



INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT:

Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

For years, Red Cliff’s workforce development efforts were hampered by poor federal data that painted an inaccurate picture of its workforce and hindered its ability to secure adequate funding to grow that workforce in self-determined ways.¹ In response, in 2018 Red Cliff conducted its first Tribal Census of reservation households to “support program design,” “assess the efficacy of newly developed programs, attract funding from a diverse array of sources, and...deepen cooperation between tribal leadership and tribal departments and programs.”² It also sought to gather precise data about Red Cliff’s “employment landscape, challenges, and opportunities.”³ Deployed over several months, the Census generated a 97% response rate through a multifaceted campaign featuring online and paper survey options, Census staff going door to door to help Band members complete surveys, promotional door hangers, gift cards to tribal businesses, and chances to win larger raffle prizes for participating.⁴ Among its key data points: a 23% unemployment rate, available jobs highly concentrated in tribal programs and Red Cliff’s casino, Band members’ strong desire for “new, different, or additional employment,” and pervasive childcare and transportation challenges presenting barriers to training and employment.⁵ The Census directly informed Red Cliff’s member-driven, 20-year Comprehensive Plan, which includes goals of partnering with higher education institutions to create education and training opportunities for Band members, recruiting Band members recently graduated from college for tribal jobs, instituting effective employee retention strategies, and creating a “no wrong door” approach to workforce development service delivery across governmental divisions.⁶ Administered again in 2023 to provide Red Cliff with longitudinal data, the Census has enabled the Band to increase its federal funding base to advance community priorities, notably: building an Ojibwe language teacher/cultural practitioner workforce, a targeted investment to cultivate small business owners, construction/rehabilitation of homes for Band members, expanding their child care options beyond center-based care, establishing a 477 Program that merges a dozen federal programs, and the hiring of an Education Division Administrator to lead the 477 effort.⁷

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RELATED RESOURCES

[Red Cliff Tribal Census website](#)

[Survey Staff Delivering Door Hangers Starting December 14](#)

[Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Comprehensive Plan 2023](#)

[Red Cliff Tribal Census 2018](#)

- ¹ Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, “Red Cliff Tribal Census” webpage (<https://www.redcliff-nsn.gov/census/>, accessed September 12, 2024). For example, Red Cliff’s “historically low participation rate in the U.S. Census reflects a dire underrepresentation of the Red Cliff population and is noted in many Tribal reports”; the Red Cliff Tribal Census, meanwhile, has empowered the Band to successfully challenge federal funding decisions based on U.S. Census data, including one by the Red Cliff Chippewa Housing Authority, the Band’s Tribally Designated Housing Entity, to secure a larger funding allocation from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribal Census 2023: Final Report (Draft)*, 2024, p. 8; Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Comprehensive Plan 2023*, 2023, p. 25 (<https://cms9files.revize.com/redcliffband/Document%20Center/Comprehensive%20Plan/Red%20Cliff%20Comprehensive%20Plan%20Approved%20Feb%202023%20WEB.pdf>, accessed September 12, 2024).
- ² Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, “Tribal Census” flyer, 2023; Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribal Census 2023: Final Report (Draft)*, 2024, p. 5. As Red Cliff explains to reservation residents through its outreach effort, the data collected is used in part to “strengthen grant applications” (Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, “Tribal Census” flyer, 2023).
- ³ Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribal Census 2023: Final Report (Draft)*, 2024, p. 31.
- ⁴ Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Comprehensive Plan 2023*, 2023, p. 25; Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Red Cliff Tribal Census*, July 12, 2018, p. 6 (<https://cms9files.revize.com/redcliffband/Document%20Center/Reports/RC%20Tribal%20Census%202018.pdf>, accessed September 12, 2024). The door hangers feature unique codes for respondents to complete the Census survey online. The 2018 Census produced “a relevant, accurate, comprehensive, tribe-owned dataset about the characteristics and needs of Red Cliff residents. The Tribe sought to correct existing data, especially with respect to seasonal residents and distortions caused by their demographics and income levels. The Red Cliff Tribal Census was completed through a survey of all residential units within the boundaries of the Red Cliff Indian Reservation. 474 of 634 existing structures were determined to be habitable, occupied housing units. Project staff obtained completed surveys from 460 households, an astonishing response rate of 97.0%.” (Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Comprehensive Plan 2023*, 2023, p. 25).
- ⁵ Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Comprehensive Plan 2023*, 2023, p. 107; Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Red Cliff Tribal Census*, July 12, 2018, p. 12. For those not working in tribal programs or the casino, the 2018 Census revealed that “most of the employment is seasonal work in motels or restaurants.” A third of respondents listed childcare as a training/employment barrier, while 29% listed transportation as a barrier (Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Comprehensive Plan 2023*, 2023, p. 107). Among respondents’ top four priorities for the Band were “Increase number of stable jobs” and “Increase childcare/daycare options for tribal members” (Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Red Cliff Tribal Census*, July 12, 2018, p. 18).
- ⁶ Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Comprehensive Plan 2023*, 2023, pp. 14 and 18. According to Red Cliff, “This comprehensive plan should be considered a ‘living document’, responsive to changing conditions, opportunities, and challenges. Periodic updates to long-range plans are inevitable as changes in development patterns, economic conditions, social values or other factors may require that the plan be revised...to remain consistent with the current situation” (Ibid., p. 8).
- ⁷ Liz Boyd, Tribal Survey Manager, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Correspondence with NCAI, September 4, 2024. Red Cliff officials attribute the Band’s self-generated Census data with playing a pivotal role in securing key workforce-development related grants from multiple federal agencies, including the U.S. Departments of Commerce, Education, HHS, HUD, and Interior. For example, its Ojibwe Language Trainee program is funded through grants from Education, HHS, and Interior (Ibid.). Red Cliff’s 2023 Tribal Census produced a 90% response rate and revealed – among other findings – that the percentage of Band members with permanent, full-time jobs had increased 3.3% from 2018 and the reservation unemployment rate had decreased by 2% (Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Red Cliff Tribal Census 2023 Summary of Results*, Prepared by Big Water Consulting, 2024, pp. 1 and 4). The 2023 Census also illuminated the need for the Band to enhance its community education and outreach efforts to increase Band members’ awareness of Red Cliff’s workforce development and related services and how to access them, which the Band has begun to do (Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, *Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribal Census 2023: Final Report (Draft)*, 2024, p. 7).