



**Findings from the NRC4Tribes  
Technical Assistance Needs Assessment:  
Guidance for the Children's Bureau T/TA Network  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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**National Child Welfare Resource Center for Tribes**

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A Service of the Children's Bureau, a member of the T/TA Network



# Findings from the NRC4Tribes Technical Assistance Needs Assessment: Guidance for the Children’s Bureau T/TA Network

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## **PURPOSE OF THE NRC4TRIBES NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

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The National Resource Center for Tribes (NRC4Tribes) needs assessment sought to explore current practices in tribal child welfare in an effort to conceptualize the unique challenges facing tribal child welfare programs better and to identify systemic and practice issues. This assessment used a variety of methods to elicit input from tribal child welfare program staff and stakeholders about program strengths, gaps, and challenges and to distill relevant information into a thorough and up-to-date profile of child welfare in Indian country.<sup>1</sup> A specific focus of this effort was to assess the types of training and technical assistance (T/TA) needed by tribal child welfare programs in areas such as practice and case management, services to children and families, administrative functions, data and information collection, program management, and reporting.

The NRC4Tribes was established in October 2009 as a member of the Children's Bureau (CB) Child Welfare Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Network, which is designed to improve child welfare systems and to support states and tribes in achieving and maintaining sustainable, systemic change that results in greater safety, permanency, and well-being for children, youth, and families. The NRC4Tribes is expected to provide consultation, training, and resources for tribal child welfare systems. As a member of the CB T/TA Network, the NRC4Tribes will become the focal point for coordinated and culturally competent training and technical assistance to tribes. The NRC4Tribes is intended to engage tribes successfully; to enhance their access to and utilization of the T/TA Network; to assess tribal child welfare needs and broker T/TA; and to facilitate peer-to-peer consultation between tribes.

The mission of the NRC4Tribes is to collaborate with Native nations and T/TA Network partners to identify and implement culturally based community strategies and resources that strengthen tribal child and family services. The NRC4Tribes is led by the Tribal Law and Policy Center (TLPI) in partnership with the Indian Child and Family Resource Center (ICFRC), the Native American Training Institute (NATI), and the Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work.

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<sup>1</sup> This needs assessment focused on federally recognized American Indian and Alaskan Native tribes. It did not include either Native Hawaiians or indigenous peoples from the American Territories since they are not federally recognized tribes. For a list of federally recognized tribes, please see Federal Register Notice Volume 75, Number 190: Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible to Receive Services from the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (available at <http://www.bia.gov/idc/groups/xraca/documents/text/idc011463.pdf>) and its supplement, Federal Register Notice Volume 75, Number 207 (available at <http://www.bia.gov/idc/groups/xraca/documents/text/idc012025.pdf>).



Needs assessment findings will help identify opportunities for the CB T/TA Network to support tribal child welfare programs in improving the quality and effectiveness of services for American Indian/Alaska Native children, youth, and families that can lead to increased safety, permanency, and well-being for children.

## OVERVIEW OF TRIBAL CHILD WELFARE PROGRAMS

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All 565 federally recognized tribes are independent sovereign nations, and as such have the right to self-governance and a responsibility to protect the health, safety, and well-being of tribal citizens. Almost every federally recognized tribe provides child protection services to children and families within its tribal boundaries, and most tribes operate their own tribal child welfare program. Some tribes also have their own tribal courts. The tribal child welfare service provision consists of a number of discrete, yet interconnected, functions that can include child protection, case management, foster care, foster home recruitment, adoption, court hearings, Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) coordination or collaboration, and referrals to other services. The provision of child welfare services by a tribe is dependent on many factors, including federal policy; state and federal jurisdiction over tribal affairs, tribal/state agreements and relationships; tribal council priorities; tribal code; and the availability of funding. Although tribes have sovereign-nation status and the right to self-governance, funding and resources for the basic welfare and the protection of American Indian/Alaska Native families is provided by the federal government.<sup>2</sup>

## METHODS

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The NRC4Tribes worked collaboratively with the CB, NRC4Tribes Advisory Council, and consultants in order to develop a multiple-method design for the assessment that included qualitative and quantitative methods. The assessment methods included a **general survey** that consisted of 85 multiple-choice questions, a checklist, and open-ended items about general tribal child welfare needs such as child welfare service provision, ICWA, legal and judicial issues, and organizational effectiveness. The survey was completed by 262 stakeholders representing more than 100 tribes. **Telephone interviews** that focused on specific program strengths and T/TA needs were conducted with 31 tribal child welfare program directors across 6 CB Regions (7 Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA] Regions) and 10 states.

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<sup>2</sup> Pevar, S. L. (2004). *The rights of Indians and tribes: The authoritative ACLU guide to Indian and tribal rights*. New York: New York University Press.



Additionally, **onsite assessments** were conducted with 16 tribes in 8 CB Regions (9 BIA Regions). Consultants traveled onsite to interview 86 tribal directors, workers, and supervisors; tribal court judges and/or attorneys; community partners and providers; client families; and foster parents in order to get a holistic and in-depth portrait of the strengths and needs of tribal child welfare programs in selected tribes. The current report presents aggregate findings across all stakeholders that emerged through qualitative analysis of interviews and open-ended survey questions, and that were supported by quantitative responses to general survey questions. These findings provide details of experiences, situations, or conditions as conveyed by the tribal child welfare stakeholders who participated in this needs assessment.

