



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM TRIBAL EXPERIENCES WITH TRIBAL CENSUSES AND SURVEYS

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INTRODUCTION

Indigenous people throughout the world have been collecting and recording data on themselves and the world around them for millennia -- since time immemorial. Many of those records still exist, on rocks, in caves, on animal skins and other material.

Various recording systems were common in what is now the United States. The Lakota and other tribes of the Northern Plains are famous for their "winter counts," year-by-year chronologies of significant happenings in their history.¹ In the Southwest, the Akimel O'odham of southern Arizona used "calendar sticks" to make annual recordings of important events that affected their lives.²

The Western urge to quantify has significantly changed the way data is collected and maintained, in Indian Country as elsewhere. The census enumerator has joined the artist, the singer, the calendar stick maker as one who tells the story of what is happening to the First Peoples of this land.

The U.S. Constitution mandated a decennial census when it was written in 1787, but it exempted "Indians not taxed," considered to be citizens of foreign nations. That changed only gradually. All Indian people became U.S. citizens in 1924. It was not until 1940 that they were fully included in the U.S. decennial census.

Moreover, it was not until the 1980 Census that most of the Indians living in rural reservation areas were finally able to identify their own race, rather than have an enumerator choose the person's race based on how the person appeared to the enumerator.³

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Throughout the 18th, 19th and into the 20th century the Bureau of Indian Affairs collected counts of Native people, using tribal "rolls," presided over by Indian agents at the reservation level, to list those under the agent's surveillance.⁴

The era of the tribal census began with support for tribal self-determination. With the passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 the federal government defined an "Indian" as a "member of an Indian tribe."⁵ Only tribes have the sovereign authority to determine who is a member, a citizen of that tribe. Tribal control over tribal numbers is now enshrined in U.S. law.

Over the last four or five decades a number of tribes have taken charge of counts of their Native people through tribal censuses and surveys, counts initiated by tribes for tribal purposes.

The first "Wind River Indian Needs Determination Survey,"⁶ (WINDS) was conducted in 1987 by the Eastern Shoshone Tribe and the Northern Arapaho Tribe on the Wind River Reservation in central Wyoming. It was developed with assistance from the University of Wyoming, a tribal-university partnership that has been replicated in different ways by tribes on other reservations. In 1998 the two tribes, again in cooperation with the University of Wyoming, conducted WINDS II.

In 2010 WINDS III took place, and the tribal census was expanded to include questionnaires seeking information on both individuals and households. The financial support for WINDS III totaled over \$200,000, including a major investment by both tribes, the University and four state agencies.

Evolving over the years, the several WINDS projects addressed a critical need on the part of both tribes for accurate data on their populations, characteristics and needs. Like the efforts of other tribes since, the tribal censuses at Wind River enabled tribal leaders and staff to understand the needs identified and to seek resources to address those needs.

Another early venture in surveying tribal reservation populations was undertaken specifically to collect information on the Indian labor force. The Standing Rock Labor Force Survey was conducted at the end of the 1980s by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the Job Services of North and South Dakota.⁷

This survey was designed to provide a more accurate picture of the labor force status of Indian and non-Indian workers on that reservation, covering two entire counties in the two states. It was structured to resemble the Current Population Survey (CPS), a nationwide monthly survey conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census on behalf of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in the U.S. Department of Labor and used to estimate the monthly national unemployment rate.

The results illustrated the significant differences between the labor force status of the Indian and the non-Indian populations, both living within the reservation's borders. It accomplished

one of its major short-term purposes, to have the reservation listed as a "Labor Surplus Area," a designation that made private enterprises locating on the Standing Rock reservation eligible for preference in federal procurement.

As the interest of tribes in conducting their own censuses or surveys grows, it is important to learn from the experiences of those tribes that have already engaged in this type of work.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project was to review the work that tribes have done and are doing to enhance their data capacity to collect important demographic information on tribal members. The project aimed to learn from the experience of tribes in planning and conducting their own tribal censuses or surveys in order to develop recommendations for other tribes planning to conduct their own censuses or surveys.

