



**WELFARE PEER TA WORKSHOP**  
*Strengthening Tribal/State Collaborations: Opportunities for Future Direction*  
**Polson, Montana**  
*September 25-26, 2002*

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## **Background**

To enhance Tribal/State relationships and the services provided to Indian families, the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network sponsored a 2-day workshop entitled *Strengthening Tribal/State Collaborations: Opportunities for Future Direction*. This Peer-to-Peer event was intended for personnel who are administering Native Employment Works (NEW) and/or State and Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs. Moreover, co-sponsorship was with the ACF Region VIII office and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe of the Flathead Reservation of Montana (CSKT). The Tribes attending varied in several factors including size, resources, challenges and their relationships with the states. This multi-recipient Tribal TA event was held in Polson, Montana on September 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, 2002 and included the following Tribes as well as other Federal and State representatives:

- Blackfeet
- Confederated Salish & Kootenai
- Chippewa Cree
- Ft. Peck
- Crow
- Northern Cheyenne
- Ft. Belknap
- Eastern Shoshone
- Northern Arapaho

The purpose of this 2-day Peer-to-Peer technical assistance (TA) event was to provide a forum that fostered and facilitated the Tribal/State dialogue needed to strengthen collaborations. As such it highlighted best practices in moving Tribal families toward self-sufficiency and better outcomes while providing participants with recommendations for enhancing tribal capacity within the states of Montana and Wyoming. Workshop sessions included:

- Tribes and States Working Together
- Best Practices Impacting Indian Family Well-Being
- The Role of Child Support in Family Stabilization
- Vision for the Future of Indian Families

## **Overview of Workshop Sessions**

Throughout the course of the workshop TA participants were provided a variety of research based practice recommendations and strategies to strengthen Tribal welfare services and the level of Tribal/State collaborations within Montana and Wyoming. By beginning the workshop with a chronological overview of the Federal Indian Policy Periods, participants gained a clearer

understanding of the historical background behind both the current structure of Tribal governments and the current relationship dynamics between the Federal Government and Tribes. This overview was followed by an in-depth discussion on the “Devolution Period” currently taking place. Tribes learned how the transference of power or authority from a central government to a local government could be both beneficial and detrimental to Tribes. They were urged to take action during this period of devolution by collaborating with States.

The following barriers, rationale, and guiding principals for effective Tribal/State relationships must be considered in the devolution cycle that Tribes now face in terms of public policy:

<p><b>Barriers to Effective Tribal/State Relationships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Outdated perceptions of Indian Tribes</li> <li>● Assumption that Tribal governments lack the capacity or jurisdiction for a government-to-government relationship</li> <li>● Little understanding of both Tribes and States as functioning governments</li> <li>● Tribes are hesitant to work with States</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rationale for Building Cooperative Tribal/State Relationships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There is an inevitable interdependence</li> <li>● Both government goals are the same</li> <li>● Reduces unintended consequences from State or Tribal legislative and administrative actions</li> <li>● Tribal/State relationships can be mutually beneficial</li> </ul>
<p><b>Guiding Principles in Tribal/State Relations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Commitment to cooperation</li> <li>● Mutual understanding and respect</li> <li>● Regular and early communication</li> <li>● Process and accountability for addressing issues</li> <li>● Institutionalization of relationships – Things need to be institutionalized to better ensure positive progression, outcomes, processes and relationships</li> </ul>

To further assist Tribes and States in embracing the necessity for successful collaborative relationships, participants were engaged in a facilitated interactive discussion which focused on recent research findings identifying the major challenges in moving Tribal members from welfare to work. These challenges include:

- Lack of automobiles and transit
- The increasing need for adequate child care to match the increasing number of TANF recipients going to training and work
- Low education levels and lack of work experience
- Insufficient number of jobs for welfare recipients
- Lack of safe/adequate housing
- Minimal known information on the specific health needs of TANF recipients

In addition, during other workshop sessions participants were provided with resources and materials on the following areas that impact Tribal ability to ensure better outcomes for Indian families.

*Child Support Enforcement In Indian Country*

- The importance of child support enforcement programs to the exercise of Tribal sovereign powers
- Opportunities for cooperative agreements and direct funding for tribes
- Overview of Federal requirements for child support enforcement programs
- Jurisdictional issues raised by child support enforcement
- Federal matching funds requirements

The Shoshone Tribe outlined the following critical considerations in determining to implement a Tribal Child Support Enforcement Program:

I.	<p>Impact of Policy Making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How will the community be affected?</li> <li>● Will families be strengthened and the Indian culture and traditions be protected?</li> <li>● What political barriers impede policy/program implementation?</li> <li>● Will the Tribal Council endorse child support enforcement?</li> <li>● Will these policies uphold tribal authority and sovereignty?</li> </ul>
II.	<p>Legal Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Separation of powers</li> <li>● Tribal court system</li> <li>● Federal guidelines &amp; regulations</li> <li>● Legal barriers and incentives</li> </ul>
III.	<p>Technical Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Data tracking &amp; management system</li> <li>● Genetics—The need to educate workers on genetic testing and establishing paternity</li> <li>● Ability to transfer enrollment data to other offices</li> </ul>
VI.	<p>Administrative Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Type of personnel and qualifications needed</li> <li>● Office space and tools needed (computer, phones and etc)</li> </ul>

*Current Federal Initiatives and Tribes*

Current Federal initiatives were outlined with Tribal recommendations for developing policy, programmatic and practice responses to a variety of issues including the role of faith-based organizations, adequate affordable healthcare and improving the healthy development of children. Regardless of the diversity of the Tribes in Montana and Wyoming, they were urged to formulate strategies specific to their Tribal needs while working with their state around the current Federal agenda.

*Tribes and Welfare Reform*

A presentation of the current trends in Tribal TANF program implementation and the status of welfare reform reauthorization fostered a discussion on what Tribes can do in their future planning of service provision. The core discussion points of this session included:

- The goals of TANF and innovative strategies for goal attainment
- Considerations for Tribes before implementing Tribal TANF
- The importance of TANF to Tribes
- Who are the critical stakeholders in welfare reauthorization?
- What Tribal issues are addressed in the provisions outlined within the current House and Senate reauthorization bill?
- What are the current organizing and coordinating efforts of Tribes to promote Tribal issues in Welfare Reform reauthorization?
- What can Tribal governments do to promote Indian Country in the reauthorization process?

### **Participant Reactions**

Participants felt the workshop was the beginning of a solution to a major need—increased dialogue and understanding among Tribes and States. The shared information of resources and material were extremely beneficial to Tribes as they balance a scant resource supply against an increasing need for services, whereas the States were informed of the growing issues impacting Tribes. Moreover, the recommendations and strategies discussed didn't compromise the traditions of Native American/Indian culture. The assorted sizes, needs, challenges and resources of the Tribes in Montana and Wyoming yielded discussion critical to future planning and the implementation of ideas targeting self-sufficiency for Tribal families

### **Next Steps**

Participants identified “next steps” once they returned to their reservations and home states. They included:

- Begin brainstorming innovative methods to achieve TANF goals
- Spend more time with Tribal leaders in discussing the needs of tribal members
- Identify additional opportunities for dialogue between Tribes and the States
- Highlight and build upon the strengths of the different Tribes in promoting self-determination, self-governance and self-sufficiency
- Develop strategies for tracking evidence based data and outcomes

*A more detailed summary of this workshop will be available on the Welfare Peer TA workshop. For more information about this event please contact Chandra Waddy at 301-270-0841 or e-mail [cwaddy@afyainc.com](mailto:cwaddy@afyainc.com)*