

How the National Resource Centers work with American Indian/Alaska Native Nations¹

Overall Children’s Bureau T/TA Network Purpose: The ten (10) Children’s Bureau National Resource Centers (NRCs) are part of the Children’s Bureau Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Network within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The purpose of the T/TA Network is to build the capacity of State and Tribal child welfare agencies and family and juvenile courts through the provision of training, technical assistance, research, and consultation on the full array of Federal requirements administered by the Children’s Bureau.

Goal of T/TA Network when working with American Indian/Alaska Native Nations

The goal of T/TA Network work is to collaborate with American Indian/Alaska Native Nations and our training and technical assistance partners to identify resources and effectively implement community and culturally based strategies that strengthen tribal child and family services in order to facilitate the empowerment of Native Nations to nurture the safety, permanence and well-being of American Indian/Alaska Native children, families and communities.

Philosophies concerning how the National Resource Centers work with American Indian/Alaska Native Nations: The technical assistance provided to American Indian/Alaska Native Nations by the ten (10) National Resource Centers of the Children’s Bureau T/TA Network is guided by the following philosophies:

- (1) The National Resource Centers approach our work with American Indian/Alaska Native Nations from a place of honor, respect, and mutual learning and observes tribal customs, traditions, and protocols.
- (2) The National Resource Centers recognize the inherent sovereign right and ability of American Indian/Alaska Native Nations to govern, control, design, and improve their own governmental institutions – including their own child and family service systems – in order to support the safety, permanence and well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native children and the healthy functioning of their tribal/village communities.
- (3) The National Resource Centers recognize that empowerment and solutions come from within tribal/village communities as they build upon their inherent strengths as sovereign nations since they are the source of legal authority and cultural knowledge through tribal leaders, elders, and culture-bearers.
- (4) The National Resource Centers recognize that the historic oppression of Indigenous Peoples has resulted in mistrust of not only the federal government, but also state

¹ Please note that this NRC statement on working with tribes was developed by the NRC4Tribes and the NRC for Legal and Judicial Issues at the request of the participants at a June 21, 2011 NRC meeting. It was subsequently presented to the NRC Directors for review and comment. Based upon the comments received, the draft was modified including a modification to clarify that it is a statement on behalf of all ten NRCs and not just the NRC4Tribes. Please note that this draft statement is not something that the Children’s Bureau has requested, reviewed, or approved.

governments as illustrated by the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) which included a Congressional finding that:

"the States, exercising their recognized jurisdiction over Indian child custody proceedings through administrative and judicial bodies, have often failed to recognize the essential tribal relations of Indian people and the cultural and social standards prevailing in Indian communities and families".

- (5) The National Resource Centers commit to serving as a bridge between states and tribes by assisting states to understand and appreciate the vital need for full ICWA compliance and the unique status of American Indian/Alaska Native Nations as sovereign nations that must be granted full status and authority in relationship with state governments. This unique status and resulting relationship was addressed by the Secretary of HHS, Kathleen Sebelius, in her September 14, 2011 letter to state governors:

"HHS has made significant progress in strengthening our partnership with Tribes, and Tribal consultation is one piece of our efforts to fulfill our responsibility to represent the best interests of Tribes. Since President Obama signed an Executive Order on Tribal Consultation in 2009, HHS has also updated its formal Tribal consultation policy. The updated policy includes the responsibility of states to consult with Tribes when HHS has transferred the authority and funding for programs to states that are intended to benefit Tribes. States must consult with Tribes to ensure the programs that they administer with federal funding meet the needs of the Tribes in that state. Tribes should be considered full partners by states during the design and implementation of programs that are administered by states with HHS funding".

- (6) The National Resource Centers recognize that American Indian/Alaska Native Nations often need technical assistance in order to develop systems that are truly based on their own cultural practices and ways of relating to each other in the manner they believe is appropriate for their families and tribal/village communities and that honor and respect the voices and choices of American Indian/Alaska Native families and youth. Youth are viewed as the future of American Indian/Alaska Native Nations and therefore the National Resource Centers recognize the need to engage Native youth to ensure their voices, choices, and dreams are represented throughout the TA effort.
- (7) The National Resource Centers are committed to providing resources that enable American Indian/Alaska Native Nations to consciously choose to develop systems that are either adapted to their communities/villages from systems they approve or are created/evolved from their historical family support practices recognizing those approaches may differ from state child welfare systems.
- (8) The National Resource Centers commit to identifying and working with local consultants and those with expertise in the targeted communities/villages.
- (9) The National Resource Centers commit to designing "do-it-yourself" tools that can be tailored for the needs of particular American Indian/Alaska Native Nations rather than a "one size fits all" approach.
- (10) The National Resource Centers commit to assisting American Indian/Alaska Native Nations in creating professionally accepted documentation of their systems practices that can be used as performance measures for their programs.

