It’s one thing to develop an effective workforce development approach that addresses the needs of a tribal nation’s citizens and advances its strategic priorities today. 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 the nation not just today, but well into the future.

As they engage this critical task, some common ingredients for “sustainability” are emerging that stand to shorten the learning curve for other nations that will follow in their footsteps:

- **Accountability:** Workforce development success — and the ability to sustain it — hinges on the accountability mechanisms (regular program assessments, employee performance agreements, outcomes-based budgeting, etc.) that a nation puts in place to ensure everyone (leaders, employees, clients, 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:** A nation’s workforce development programs must adapt in real time to meet the distinct needs and goals of each client it serves to be effective. To be sustainable, a nation’s overall workforce development approach must be institutionally adaptable over time to: stay synced with the nation’s evolving strategic vision and priorities, refine programs based on new info and data, expand what is working, neutralize emerging obstacles, capitalize on staff’s deepening experience and know-how, account for a growing population, and forecast and adjust to changing labor market conditions and needs to ensure that the workforce itself is adaptable.

- **Communication:** Building effective mechanisms for regular communication between political leaders, programmatic leaders, program staff, and community members fosters a common, well-informed understanding of — and support for — the nation’s approach, why it works the way it does, how it’s changing to better serve the people, and how it advances the nation’s larger goals.

- **Institutionalizing innovation (and success):** No nation can thrive — or sustain success — on 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 program staff equipped with the technical expertise, institutional memory, and confidence from learned experience to achieve, sustain, and grow success across the organization by innovating is vital.

**Framing the Discussion**

“All and good ideas are good ideas, but you have to keep looking at ways that you can use the infrastructure and the ways your workforce development [approach] will continue to grow.” — Margaret Zientek, Assistant Director, Workforce & Social Services, Citizen Potawatomi Nation

**Questions to Consider**

- What accountability mechanisms and metrics does your nation currently use to drive exceptional performance across its workforce development programs?

- What mechanisms and metrics does it use to evaluate the effectiveness of those programs and determine how to strengthen them? Are they tribally designed? What else should it be using?

- Does your nation have a long-range strategic plan for the growth and sustainability of its workforce development approach and its component programs? What would it take to create one?

- Does the nation have a firm handle on how rapidly its population is growing? If so, what does it mean for how it needs to grow its workforce development approach? If not, what steps should it take to track that growth and use that data to inform decision making on an ongoing basis?

- Does/how does your nation currently educate new tribal leaders and employees with direct roles in workforce development programs? What would it take to create one?

- Does the nation have a firm handle on how it needs to grow its workforce development approach? If not, what steps should it take to track that growth and use that data to inform decision making on an ongoing basis?

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