METHODS

Consistent with this objective, the project selected four tribes and one intertribal organization to receive financial assistance to conduct tribal censuses or surveys. The five sub-awardees reflect the wide range of tribes and tribal organizations with an interest in enhancing their data capacity. They include a relatively small tribe, several medium-size to larger tribes, and an intertribal epidemiology center. The tribes used their funding, planned and/or conducted censuses and surveys, and reported their experiences and lessons learned. A summary of key considerations in planning and conducting tribal censuses and surveys along with recommendations were developed from the experiences of the tribes. This report does not include the specific experiences of each tribe, which may be told in other forums in the future depending on the wishes of the tribes themselves.

ANALYSIS

Tribal participants

The following are brief descriptions of the tribal participants in this project and the efforts they undertook to enhance their tribal data capacity.

The Kalispel Tribe

The geographic heartland of the Kalispel Tribe of Indians is the Pend Oreille River in northeastern Washington. The tribe's enrollment is 4,700, with about one-third of the members living on the very limited amount of reservation land and in several small communities nearby. Another one-third resides in the Spokane area 55 miles to the south. The remainder is scattered throughout the rest of Washington and the U.S.

For various reasons, many relating to its small size and the relative remoteness of most of its reservation land, the tribe has struggled with the inadequacies of federal data. It sought financial support from the NCAI project to conduct a census of the tribe's population, principally on and adjacent to the reservation. The purpose was to have higher quality data to establish priorities for the use of tribal resources and in drafting applications for external funding.⁸

The tribe turned to a consulting firm in Seattle with years of experience in the field to conduct its census, Big Water Consulting. Tribal members were trained to serve as enumerators. The survey instrument was administered using an online form, followed by a paper questionnaire mailed to those not responding online. A final follow-up involved door-to-door visits by enumerators equipped with tablet computers to those households that had still not responded.

The paper version of the questionnaire included 169 questions, many with multiple answers possible. It sought standard demographic and socio-economic characteristics information, along with information on tribal specific issues not covered in other surveys, such as migration to and from the reservation, the use of natural resources on tribal land and involvement in the community.

The Pueblo of Laguna

One of the 19 pueblos in New Mexico, the Pueblo of Laguna is among the largest with an enrollment of about 8,800 members. The Pueblo's main offices are located 50 miles west of Albuquerque. The reservation and associated tribal trust land cover over 500,000 acres.⁹

For this project, the Planning Program under the Pueblo's Administrative Services Department conducted a comprehensive census. Unlike the census and survey work of other tribes in the project, the Pueblo planned and carried out the census itself.

The Pueblo Planning Program partnered with the Geospatial Population Studies program of the University of New Mexico. The university developed a computer program for the hand-held tablet computers used by the tribe's enumerators to collect data for the census.

This approach enabled the questionnaire to be administered during interviews with the household respondents. The data collected could simply be downloaded in computer-readable format for tabulation purposes. The process avoided a familiar obstacle with older data collection methods, the keyboarding necessary to convert the responses from paper questionnaires to machine-readable data.

The Pueblo of Laguna Census was able to draw upon the tribe's Geographic Information System (GIS) that provides a data base showing the location of all the housing units on tribal land. The data base was originally developed to support the Pueblo's E911 program.

The tribe's census provided a rich body of experience on how to plan and implement this kind of enumeration. Many of the lessons learned in the course of this project that are discussed later in this paper are a result of events that happened in the course of the Pueblo of Laguna Census.

The Nez Perce Tribe

The Nez Perce people, the Nimi'ipuu (the First People), have a 750,000 acre reservation spanning four counties in north central Idaho.¹⁰ Economic development is a priority for the Nez Perce as it is for all tribes. The tribe is a member of the Clearwater Economic Development Association (CEDA), a regional economic development organization. Tribal projects are a prominent part of CEDA's plans for the future economy of the region.¹¹

The tribe's interest in conducting a tribal survey was a direct outgrowth of its prior work to develop an accurate profile of its workforce. The Nez Perce tribe conducted its own labor force survey in 2009. This was followed by further surveys in 2011 and 2013, the last assisted by faculty and students in the sociology department of Washington State University (WSU).