(11) The National Resource Centers commit to supporting the efforts of American Indian/Alaska Native Nations in providing documentation that can support delivery system changes consistent with their cultural practices.

(12) The National Resource Centers commit to working together collaboratively with American Indian/Alaska Native Nations and our training and technical assistance partners to implement the ten (10) recommendations from the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Tribes (NRC4Tribes) July 2011 Technical Assistance Needs Assessment (10 recommendations attached below).

Summarized T/TA Recommendations	
Recommendation	Implementation Strategies
Recommendation 1: <i>Support the strengthening of the tribal child welfare program infrastructure to improve practice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRC4Tribes and the T/TA Network should partner with tribes to identify gaps in infrastructure, provide T/TA to address these gaps in order to improve organizational effectiveness of tribal child welfare programs, and address the specific T/TA needs identified in the needs assessment. • In partnership with tribes, NRC4Tribes should examine and utilize innovative strategies from across the T/TA Network and the field in order to build program infrastructure and capacity.
Recommendation 2: <i>Support the use of culturally based practices in tribal child welfare</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRC4Tribes, with support from its partners in the T/TA Network, can assist tribes in developing tribally specific and culturally informed practice models that reflect the values and practices that keep children safe and connected to culture, extended family, and community. • NRC4Tribes can also assist tribal child welfare programs to articulate the cultural values and practices that underlie their programs' approaches to practice; determining whether there is relevance in identifying how mainstream child welfare practices can be modified to align with cultural values and practices, such as the different boundaries that may exist between tribal clients and tribal workers, and how these can be operationalized.
Recommendation 3: <i>Partner with the T/TA Network to support the development of MISs for tribal child welfare programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRC4Tribes can partner with the T/TA Network, and particularly the National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRCCWDT), to support dissemination of knowledge, and promote the development of MISs for tribal child welfare programs.
Recommendation 4: <i>Promote the development and maintenance of successful tribal foster care and adoption (permanency) programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NRC4Tribes can work in partnership with the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents (NRCRRFAP) at AdoptUSKids and other members of the T/TA Network to improve the program infrastructure necessary to keep children in their families and tribal communities and maintain their connections to tribal culture and tradition; assist tribes and states in an effort to work collaboratively to develop agreements that support traditional or cultural practices in foster care and adoption; and support effective implementation of Title IV-E grants.

<p>Recommendation 5: <i>Support the strengthening and improvement of tribal/state relationships</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NRC4Tribes and the T/TA Network should work with tribes and states to determine whether T/TA requests by state agencies have an impact on tribes within the state in question; develop structured mechanisms of communication; improve the ability of tribes to access Statewide Automated Information Systems (SACWIS); identify and address cross-training challenges; and address the repercussions of long-standing historical trauma and distrust.
<p>Recommendation 6: <i>Build tribal child welfare peer networks</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NRC4Tribes and its partners in the T/TA Network should identify and utilize the collective experience, skills, and knowledge of tribal child welfare programs by establishing peer networks that provide tribes with a way to assist and support one another.
<p>Recommendation 7: <i>Address workforce issues in tribal child welfare programs</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NRC4Tribes and the T/TA Network can work with tribes and tribal child welfare programs in an effort to address workforce issues such as staff recruitment and retention; professional development; agency climate and culture; and overall organizational effectiveness.
<p>Recommendation 8: <i>Enhance multidisciplinary collaboration for prevention services</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NRC4Tribes and the T/TA Network can assist tribal child welfare programs in their efforts to collaborate with community-based programs and providers in family preservation efforts and to partner with tribal and state courts to develop innovative prevention approaches that can keep children connected to family, tribe, and community.
<p>Recommendation 9: <i>Ensure a targeted T/TA that meets the individualized needs of tribes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NRC4Tribes, and other NRCs and Implementation Centers, should facilitate tribal T/TA by working collaboratively and effectively to ensure that the T/TA provided by the Network meets the individualized needs of tribes. • NRC4Tribes should develop culturally based assessment protocols; recruit, train, and support a team of American Indian/Alaska Native consultants for the T/TA Network; and help broker T/TA for the Network.
<p>Recommendation 10: <i>Partner with other federal agencies within the ACF, the BIA, and others to model effective systems of care that will support tribal child welfare programs</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NRC4Tribes and the T/TA Network should reach out to partners in other service systems beyond child welfare, such as the BIA, National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare, and the National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health, to support tribal child welfare services.