone calls may not be returned, meetings may not materialize, or tasks agreed to, may not be completed. Continue efforts by asking tribal members what they would need in order to move forward on goals.
- Use empowerment strategies, asking tribal members their vision of successful collaboration and how they "see" success. Remain consistent in following through on promised actions.
- Attend training on ICWA, local tribe history, engaging Native American communities, and rural child welfare practices.

3. Native values may conflict with current policies and practice.

- Traditional social work practice has is rooted in formal relationships with clients. Many Native American tribes value a connection on a more informal basis. Research also suggests that rural practice may require a more informal approach that may conflict with current professional "boundaries." Consider working with agency administrators to reexamine policies and procedures that may interfere with more culturally appropriate interventions with Native Americans and those in rural settings

4. Partner with Tribes and ICWA Agencies.

- Consider looking at the needs of the tribes, tribal children, and ICWA agencies. Are there some ways to partner on projects to achieve a goal?
- Consider partnering on grant funded projects. Can the government agency provide a grant writer and the financial know how when collaborating on grant applications?
- Consider if tribes, ICWA agencies are aware of federal, state or local funds they can access. For example, have the tribes and ICWA agencies leveraged funds from the Chafee Act? If not, why? Working with tribes and ICWA agencies to obtain needed funds are desired partnerships
- Recognize that time may not have the same meaning for Tribal members. Meetings may not start on time or end on time because of valuing the process rather than the structure of the meeting. Consider building in "conversation time" prior to and/or after the meeting, to allow for enough time to address issues and build connections.

Remember that the Native community is the expert and their support and guidance in creating long-lasting relationships will be an important factor in your ability to serve Tribal youth.

Culturally Responsive Communities, Tribes and Native Organizations Increase Cross-Cultural Understanding Through the Following Actions:

- Establish a welcoming and supportive environment for new personnel moving to the community/organization and offer guidance in helping them learn the cultural ways of the area, including greeting them at the airport and assisting them in getting settled into the community.
- Assist local organizations, groups, tribes and communities that promote programs that enhance cross-cultural understanding.
- Sponsor regular meetings and in-service programs with community members, leaders, organizational staff, and supervisors in the community to develop ways to incorporate cultural values in their programs' service and outreach efforts.
- Assist organizational personnel with the involvement of Elders as the local culture-bearers to foster the incorporation of traditional knowledge, values and beliefs in all aspects of community and health and human services.
- Provide an annual open house/workshop (with food) for community, families and extended families of tribal staff and clients to discuss ways that organizations increase positive outcomes with communities.

- Develop mechanisms to coordinate services of all local and regional social services, health, economic, cultural and educational programs for mutual support and benefit to the communities.
- Provide encouragement and support for community members who show an interest in pursuing a career in social work, health and human services, and education and involve them as resources in cross-cultural orientation activities.
- Encourage all members of the youth services circle to take an active role in guiding newcomers to understand the local cultural practices and aspirations to become active contributors to community life.
- Implement a support structure for preparing the next generation of Elders.
- Provide opportunities for social service, health services, and educational staff to participate in cultural activities, and events that strengthen relationships to support cross-cultural collaboration.

(Source: Assembly of Alaska Native Educators (2003) Guidelines for Cross-Cultural Orientation Programs, Anchorage, AK.)