As part of this project, the tribe was able to conduct a new labor force survey. Continuing the relationship already established with WSU, the tribe contracted with the University's Social and Economic Sciences Research Center (SESRC) for assistance in implementing the survey. The Planning, Education and Enrollment Departments of the tribe were all closely involved.

The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians

The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe has a long history but was only able to gain federal recognition in 1972. The tribe has small tracts of trust land scattered throughout seven counties on the eastern side of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The tribe is organized into five governing regions, called "Units." The Sault Tribe has an enrollment of 43,376, making it among the largest tribes in the U.S. in terms of the size of its membership.¹²

The tribe has a history of having conducted its own census. One conducted in 2014 provided valuable experience. Another is scheduled for 2019. The major focus of the tribe's work has been to identify what went right during the last census and what needs to be improved for the coming one. Tribal staff developed a detailed plan to guide the preparations for 2019.

Part of the tribe's work on this project involved a "data gap" study. Interviews were conducted with a number of tribal agencies, identifying information on the tribe's population not currently being collected so that it might be included appropriately in the next census, community survey, or in tribal department or program-specific surveys. This work also identified information currently being collected and the barriers to sharing that data among the different tribal departments.

The Rocky Mountain Tribal Epidemiology Center

The Rocky Mountain Tribal Epidemiology Center, or RMTEC, is a division of the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council. The Council represents the tribes in Montana and Wyoming, along with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in Idaho.¹³

In this project, the RMTEC conducted household surveys in two locations, in the Great Falls, MT area where most of the members of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians live, and on the over 2-million acre Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux reservation in northeastern Montana.

The surveys collected basic household information, numbers, ages, and gender of the members of the household, along with data on education, employment and income. The surveys were health oriented, involving the implementation of a tribal version of the "BRFSS," the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System¹⁴, an important data tool overseen by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and implemented through state-administered surveys. Although tribal people are covered by the BRFSS surveys, the standard questionnaire does not capture important factors affecting the health of the Indian population, particularly the on-reservation population.

Other Tribal Efforts

This project also reviewed a variety of other tribal experiences with surveys that were not a part of the group of tribes funded to conduct a census or survey. Each was designed to fit the unique situation of the tribe involved and each approached the task in a slightly different way.

The Navajo Nation Housing Needs Assessment and Demographic Analysis

Although the size of the Navajo Nation's population and geographic extent of its land base pose significant challenges to any survey effort, the Navajo Housing Authority successfully conducted a major enumeration of the reservation population in 2008 and 2009. In all, 11,466 households were covered, with a total population of 31,166, making this what may well be the largest tribal survey undertaken to date.¹⁵

As has been the case with other tribes since, the Navajo survey drew on U.S. Census Bureau questionnaires for the decennial census and the American Community Survey (ACS), modifying these as necessary to reflect reservation circumstances. The survey instrument covered basic demographic information such as age, gender and relationship to other members of the household, as well as items on socio-economic characteristics such as education, employment and income. The survey focused primarily on housing characteristics, needs and opinions for the purpose of developing a reservation-wide master housing plan.

The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe

Work to establish a data hub for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe began 13 years ago with the tribe's development of a strategic plan to reduce poverty on the reservation. The tribe contributed its own funds to the effort, which was also supported by a major multi-year grant from the Northwest Area Foundation.

It was essential to be able to track the plan's progress. Tribal staff asked: "How do we know we are making a difference?" Measuring progress requires data. Cheyenne River Tribal Ventures (CRTV) was born in 2006 to collect and maintain the necessary information.¹⁶

A great deal of data was already being collected by tribal programs. However, that data wasn't being shared within the tribe. There were gaps in the data. The data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau was not considered up to the task of "telling the tribe's story."

In 2012 the tribe implemented its VOICES project involving house-to-house interviews with families across the reservation. VOICES launched its survey by selecting every fourth housing unit on the reservation's road network for interviews. Overall, 819 families in 547 housing units were surveyed. When the survey was complete, CRTV took the results back to the people in the tribal community. Between January of 2014 and 2015 CRTV held 50 community meetings across the reservation to discuss the findings with community members.

