



Grand Ronde member Daniel Freeman receives auto mechanic training through the Tribes' 477/TVR program. (Photo: Grand Ronde/Michelle Alaimo)

FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Many tribal nations are plagued by a dynamic called the “silo effect.” A legacy of outsiders calling the shots in tribal communities, the silo effect is evident in a lack of communication, coordination, cooperation, and common goal-setting between the various departments and programs in tribal government. For each new initiative the federal government created to support workforce development and related services, for example, came the establishment of a tribal program or office to administer it (JTPA, NACTEP, TERO, TVR, WIOA, etc.). Over time, this has produced fragmented bureaucracies where programs dedicated to some aspect of developing workforce do their work separately, or worse, at cross-purposes. To complicate matters, in the self-governance era, some 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, and the wasteful spending of limited financial resources. And because programs rarely communicate or work together, they can't comprehensively address community needs or grow what does work across the organization. Conversely, research by NCAI and others finds that nations who develop *integrated systems* which coalesce workforce development and related activities around a singular set of *tribal* goals enhance their ability to make life-changing differences for tribal citizens.² This requires eradicating programmatic silos, and often, consolidating programs into larger, centralized programs or “umbrella” departments or divisions. It also demands structural coordination and communication between that system and other parts of tribal government, notably: its economic development arm (and tribal businesses), education department (to ensure a “cradle through career” workforce development continuum), and social service programs (GA, LIHEAP, TANF, etc.).

How a nation creates such a system is *its sovereign choice*, and should be based on its needs alone. 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*.³ 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.”⁴ 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 that provides person-centered, “wrap-around” services enables you to holistically assess all of a client's needs, instantly connecting that person to the suite of services they need to get on the right path.

“It would not have happened if it didn't come from the tribal council, because they had to say, ‘Enough of the turfism. All your programs are going together and you have one goal.’ They gave us just that much of a light, and then we took it from there.”

– Arlene Templer, Director, Department of Human Resource Development, CSKT

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are your workforce development and related programs working together to the degree necessary to successfully advance the nation's workforce development priorities? To provide person-centered, wrap-around services effectively to people in need? Why/why not?
- Do key staff members of your workforce development and related programs (GA, TANF, etc.) meet or communicate regularly to discuss, strategize about, and coordinate shared work? What mechanisms can you put in place to enhance that communication/coordination?
- Does the nation have a singular workforce development mission it expects all programs to advance?
- Ask yourself: “If we were to design – from scratch – our own income support, employment and training, and related programs (such as child care, transportation services, low-income health insurance programs, and even economic development), what would the system look like?”
- What steps does the nation need to take to create such a system? And how can it marshal the political will, technical expertise, and community support necessary to take those steps?

INNOVATION SNAPSHOTS



Blackfeet Manpower (BMP) (Blackfeet Nation)

Established in 1964 as the Blackfeet Nation's workforce development arm, BMP became the first certified Native American One-Stop Center in the U.S. in 2007. It did so to consolidate its resources and be more responsive to the pressing needs of Nation members living on and around Blackfeet's reservation, which contends with a 70% unemployment rate. Serving more than 2,200 welfare recipients, BMP offers “a comprehensive set of services under one roof”¹ (including AmeriCorps, Child Care, Child Support Enforcement, Fatherhood, GA, Medicaid, NACTEP, Teen Pregnancy, Tribal TANF, TVR, Veterans, and WIOA). The linchpin of BMP's system is its universal application, administered by a single case worker who is assigned to each client and assesses his/her job-readiness challenges and then routes that person to the customized suite of services they need. Pooling and leveraging dollars from DOI, DOL, HHS, and other sources, BMP also operates a centralized database that tracks its clients' progress over time, collating and analyzing data from its component programs and then sharing the results with those programs so that everyone knows how individual clients are doing, how well their programs are performing, and how they can perform better.²

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

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Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC)

Years ago, CITC comprehensively examined the overall yet varied needs and desires of its program participants to move from dependency to self-sufficiency. Through 477, it merged its job and career-readiness programs with its Child Care, CSBG, GA, TANF, and related programs to create a unified approach that meets “people where they are and help them help themselves to achieve their endless potential.”¹ At its core is CITC's intake form and process, which has enabled it to provide services in a more holistic, culturally competent, and efficient way. The approach offers a “no wrong door” ease of service for clients seeking assistance, enabling them to tell their story once and then get “cross-referred” to any other programs under CITC's workforce development umbrella that would be helpful to getting them on the road to gainful employment.² In the past five years, its integrated approach has helped nearly 2,000 participants transition from welfare to employment and produced an average increase of \$7.81 in their hourly wage.³ As CITC explains, it's “allowed us to allocate more funding to direct services, and both philosophically and financially better align programs with local needs.”⁴

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

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Evaluate the level of collaboration between your workforce development and related programs to ensure they are coordinating and communicating with one another. Identify gaps and weaknesses, and implement steps to establish/strengthen the working relationships between them.
- Build “inter-agency” teams across programs to enhance your ability to provide holistic wrap-around services to those in need of workforce education, training, and other types of support. They should meet regularly to design joint work, assess progress, and craft solutions to strengthen services.
- 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 programs so that you can comprehensively address your people's needs.
- Design a long-range plan for an integrated system. Remember it doesn't need to happen all at once. Build it step by step, program by program, as you learn from experience and build your capacity.