



# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT:

## Nez Perce Tribe

Like other Tribal Nations across the country, NPT operates a Tribal Employment Rights Office (TERO) that enforces tribal laws and provides services to ensure “Nez Perce citizens have their rightful share of employment, training, and other economic opportunities.”<sup>1</sup> Exercising NPT’s sovereignty, its TERO charges a fee of 3.5% on construction- and forestry-related project contracts and subcontracts exceeding \$15,000 within its jurisdiction.<sup>2</sup> Unlike many other Tribal Nations whose TERO fee revenues go into their general funds with a *portion* then reallocated back to their TERO offices, NPT law mandates *all* funds “received from TERO fee payments shall go into a revolving fund to be used by the TERO Office to pay for the implementation of [NPT’s] Ordinance.”<sup>3</sup> This approach has helped NPT TERO to be 100% fiscally self-sufficient, enabling it to use 5% of its annual budget to support its TERO Commission and 10% of its TERO Fee revenue on “Service to Participants,” which includes purchasing work attire and safety gear for clients and covering the costs of their Heavy Equipment and Commercial Driver’s License trainings and training-related lodging and meals.<sup>4</sup> With its TERO FEE revenue covering its base operating budget, NPT TERO strategically pursues other funding sources to launch targeted workforce development initiatives that NPT leaders and citizens have deemed most important. These include the Tribal Youth Apprenticeship Program (TYAP), which NPT TERO established in 2023 to advance NPT’s strategic priority to “expand Career Technical Education (CTE) and academic credit offerings for area secondary students.”<sup>5</sup> Funded in part by TERO Fee revenue and heavily supported by recurring grants from the State of Idaho, TYAP runs a five-week heavy highway construction academy twice a year that provides local youth ages 16 to 24 with hands-on, industry-relevant skills; many are subsequently hired by local employers, including NPT’s Housing Authority and several construction companies.<sup>6</sup> NPT’s budgetary approach also has enabled NPT TERO to build up a \$4 million reserve fund, which can cover its annual operating budget for three years should other funding sources dry up.<sup>7</sup>

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### **RELATED RESOURCES**

[Nez Perce Tribe TERO \(Facebook page\)](#)

[Nez Perce Tribal Code Title 9 - Indian Preference in Employment and Contracting](#)

[Nez Perce Tribal Employment Rights Office Compliance Plan & Agreement](#)

[Nez Perce Tribal Employment Rights Office/TERO Youth Apprenticeship Program \(TYAP\)](#)

[Idaho County Free Press: Youth Apprenticeship Program: Tribe efforts to build skilled workforce](#)

[American University Center for Environmental Policy: Workforce Development through Internships: Lessons from the Nez Perce Tribe](#)

[Nez Perce Téecukwenwees Career Center](#)

[Nez Perce TERO Skills Bank Application](#)



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<sup>1</sup> Nez Perce Tribe (NPT), “Law and Justice” webpage (<https://nezperce.org/government/law-and-justice/>, accessed April 11, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> NPT, Nez Perce Tribal Code, *Title 9 - Indian Preference in Employment and Contracting*, Subchapter §9-1-3, p. 1 (<https://nezperce.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/TITLE-9.pdf>, accessed April 15, 2025). According to the Nez Perce Tribal Code, with the approval of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee (NPTEC), NPT TERO also “may apply this Title to other employers and contractors within the jurisdiction of the Tribe, taking into consideration the size of the employer or contract and the resources available to the Office” (Ibid). NPT increased the TERO Fee percentage from 2.5% to 3.5% in 2022 “to keep pace with the rising costs of staff salaries, benefits, and service delivery” (Melvin Wheeler, TERO Director, Nez Perce Tribe, Conversation with NCAI, April 7, 2025). For projects totaling \$350,000 or less, the full TERO Fee is due at the start of the project; for projects exceeding that amount, half of the TERO Fee is due up front, with “a payment schedule for the remaining balance of the TERO Fee” that must be submitted with the project’s TERO compliance plan for approval (NPT TERO, *TERO Compliance Plan & Agreement*, p. 1 (<https://www.nezperce.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Current-TCP110816.pdf>, accessed April 8, 2025)).

<sup>3</sup> NPT, Nez Perce Tribal Code, *Title 9 - Indian Preference in Employment and Contracting*, Subchapter §9-1-19, p. 7; Wheeler, Conversation with NCAI, April 7, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Wheeler, Email correspondence with NCAI, March 28, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> NPT, *Nez Perce Tribe Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy | 2022-2027: Setting a Pathway to Economic Resiliency*, June 22, 2022, p. 10. NPT identified a lack of adequate apprenticeship opportunities as a weakness in its 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy process in 2022, which lead to its formulation of a strategy to “expand collaboration and interaction among economic development efforts, workforce training programs, and tribal businesses to better promote training activities and provide expanded opportunities. Tribal internships, job training programs and apprenticeships within high wage, in-demand occupations and industries, including all tribal entities as well as encouraging small businesses to utilize Workforce Development Training Funds (WDTF) from Idaho Department of Labor (IDOL)” (NPT, *Nez Perce Tribe Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy | 2022-2027: Setting a Pathway to Economic Resiliency*, June 22, 2022, pp. 28, 42-43).

<sup>6</sup> Wheeler, Correspondence with NCAI, March 28, 2025; NPT, “Youth Apprenticeship Program: Tribe efforts to build skilled workforce,” *Idaho County Free Press*, January 8, 2025 ([https://www.idahocountyfreepress.com/community/youth-apprenticeship-program-tribe-efforts-to-build-skilled-workforce/article\\_45f1eb2c-cd38-11ef-8e91-672a19445e9b.html](https://www.idahocountyfreepress.com/community/youth-apprenticeship-program-tribe-efforts-to-build-skilled-workforce/article_45f1eb2c-cd38-11ef-8e91-672a19445e9b.html), accessed March 10, 2025); NPT TERO, “Nez Perce Tribal Employment Rights Office/TERO Youth Apprenticeship Program (TYAP): Nez Perce TERO/TYAP Accomplishments Summer 2024-March 2025,” PowerPoint presentation, 2025 slide 9. TYAP trained 20 youth participants in its Fall 2024 session and another 15 in its Spring 2025 session. NPT TERO provides youth a stipend to support their participation in the program (Wheeler, Correspondence with NCAI, March 28, 2025). It provides certifications in heavy equipment operation, hazardous materials response, OSHA construction safety, and First Aid/CPR; “additional training includes blueprint reading, land grading, and forklift operation. Graduates leave with skills that are transferable to careers in construction and infrastructure development” (NPT, “Youth Apprenticeship Program: Tribe efforts to build skilled workforce,” *Idaho County Free Press*, January 8, 2025). According to NPT TERO staff, “This program is a key step toward building a stronger, skilled workforce to enhance the economic resilience of the Nez Perce Reservation. We are committed to equipping our youth with the training they need to succeed in high-demand industries” (Ibid).

<sup>7</sup> Wheeler, Conversation with NCAI, April 7, 2025.