The Ysleta del Sur Pueblo

The data collection work at Ysleta del Sur Pueblo (YDSP), the southernmost of the pueblos along the Rio Grande River, produced some of the most dramatic results of any of the tribal censuses.¹⁷ After being forced to shut down a successful casino, the Pueblo had an urgent need to rebuild its economic base. It chose a path to development it calls "Tiguanomics." This approach involves facilitating the start-up of tribal member-owned businesses. For that, YDSP needed a business incubator facility.

In 2011 YDSP applied to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for an Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG) to construct the business incubator facility. HUD denied the application because the BIA and Census Bureau data that HUD relied on to judge the project's eligibility indicated that the proposed project did not meet HUD poverty and population-in-need guidelines.

Using data that YDSP collected using its own survey, the Pueblo was able to demonstrate that the 2000 decennial Census count used by HUD did not accurately reflect the number and income levels of the tribal population. When the tribe reapplied for the ICDBG grant in 2012, the data from the YDSP Socio-Economic Profile established that the application did meet the HUD eligibility requirements. HUD approved the grant. The building, constructed with the ICDBG funds, is now up and serving its purpose in helping to grow the Pueblo's economy by providing space to assist tribal member-owned businesses.

The California Indian Manpower Consortium (CIMC)

The California Indian Manpower Consortium is a consortium of tribes and off-reservation Indian organizations that provides workforce and other services throughout most of the state.¹⁸ It played an early role in facilitating the ability of tribes to collect and manage their data in a cost-effective way.

The many small tribes in the state have not been well served by the standard sources of demographic data. With limited land bases, many of their members live in surrounding communities or in larger urban areas where jobs are more plentiful. Simply counting the Native people who live within reservation boundaries produces an incomplete picture of the tribal populations.

In the mid to late 1980s CIMC set out to develop a remedy for this problem. It supported a low cost approach that enabled member tribes to collect information on their citizens. The effort involved a partnership with a then-recently formed commercial firm, Tribal Data Resources. The firm developed software and provided training in data collection, analysis, storage and presentation designed specifically for tribal use. CIMC encouraged member tribes that wished to do their own censuses to use participants in CIMC's Summer Youth and Adult Work Experience programs as enumerators. Many did so, and the approach spread to tribes across the country.

RESULTS

Key Considerations in Conducting Tribal Censuses and Surveys

The experiences of the tribes and the tribal organization participating in this project, along with the experiences of other tribes, have added to the growing body of knowledge about the processes, benefits and challenges associated with tribal collection and management of data for tribal purposes. There were many lessons learned, and these lessons resulted in valuable information about key considerations in conducting tribal censuses and surveys. These key considerations are summarized below and are described without reference to which tribe(s) experienced which lessons learned. The specific experience of the tribes in this project is their own story to tell.

Planning a Tribal Census or Survey

The experience of the tribes in this project reinforced the importance of careful, comprehensive planning as the essential first step in any tribal census or survey. Done right, planning makes the process flow smoothly. However, failure to consider factors important in a tribal data collection effort during the planning stage can complicate the implementation of the project and compromise the value of the results.

The purposes to be served by the project are a foundational issue. Why does the tribe want the data? What will it use it for? What kind of results do tribal leaders, staff and the tribal community want to see at the end of the process?

One of the core principles that needs to be observed throughout every step of the process is maintaining confidentiality. This must be part of the conversation at every meeting and throughout the data collection, tabulation and storage processes. A culture of data privacy must be created so that every member of the project team stays vigilant in protecting data on the tribe's population.

The scope of the census or survey is important. Should it be a full census, attempting to enumerate all persons in the population? Alternatively, should it be a survey, and if so, how extensive? If a survey, what can be done to make the sample selected for the survey representative of the total population?

The population to be covered is important. Should the census or survey collect data just on persons enrolled in the tribe? If so, basic information from the tribal enrollment office will be essential to determine who is a member, a citizen of the tribe. Should Native people enrolled elsewhere but living on the tribe's reservation be included in the census or survey? Should non-Indians be included?

