

CHALLENGES TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: A WORKSHEET EXERCISE

Below is a categorized list of the common challenges Tribal Nations and other Native-led workforce developers face as they work to build robust Native workforces. NCAI compiled this list through ongoing consultation with tribal leaders and Native workforce development practitioners that play or have played direct roles in building Native workforces. We note that the variety and gravity of challenges that each Tribal Nation or other Native-led workforce developer faces are different, and that not all contend with every challenge mentioned below.

Step 1: To help you identify, prioritize, and address the challenges you face, “check” the significant challenges you currently confront.

Step 2: Review your checked challenges and rank the 10 most-pressing challenges by placing the ranking number next to the check mark.

Step 3: Write your top 10 challenges in the box at the bottom of this worksheet and compare them with the challenges selected and ranked by your colleagues. Discuss your combined rankings with your colleagues to inform where you focus your workforce development energy.

COMMUNAL CHALLENGES

- ☐ Longstanding, severe local unemployment
- ☐ Low labor force participation among local Native people
- ☐ Inadequate “living wage” job opportunities
- ☐ Lack of permanent, career-based jobs
- ☐ Few job opportunities outside of tribal government and tribal enterprises
- ☐ Limited local higher education, vocational training, and professional development options
- ☐ Inadequate financial and technical assistance for existing and aspiring Native entrepreneurs
- ☐ Native workforce not qualified for senior-level jobs working for Tribal Nation or elsewhere locally
- ☐ Increasing costs of higher education
- ☐ Inadequate housing suitable for career-based professionals (or short-term housing for workforce trainees)
- ☐ Lack of broadband infrastructure to support remote work and distance learning
- ☐ “Brain drain” dynamic (see toolkit Glossary)
- ☐ Lack of community readiness to inform, support, and participate in Native-led workforce development initiatives
- ☐ Fear of failure and taking risks based on past failed efforts

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

- ☐ Absence of specific laws, codes, and policies needed to support self-determined, comprehensive workforce development efforts
- ☐ Overly bureaucratic and inefficient tribal government that hinders advancement of workforce development initiatives
- ☐ Tribal “self-administration” of federal programs
- ☐ Counterproductive/overly rigid federal policies and regulations
- ☐ Imposition/use of federal/state workforce development models and criteria to gauge programmatic “success”
- ☐ Limited capacity to generate/analyze/use local workforce and labor market data for informed decision-making

PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES

- ☐ Program “turfism” (see toolkit Glossary)
- ☐ Lack of/ineffective communication/coordination between workforce development and related programs (silo effect)
- ☐ High turnover rate among leadership and staff
- ☐ Lack of succession planning processes for key positions
- ☐ Overly bureaucratic/inefficient client intake process(es)

POLITICAL CHALLENGES

- ☐ Political interference in the day-to-day administration of workforce development programs
- ☐ Nepotism-based hiring practices in tribal government and nation-owned enterprises
- ☐ Disconnect between your Tribal Nation’s strategic plan and its workforce development activities (or lack of a strategic plan)
- ☐ Workforce development priorities change when tribal leadership changes

SOCIAL CHALLENGES

- ☐ Deep, longstanding poverty
- ☐ Low education attainment levels
- ☐ Inadequate/countercultural local education systems
- ☐ Lack of preparedness for higher education
- ☐ Lack of industry-required hard skills, credentials, and work experience
- ☐ Limited/lack of soft skills
- ☐ Workforce readiness challenges (ex: substance misuse, mental/behavioral health issues, criminal records, lack of driver’s licenses, past work experience issues, etc.)
- ☐ Dependency mentality/lack of work ethic
- ☐ Entitlement and other negative workplace attitudes
- ☐ Native individuals’ lack of self-confidence in their own abilities
- ☐ Lack of trust among tribal citizens/other local Native people in each other’s abilities
- ☐ Absence of professional role models
- ☐ “Crabs in the bucket” dynamic (see toolkit Glossary)
- ☐ Predatory lending targeting Native people that robs them of financial assets
- ☐ Lack of accessible, reliable, affordable childcare and transportation for Native workers and trainees
- ☐ An aging existing Native workforce
- ☐ A rapidly growing Native population

RESOURCE CHALLENGES

- ☐ Inadequate/unstable federal and/or state funding
- ☐ Limitations on how outside funding can be spent
- ☐ Excessive and burdensome funding reporting requirements
- ☐ Lack of discretionary funding that your Native-led workforce development entity controls and deploys
- ☐ Lack of accurate federal, state, and regional workforce data

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