



INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT: Native Workforce Partners

As with the rest of Indian Country, COVID-19 severely disrupted service delivery by Native workforce development entities across New Mexico. Determined to enhance and expand their services as the Native communities they serve recovered economically from the pandemic, these entities banded together in 2022 to form New Mexico Native American Workforce Partners (NWP).¹ Established through a seed grant from the LANL Foundation, NWP consists of 12 WIOA Section 166 grantee programs in New Mexico and at Ysleta del Sur Pueblo in Texas as well as four New Mexico-based 477 programs.² Its purpose is to empower the institutional capacity and know-how of its members and leverage its collective voice to strengthen state policy and increase available resources through structured collaboration.³ With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and technical assistance from New Mexico Community Capital, in 2023 NMNAWP developed a strategic plan featuring several key goals, among them: (1) supporting the professional development of its members' program staff; (2) increasing knowledge sharing between members about effective program design, administration, and evaluation; and (3) increasing members' access to funding opportunities to enhance and expand their programs.⁴ NWP launched its regular training series in early 2024, with topics including strengths-based leadership, project management, case management, organizational-level critical thinking, and team building (future topics include understanding labor market trends, grant writing/management, and data analysis/reporting).⁵ Meanwhile, through quarterly meetings, NWP has laid a solid foundation for partnership with the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, targeting Summer 2025 for the signing of an MOA that would create a mechanism for regular, *genuine* consultation between the two parties with an eye towards ensuring NWP members receive an equitable share of state dollars for workforce development.⁶ NWP also plans to develop specialized programming for Native youth and produce videos and digital stories educating philanthropy about the positive impacts its members make and how they could increase those impacts (e.g., increased high school graduation, credential attainment, and long-term employment rates) through greater investments in them.⁷

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¹ Native Workforce Partners (NWP), *Strategic Plan Developed for the New Mexico Native American Workforce Partners: Planning activities from August 2023 to December 2025*, Poston & Associates, LLC, 2023, p. 5.

² NWP, “Building Tribal Workforce Capacity with Philanthropy,” PowerPoint Presentation, National Indian and Native American Employment and Training Conference, Orlando, Florida, May 15, 2024, slide 3. “LANL” is the acronym for the Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation.

³ According to NWP, its mission is to “Empower advocates for Native Americans in New Mexico, by collaborating across communities and with partners to share resources, to promote self-sufficiency, and to ensure our people thrive at home and in their career” (NWP, “Building Tribal Workforce Capacity with Philanthropy,” May 15, 2024, slide 4). In its 2023 Strategic Plan, it explains that NWP members “work together to achieve the shared objective of fostering resilience and instilling hope in local communities by severing oppressive cycles for empowerment and the reclamation of Native American identity. This is accomplished by removing systemic barriers, creating opportunities for career path planning, and fostering self-reliance and self-advocacy in the pursuit of financial security” (NWP, *Strategic Plan Developed for the New Mexico Native American Workforce Partners*, 2023, p. 7).

⁴ NWP, *Strategic Plan Developed for the New Mexico Native American Workforce Partners*, 2023, p. 11. NWP frames the purpose of its Strategic Plan in this way: “By supporting Native families to attain greater economic self-sufficiency and stability, this investment will address systemic barriers and its associated challenges, such as higher rates of poverty and unemployment, inadequate housing, and limited access to healthcare. Furthermore, investing in the future of Native American communities will ensure the continuity of their invaluable languages, cultures, and traditions and the vitality of Tribal sovereignty and self-determination” (Ibid., p. 5).

⁵ Poston, p. 27.

⁶ According to NWP leadership, “To address past misunderstandings, where informal grantee meetings were incorrectly labeled as tribal consultations, our MOA will provide explicit criteria for determining when a genuine tribal consultation has occurred” (Bernadette Panteah, Co-Chair for 477, NWP, Correspondence with NCAI, August 9, 2024). NWP also plans to have the MOA support the establishment of a “co-enrollment system” between Native and non-Native WIOA grantees “that offers comprehensive support to individuals enrolled in federally recognized tribes by leveraging state and tribal WIOA funds. This approach would enable grantees to include these individuals in their participant database and reporting requirements” (Ibid.).

⁷ Ibid.; NWP, *Strategic Plan Developed for the New Mexico Native American Workforce Partners*, 2023, p. 10.