The geographic area to be covered is important. Will the survey cover just those living within the external boundaries of the reservation? Should the responses be geocoded, that is coded according to the part of the reservation where the respondents live? If the tribal land base is limited and a significant portion of the tribal population resides in nearby communities, should those persons be included? If tribal members living elsewhere in the region or state are to be included, how will they be reached?

Time as well as space is essential in planning. When might be the ideal time to launch a tribal census or survey? When should data collection start and when should it end?

In what ways might external expertise be desirable? Where might it be found – from a university, a commercial firm, or from one or more individual consultants? If external expertise is employed, how might it best be used?

Ownership of any of the products created with the assistance of an external institution or contractor should be considered. Can the tribe ensure that it will retain full control of all the data collected?

Information technology (IT) infrastructure, both hardware and software, is a critical part of any effort to collect, tally and manage data. Tablet or other hand-held devices can be useful in collecting and recording responses. How will the data, however collected, be transferred to a central computer for tabulation and analysis? Some form of data base software will be essential. The range of choices include standard off-the-shelf software packages, a fully

relational data base product, widely used statistical software or a commercial product specifically designed for tribal use.

Considering these issues is vital in the planning stage. The ultimate success of the project depends on the answers to these questions. Exploring these questions takes time, perhaps months, before the data collection begins.

Funding for Tribal Data Collection

The experience of the tribes in this project also reinforced the importance of having dedicated funding and staff to plan and conduct tribal censuses and surveys. The central question for any initiative undertaken by any government, tribal or other, is where the money is to come from to cover the costs involved. Tribal censuses or surveys are expensive. All of the tribes whose experiences are described in this paper have encountered this issue. Resources for tribal censuses and surveys can be hard to find.

The federal government has a unique responsibility to Indian tribes. It took control of the land tribes occupied and used it to build a non-Indian economy, promising in return to protect Native people and ensure their well-being. Despite its responsibilities to tribes, the U.S. government does not currently have a single program specifically designed to provide financial support for comprehensive tribal planning. There is no support dedicated to helping tribes conduct their censuses or surveys. Nor are federal resources widely available for the studies that are essential to many tribal planning efforts.

An extensive list of federal programs is contained in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) maintained by the General Services Administration (GSA).¹⁹ Programs for which federally recognized tribes are eligible are listed. However, a search of the CFDA fails to turn up a single program that supports comprehensive tribal planning.

Individual federal programs, such as the Native workforce programs in the Labor Department and the tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), require the submission of tribal plans. Although they must be focused on the services the programs authorize, planning is an allowable activity for these programs. At the same time, it may be considered as an "administrative cost" and within a cap on total administrative costs.

If a tribe is to launch a tribal census or other extensive data collection effort, it must search hard to find funds within the federal system that can somehow be pieced together to finance the effort. While many federal grant programs may allow funds to evaluate programs or determine needs for particular programs or issues, they virtually never support a comprehensive tribal census.

Though rare, tribes have been able to tap into sources other than those of the federal programs or the tribe's general fund to support tribal data collection. These include state and

local agencies, even though the projects were firmly under tribal control. On several occasions, grants from philanthropic organizations have helped.

One possibility that may be worth exploring is the pooling of funds, particularly by smaller tribes within a region that cannot afford to conduct separate individual tribal censuses. Pooling of resources by multiple tribes for a centrally planned and managed effort and a single contractor may be more cost-efficient than if every tribe has to go it alone. Although the feasibility of such an approach will be limited, it could be an option to consider under the right circumstances.

Building Support within the Tribe

The experiences of tribes in this project reinforced the importance of tribal support for censuses and surveys. The most essential source of endorsement for any tribal data collection effort is the leadership of the tribe. This starts with the elected tribal leaders, the Chairperson, President or Governor and the members of the Tribal Council or Business Committee. The members of the Council that are particularly important include those on the Committee or Committees with jurisdiction over the planned census or survey.

Tribal programs can be invaluable in the success of the effort. That includes the enrollment office, the one authoritative source of information on the tribe's members. Offices responsible for distributing per capita payments should have up-to-date contact information for those eligible for payments.

