

CLOSING THE LOOP Matters



WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT
TOOLKIT

FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Years ago, one tribal nation in the Northeastern U.S. established a higher education scholarship program to help its young people cover 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

This “scholarship for service” strategy is a growing Indian Country phenomenon. For example, one nation in the Southwest requires students to work for its economic development corporation or one of its subsidiary businesses 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.² 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.³

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 “return” on the investments they are making to develop their people (whether through vocational training, scholarship funding, or in other ways). All things being equal, the majority of those people would prefer to work and live in their tribal communities.⁴ Tribal nations can “close this loop” by deploying strategies specifically designed to fully tap into the human capacity they are cultivating with the limited resources they have. For example, tribal nations can create a strong system of incentives (financial support for education, hiring preference, competitive wages, housing, etc.) aimed at keeping tribal citizens at home or attracting them back home. They can take it one targeted step further by supporting tribal citizens in obtaining degrees, certifications, and skills in critical fields and then directly channeling those individuals into specific positions working in tribal government or businesses where they apply what they’ve learned on their nations’ behalf. Doing so not only strengthens tribal nations’ ability to leverage their human capacity in targeted ways that address community needs and advance their nation-building priorities, it enables more tribal citizens to participate in culture and community, enriching and strengthening them over time.⁵

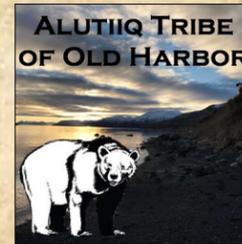


Navajo medical student Shannon Zullo and Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye at the University of Arizona, 2016. (Photo: Navajo Nation Scholarship & Financial Assistance Office)

“However long it takes to go to school, you’re going to give those years back to your tribe by signing off on our contract that 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, Human Resource Director, Tigua Inc.

INNOVATION SNAPSHOTS



ALUTIIQ TRIBE OF OLD HARBOR

Alutiiq Tribe of Old Harbor

The Alutiiq Tribe of Old Harbor claims a long tradition of financially supporting tribal members who pursue higher education. It came to realize, however, that many of its scholarship recipients not only grew up outside the Tribe’s home village on Kodiak Island, Alaska, but they “also frequently attended college in the lower 48 states and, after graduation, did not come back to the community.”¹ To ensure a greater return on the sizable investment it was making of its limited resources, Old Harbor created the Undergraduate Specialized Academic Award (USAA). Incentivizing funded students to return home to apply what they’ve learned on the community’s behalf, USAA requires them to work with Old Harbor youth for at least one summer upon graduation (in exchange for the \$500 scholarship they receive each semester). USAA not only immerses students in their village life and culture (which is critical for those who grew up outside their ancestral homeland), the Tribe also benefits from their education and skills. In addition, by engaging with USAA students, Old Harbor’s youth expand their visions of “what is possible,” inspiring them to “likewise pursue higher education.”² The Tribe also utilizes its Specialized Skill Training Award, which funds up to \$1,000 per year for tribal employees to develop professional skills that can further benefit Old Harbor.

LEARNING LINK: <http://www.ncai.org/ptg/workforce-development-oldharbor>

CONNECT: Phyllis Clough, Council Member, Alutiiq Tribe of Old Harbor, pclough01@kibsd.org



Navajo Nation

In 2016, seeking to address a critical shortage of qualified Navajo doctors to take care of 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 can be renewed after six years, gives financial aid (provided by Navajo with matching funds from UA) to fully cover the tuition, fees, and academic support costs for up to seven Navajo scholars each year as they work towards obtaining a medical degree.¹ Those scholars who complete the program are then required to return to

the Navajo Nation to serve the Navajo people for at least five years once they complete their post-degree medical residency programs. As UA sees Navajo’s commitment, “They are investing in you, and the way that you can repay them is serving the community.”² According to Navajo, “This agreement is historic for us. We have never had a relationship with any medical school anywhere in the country.”³ To further address the underrepresentation of Navajos in the medical field, Navajo Technical University (NTU) is exploring a partnership with UA to expand NTU’s healthcare professional programs for Navajo students.

LEARNING LINK: <http://www.ncai.org/ptg/workforce-development-navajo>

CONNECT: Rose Graham, Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship & Financial Assistance, rosegraham@navajo-nsn.gov

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How is your nation working to provide opportunities for its citizens to pursue careers using the education, skills, and experience that your nation is supporting them in obtaining?
- Where do your higher education scholarship recipients reside? What degrees/certifications are they obtaining, and where are they working post-graduation? Who is benefitting from their newly acquired education and skills? And does your nation have a system to track them in these ways?
- What education, skills, and experience do your nation’s citizens who live off-reservation possess? What would it take (available positions, competitive salaries, quality housing and schools, etc.) to recruit them home to contribute to the nation? How should the nation tackle this complex task?
- What specific positions in tribal government and businesses are most critical to your nation’s future, and does it have a targeted plan to train and designate individual citizens to take those positions?
- Does your nation have a handle on the local, *non-tribal* jobs that are available and will be available? What is it doing to prepare your citizens for – and then connect them to – those jobs?

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Identify and recruit young tribal citizens to consider particular careers that your nation has identified as priorities, and support them in obtaining degrees relevant to those careers.
- Establish tribal service and/or employment requirements for those citizens who receive financial support from the nation for higher education or other professional development programs.
- If aligned with your values, consider giving on-reservation citizens preference for scholarships, as they are more likely to return home to work post-degree.¹
- Gear your workforce development programs to build human capacity in the particular fields where locally available jobs (including those with non-tribal employers) are (or will become) most plentiful.
- Implement a tracking system to follow degree-seeking citizens and match them to those jobs.²
- Foster an environment that honors/welcomes citizens who leave the nation to get an education to return (this involves educating the community about the benefits the nation gains from their return).
- Designate recent graduates to serve as professional mentors/role models to your nation’s youth.