

FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

The governance and service delivery systems of many Tribal Nations and Native organizations have long been plagued by an insidious dynamic often called the **silos effect**, which is an enduring legacy of outsiders like the federal or state governments calling the shots and supporting workforce, economic, and community development the ways they see fit in Native communities. The silo effect fuels a lack of communication, cooperation, coordination, and collective goal-setting and advancement between the various departments and programs in tribal government and with other Native organizations serving the community. It sustains a status quo within Tribal Nations and Native organizations where the norm is for programs to work alone, with no requirements or incentives to work *together*.

This dynamic is particularly pervasive in workforce development. Since the 1950s, the federal government has devised and launched – often without substantive input from Tribal Nations and communities – a host of disconnected initiatives and programs designed to develop the Native workforce. Some have been exclusively confined to Indian Country (e.g., **NACTEP, 477**), while others include Native people as part of larger national policy mandates (e.g., **JTPA**). Some are broad (e.g., WIOA), while others target specific population demographics with particular workforce challenges, needs, and goals (e.g., Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation). Typically, however, they were designed by federal policymakers and bureaucrats as stand-alone programs with no structural or institutional commitment to collaborate with other federally funded programs serving Native communities. Worse yet, they are administered by a multitude of different federal agencies (**ED, DOI, DOL, HHS**, etc.) with no policies or processes in place to systematically coordinate their efforts to ensure they collectively serve Native communities effectively.

Over the past six decades, this dynamic has produced fragmented tribal government and Native organization bureaucracies, where programs dedicated to various aspects of workforce development do their work separately, redundantly, or at cross-purposes. To complicate matters, some Tribal 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, the wasteful spending of limited financial resources, and needlessly limiting the number of Native people being served. And because programs rarely communicate or work together, they can’t comprehensively address community needs, holistically assess and support the workforce development needs of individual Native people, or grow what does work across the organization.

“Once staff understand the advantage to their programs and the people they work with, they become a lot more open to the idea of integration.”

– KIM CARROLL, FORMER GRANTS & COMPLIANCE DIRECTOR, CAREER SERVICES, CHEROKEE NATION²

Conversely, research by NCAI and others finds that Tribal Nations and Native organizations who develop *integrated* systems that coalesce workforce development and related activities around a singular set of self-defined goals enhance their ability to make life-changing differences for Native people.³ This requires eradicating programmatic silos and, often, consolidating programs into larger, centralized programs or “umbrella” departments or divisions.

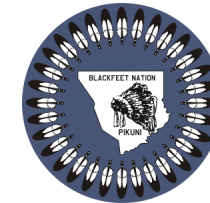
For Tribal Nations, it also demands structural coordination between that system and other parts of tribal government, notably its economic development arm (and tribal enterprises), education department (to ensure a “cradle through career” workforce development continuum), and social service programs (**GA, LIHEAP, TANF**, etc.). For example, more and more are leveraging 477 “to develop and execute a shared vision for how the resources can be applied most effectively based on their geographic and labor market contexts...It is also a valuable example of how public systems can be aligned and services streamlined when budget barriers are reduced.”⁴

How a Tribal Nation creates such a system is *its sovereign choice* and should be based solely on *its* needs. 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.⁵ 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.”⁶ 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 providing person-centered, **“wrap-around” services** enables you to comprehensively assess all of a Native person’s individual and familial needs and instantly connect that person to the suite of services they need to get on the right path.

ASK YOURSELF

- ▶ Do we have a singular workforce development mission that all of our programs are charged with advancing *together*?
- ▶ Is/how is the silo effect currently impacting our workforce development approach, and what can we do to address it?
- ▶ Do any of our workforce development or related programs practice **turfism**, and how can we neutralize that dynamic by requiring or strongly incentivizing programs to work together so we can achieve intergration?
- ▶ Are our workforce development and related programs working together to the degree necessary to successfully advance our long-range workforce development priorities? To provide person-centered, wrap-around services effectively to people in need?
- ▶ Do leaders and staff of our workforce development and related programs (GA, TANF, etc.) meet or communicate regularly to coordinate shared work and eliminate duplication of services? What mechanisms can we create to enhance that coordination?
- ▶ If we were to design our own, coordinated workforce development system of support for Native people (see page 6), what would that system look like, and why/in what ways would it be fundamentally different from the approach we currently have?
- ▶ What steps do we need to take to create such a system? How can we marshal the political will, technical expertise, and community support necessary to take those steps?

INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS



Blackfoot Nation

Launched in 1965 as the Blackfoot Nation’s workforce development arm, Blackfoot Manpower became the country’s first certified Native American One-Stop Center in 2007. It did so to consolidate its resources to more effectively address the pressing needs of Blackfoot members on and around Blackfoot’s reservation, which contended with a 70 percent unemployment rate. Today, Manpower provides a comprehensive set of interconnected education, training, work experience, job placement, family strengthening, and supplemental services “under one roof”¹, many of which are included in Manpower’s 477 Plan.² Comprising most of its annual budget, Manpower’s blended 477 funds enable it to prioritize “planning and delivering services instead of maintaining individual service budgets”³ and flexibly direct resources to its areas of greatest need. Manpower provides its centralized services at its main campus in Blackfoot’s population hub of Browning and two satellite offices serving Blackfoot’s outlying communities.⁴ Manpower’s “ease of accessing services”⁵ is exemplified in its universal intake application, administered by a single case manager who assesses each client’s job-readiness challenges and then connects that person to the customized, culturally grounded suite of services they need to address them.⁶ Manpower maintains MOUs with several tribal entities to ensure community members’ needs are seamlessly served; for example, Blackfoot’s Child Support Enforcement Program automatically channels its clients to Manpower to determine what workforce development and other related services they require.⁷ The One-Stop Center also provides specialized services – including transitional housing – to members of the armed forces to support their transition from active duty to veteran life, and serves citizens of other Tribal Nations through a TANF service contract with the State of Montana.⁸ Manpower’s staff and partners contribute client data to a shared system that tracks clients’ progress, how its services are performing, and how they can be improved.⁹ To further increase service effectiveness, Manpower recently adopted a universal case management approach where case managers are cross-trained in all services so any one of them can immediately work with any new client, “instead of being connected to a specific case manager based on service need.”¹⁰

LEARNING LINK: <https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/blackfeet.pdf>

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Red Lake Nation (RLN)

A leader in the tribal self-determination movement, RLN established its own workforce development programs in the mid-1970s.¹ However, for the next 25 years, these programs remained largely disconnected from one another due to their different federal and state funding sources; they also struggled to holistically address RLN members’ distinct workforce development needs or fully align with their cultural values and lifeways. In response, in 2000 RLN launched Oshkiimaajitahdah (“A New Path”), a consolidated approach that educates families “to discover their strengths as individuals”² by “breaking down the barriers” that stand in the way of self-sufficiency.³ Under Oshkiimaajitahdah’s umbrella are 22 programs – six within RLN’s 477 Plan and the other 16 seamlessly run as side-by-side programs.⁴ A “true one-stop”⁵, Oshkiimaajitahdah provides “fully integrated” workforce development and related services “at all stages” through a single, centrally located facility “where community members who are unemployed or underemployed can prepare for work.”⁶ These services are coordinated through weekly meetings of all connected programmatic leaders and Oshkiimaajitahdah’s universal TribeVue case management system, which enables all staff to update and track each client’s progress in real time. Oshkiimaajitahdah heavily emphasizes facilitating “the growth of business, investment and jobs,” which receives “the highest priority for the use of all available employment and training resources.”⁷ Its streamlined approach flexibly channels resources into solutions tailored to community needs, such as the hiring of a career development specialist who connects clients with area off-reservation employers and teaches them how to start their own businesses.⁸ It also has launched targeted trainings in auto repair through its full-service auto shop (where clients learn the trade servicing tribal vehicles) and food production through food producer trainings and its Ashangewin Catering (where they learn about food-based businesses).⁹ Oshkiimaajitahdah recently expanded TANF to a four-county service area surrounding RLN.¹⁰

LEARNING LINK: <https://www.ncai.org/workforcedevtoolkit/rln.pdf>

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POLICY TIPS

- ▶ Evaluate the degree of collaboration between your workforce development and related programs to ensure they are coordinating with one another. Identify gaps and weaknesses and implement steps to strengthen their working relationships.
- ▶ Build an overarching institutional “culture of collaboration” within your workforce development system that rewards working together and centering Native people in service delivery (and discourages “the administration of *distinct* programs”).⁷
- ▶ Build “inter-agency” teams across programs to provide holistic, wrap-around services to those in need of workforce education, training, and other supports. They should meet regularly to design and advance joint work, assess progress, and craft solutions.
- ▶ 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 related programs so that you can comprehensively address your people’s needs.
- ▶ Design a long-range plan for an integrated system and build it step by step, program by program, as you learn from experience and build your capacity (remember: it doesn’t need to happen all at once).