Tribal agencies responsible for service programs that have direct contact with tribal residents are in a position to be particularly useful. These agencies can play an important role in helping to initiate a tribal census or survey, establishing its goals, designing the questionnaire and promoting participation while the enumeration is underway. They are also important users of the data produced.

Gaining approval from various segments of the tribal community is necessary. Elders and cultural leaders should be consulted and their wishes respected, particularly when the census or survey will ask about issues like language and participation in tribal ceremonies. Youth councils or organizations as well as schools, Head Start and child development programs can help to promote participation, and encourage family members to respond to the questionnaire. All these sources of participation tend to be more supportive if consulted early in the process.

Questionnaire Development

The experience of tribes in this project reinforced the importance of thoughtful questionnaire development. The questionnaire or interview schedule is the centerpiece of any census or survey. It must collect the desired data, but ask for that information in ways that

respondents understand in the same way that the designers intended. The questions must not seem intrusive, a difficult issue when sensitive information such as income is involved.

Several of the tribes participating in this project used the questions on the U.S. Census Bureau's ACS questionnaire as an initial model. That questionnaire is readily accessible on the Bureau's Web site.²⁰

The ACS questions are comprehensive in many respects. They cover basic demographic data, like age, gender, race and relationship to other members of the household. The ACS questionnaire for 2017 also asks for information on education, language use, military service, employment and income, as well as other topics. The ACS survey form also asks a variety of housing questions. Tribal housing authorities can provide ideas that are more suited to tribal conditions.

While useful as a starting point, tribes that have borrowed from the ACS questionnaire realize that it does not address reservation-specific circumstances. Adapting the questionnaire to what's relevant to the local population and geography is necessary to achieve a more accurate profile of the tribal population.

For instance, in order to be considered as "unemployed" for ACS purposes a person must indicate that she or he did not work at all during the week before completing the questionnaire, has "actively" sought work in the past four weeks and would take a job if offered one. However, in a reservation context there are reasons why persons interested in working may not be able to "actively" seek work or take a job if offered. Reservation workers confront barriers to working or seeking work as a result of a lack of dependable transportation, being unable to obtain care for a child or other family member while the person is at work or for other reasons. Information like this is simply not collected on the ACS questionnaire.

Tribal questionnaire designers are interested in collecting data that does a better job of "telling the tribe's story." That purpose may not be well served if the questions on ACS form are the only ones used.

In recent years new approaches have opened up for questionnaire designers. Surveys can now be completed on-line in the privacy of one's own home, on tablet computers used by interviewers and even on smartphones.

Once the survey instrument is designed, it should then be screened by the tribal leadership, officials in the tribal departments that will use the information, possibly even by legal staff to make sure that none of the questions violate tribal ordinances. Tribal elders and culture bearers should also be consulted to ensure that the questions are appropriate.

Preparation, Field Testing and Staffing

The experience of tribes in this project reinforced important steps in planning the conduct of tribal censuses or surveys. Once the time to collect the data draws near, the tribe faces a new set of tasks. These include finalizing the address files, pre-testing the census or survey instrument, conducting field tests of operating procedures, considering incentives for participation and, of prime importance, staffing the enumeration phase.

Every census is as much about where as it is about who. People are counted in a specific place, within or outside reservation boundaries, in a particular village or tribal district, or as a tribal member in a distant city.

Finding those to be enumerated requires accurate address lists. Address lists are commonly sought from the tribal enrollment office and can be obtained only if proper confidentiality safeguards are in place. Determining housing units that have been added, abandoned or destroyed is necessary. Some tribes are now in a position to use rural addressing systems which enable more precise determinations of where families live than simply using post office box addresses.

The questionnaire should be pre-tested to determine whether revisions may be desirable before it is finalized for general distribution. In-person interviews or focus groups may be useful to discover whether the respondents interpret the questions in the way the designers intended. It can also be helpful to test field procedures.

Preparing for a tribal census or survey may involve a decision on whether to offer incentives for participation. Incentives reward participation on the part of the respondents. A different approach to the incentive issue is to reward enumerators for successfully completing their assigned interviews.

Staffing the enumeration process can be a difficult and time-consuming issue. The jobs of enumerators as well as the crew leaders who supervise them are temporary. They may involve part time work and work in the evenings and on weekends. The work can be stressful and the pay scale low. Training and turnover can be major staffing hurdles. Once selected, the enumerators need to be trained.

It is standard practice to promise respondents confidentiality in return for their cooperation. Do the enumerators understand the importance of fully honoring this promise?

With low pay, possibly irregular hours and only temporary employment, enumerator turnover can become a serious problem. For many tribes, relatively few enumerators will be needed. If one or more of these enumerators leave before the job is finished, that can jeopardize the work and complicate the on-time completion of the census. If the turnover involves a crew leader, that can be an even bigger problem.

The Count and Beyond

The experience of tribes in this project reinforced the importance of how the census or survey is actually conducted. The actual enumeration is the culmination of months of planning and preparation. It normally has a limited time frame, meant to ensure that all the respondents are counted at the same time and under the same circumstances.

The enumeration should be launched with a series of events to engage the community and get everyone interested and eager to participate. A publicity blitz involving tribal leaders and other respected members of the community is frequently part of the kick-off campaign. The tribal census or survey staff should be part of community events during the enumeration period, distributing information and answering questions.

The tribe should have a plan to ensure that every household included in the census or survey completes and returns the questionnaire in the event that a household does not respond after the initial contact. The U.S. Census Bureau calls the process "non-response follow-up," or simply by the rather obscure acronym "NRFU." It's the set of procedures used to contact those who do not answer the questionnaire while the enumeration is underway. It can be one of the most expensive aspects of the entire process.

The process frequently begins with a simple reminder message, possibly including a duplicate copy of the survey form in the event the original was misplaced or simply thrown away. Further follow-up involves contacting the household by e-mail, phone or with one or more door-to-door visits to collect as much data as possible. The higher the response rate, the greater the validity of the results.²¹ As a last resort, enumerators can contact neighbors to see if the members of a non-responding household still live in the area and, if so, the numbers, ages and the genders of those living there.

Shortly after or even during the conduct of a census or survey, the data must be entered in a central data base where it can be stored and cross tabulated. First the data should be "cleaned" -- checked for obvious errors or inconsistencies. Missing items should be identified.

Tabulation to Dissemination

The experiences of tribes in this project reinforced the important steps in analyzing and reporting on the results of the census or survey. Once the data is cleaned and entered it needs to be tabulated. With the proper hardware, software and skills, the tribe can do the job itself. In the case of many of the tribal censuses and surveys described earlier, the job was done by an outside agency or by consultants with the appropriate expertise and statistical software. The process involves more than simply summing up the answers to each of the questions on the survey instrument. Cross-tabulation is important to see how some answers vary when divided by aspects of another question, e.g. unemployment by age group.

The next step is the actual dissemination of the results. Tribal leaders come first. They will want to know what the census or survey found and what that says about steps that the tribe can take to improve the well-being of its citizens. Tribal program managers have a major stake in the results. What does the census or survey say about the impact of their services? What can be done to improve those services?

Getting the results back to the community is vital, not only to redeem the promises made during the planning and collection phases, but to guide each of the reservation's various tribal communities in setting its own goals for the future. It is essential that the survey team visit every village or district on the reservation and ensure that the local leaders know what the results show. The census or survey is a tribal product. Retaining tribal control and ownership of the results is vital.

Finish and Consider Future Needs

The experiences of tribes in this project reinforced the important steps desirable after a census or survey has been completed. The data collected should be retained and the products containing the results preserved. Data storage involves protecting it from unauthorized access. This should involve precautions that go beyond simply keeping the returned questionnaires in a locked file cabinet. Tribes should remove any information that can identify individual respondents and their households. Protecting confidentiality includes severing any link before analysis between the survey forms and tribal administrative records, including enrollment records.

Perhaps the final stage in a tribal census or survey project involves documenting the process. What happened at each stage: planning; execution; and the tabulation and use of the results? What were the challenges, the lessons learned, and the pitfalls to be avoided in the future? Such an analysis is not only important to tribal officials, but it is essential in planning the next census or survey project.

Data ages. It is collected at a specific point in time. If well done, a census or survey provides a significant resource for an evaluation of progress and unmet needs now and in the future.

Nevertheless, over the course of the coming years conditions will change as new opportunities and challenges arise. The need for a fresh look at the tribal population and its characteristics will suggest a new census or survey project. Any future effort needs to know what happened the last time. If key staff have changed, it is even more important that the prior effort be well documented.

DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the experience of the tribes in this project, a number of recommendations for policy were developed to support future efforts by tribes to conduct their own censuses and surveys.

- **A federal financial assistance program should be authorized and funded to support comprehensive tribal planning, with an emphasis on data collection, analysis and management.**

Collecting, analyzing and managing data on tribal populations and tribal resources is expensive. Many, perhaps most tribes have planning departments that are supported in whole or in part with tribal general funds. With a limited ability to tax either the tribal population or business ventures on tribal land, tribal general funds are often scarce. Although the federal government bears a major responsibility for strengthening tribal institutions, there is not a single federal program currently dedicated to supporting comprehensive tribal planning activities, including data work. Given the increasing interest of tribes in conducting their own censuses and surveys, dedicated funding to support tribes in these efforts is urgently needed.

- **Tribal governments should be authorized to integrate the funds they can use for program-specific planning from individual federal programs in order to undertake more comprehensive planning and data collection efforts.**

Several federal programs provide support for strategic planning in specific program areas such as economic development and transportation. Individual service programs permit planning for their particular services as an allowable activity. Examples include the Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Tribal TANF) program, Native workforce programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG) program.

Tribal policymakers need the ability to take a more comprehensive view of the needs of the tribal population and the opportunities for more holistic solutions. Allowing tribes to combine the program-specific funds they already receive and can devote to program planning to collect data covering a variety of subjects would be a positive, cost-effective way to foster more comprehensive planning and program development efforts.

The Public Law 102-477 tribal service integration initiative shows the value in integrating services supported by multiple funding sources under a single plan, single budget and single reporting system. This approach has proven more effective than single-focus, individual program only approaches and can also be expected to achieve similar results in the planning area.

- **Intertribal forums should be expanded to enable tribes to exchange best practices with respect to the systems tribes use to collect, analyze and manage data for tribal purposes.**

Tribes learn best from the experiences of other tribes, particularly in face-to-face forums. Tribal leaders and staff know that others in similar circumstances are the best guides to solving the problems they encounter. At the moment, there are opportunities for tribes operating the same individual federal service program to learn from each other, as well as from federal staff. There are also programs that provide channels for the exchange of tribal governance best practices and knowledge. However, there appears to be no established process to enable tribes to regularly exchange experiences on the ways they have solved problems in designing and conducting their data collection and management efforts in a comprehensive way across multiple program areas. Efforts to convene tribes to discuss these efforts would have a very positive impact on tribal capacity to use data to actively improve programs and services for their communities.

- **The federal agencies should work with tribes to explore tribal data collection for federal agency as well as tribal use.**

The Department of the Interior's American Indian Population and Labor Force Report presents an excellent opportunity to explore this process. Section 17(a) of the Indian Employment, Training and Related Services Demonstration Act of 1992 (25 U.S.C. 3416(a)) requires the Secretary of the Interior to publish, not less than biennially, a report on the BIA service population, including basic data on its labor force characteristics. For some years, this American Indian Population and Labor Force Report was based largely on data furnished by tribes. This system ended with the report covering 2005.

A process of working with tribes, drawing on the expertise of tribal data technicians, combined with federal financial assistance, could provide the basis for future statutorily required reports. In addition, such a process could form the basis of a model that other agencies might emulate in using tribes to collect data for federal as well as tribal use.

Supporting tribes to conduct their own censuses and surveys was a very positive experience in this project. Supporting tribal sovereignty and self-determination is an ongoing priority, and increasing tribal data capacity is an important part of that goal. Tribes can conduct their own censuses and surveys, and deserve growing urgency in gaining support for these efforts.

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