### **Participant Demographics**

More than 400 individuals participated in the NRC4Tribes needs assessment through either a survey or an interview. Survey respondents represented 95 federally recognized tribes; 13 additional respondents indicated a general affiliation with a nation or band (e.g., Cherokee or Apache but not a specific tribe) or indicated their clan membership rather than their tribe. Interview participants selected for a telephone interview or an onsite assessment represented 47 tribes. Figure 1 shows the distribution of needs assessment participants by CB Regions.

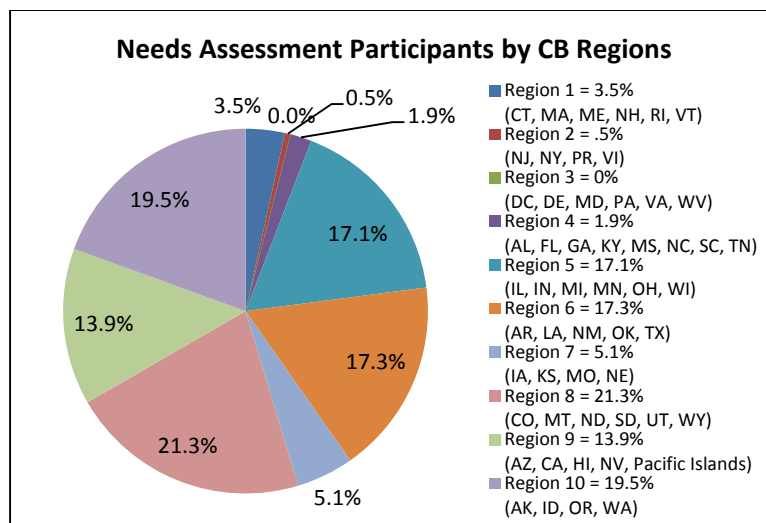


Figure 1. Distribution of needs assessment participants by CB Regions (n = 375). Please note that during data collection for this needs assessment (July–October 2010), there were no federally recognized tribes in Region 3.

These findings represent 127 federally recognized tribes that participated in the needs assessment through a general survey response, a telephone interview, an onsite assessment, or some combination



thereof. Tribal enrollment size and federal funding varied. More than half of the tribes (78 tribes or 61.4%) receive Title IV-B funding. Of the 49 tribes that do not receive Title IV-B funding, nearly half (46.9% or 23 tribes) have tribal enrollment sizes of one thousand or less.

General survey respondents and interview participants varied in their involvement with tribal child welfare. When asked about job title and/or tribal community role on the general survey, “Tribal Child Welfare Agency” received the most responses (42.8%). Within these responses, 16% were senior management staff, 14.5% were direct service staff, and 12.6% were mid-level management staff. Nearly half (48% or 126 respondents) of general survey respondents were members of the tribe in which they were employed. Of the 149 interviews done onsite or by telephone, tribal child welfare staff, including directors, accounted for 45.6% of all interviews. Twenty-six interviews were with families involved with child welfare services, foster parents, or youth (17.4%), while the remaining interviews (37%) were with other tribal child welfare stakeholders, such as judges, community providers, and law enforcement officers.

## FINDINGS

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### *Summary of Topic Areas*

Five overarching themes or topic areas were identified from needs assessment data. Highlights of findings and recommendations in each of these areas are presented below. These findings were compiled from an analysis of survey responses and interviews, and they represent the experiences and perspectives of individuals who occupy a variety of tribal child welfare program roles.

#### Needs Assessment Topic Areas

1. ***Tribal Child Welfare Practice*** addresses programs’ approaches to practice, the inclusion of culture-based services, challenges to working with tribal families and communities, issues related to the infrastructure needed to support programs, and workforce issues that include the areas of staffing, capacity, training, and development.
2. ***Foster Care and Adoption*** describes the needs of tribal foster care and adoption programs and funding, recruitment, licensing, and training matters.
3. ***Indian Child Welfare Act*** addresses collaborations with state and county child welfare programs and courts.
4. ***Legal and Judicial*** discusses tribal children’s codes, participants’ experiences working with state/county, and tribal courts and child protection/multidisciplinary teams.
5. ***Tribal Child Welfare Program Operations*** discusses participants’ experiences with tribal/state agreements and funding needed to operate programs.



### ***Tribal Child Welfare Practice***

Many tribal representatives who were interviewed felt that they needed to grow their child welfare programs in order to meet the increasing service needs of American Indian/Alaska Native families in their communities. Participants identified numerous *infrastructure elements* that are necessary for effective tribal child welfare programs and critical need areas for T/TA, including

- A documented practice model;
- A Tribal Children’s Code that aligns with the practice model, reflects the culture and value of the tribe, and meets federal child welfare requirements;
- Job descriptions and staff performance reviews;
- Formal assessment protocols and case management processes; and
- Electronic management information systems (MIS).

Many tribal child welfare program stakeholders who were interviewed recognized a need for a more formal and documented practice model, and 77% of survey respondents supported this by identifying the development of a practice model as a critical or moderate need area. A written practice model was thought to be helpful for ensuring effective and consistent practice and when establishing a tribal/state agreement or articulating the need for funding. Another advantage of a documented practice model mentioned by tribes was that it helps clarify the purpose and scope of the tribal child welfare program and helps tribal child welfare programs better communicate their purpose and values to their tribal governments, families, and community partners.

The need for improved MIS in order to track child welfare cases emerged as one of the most critical needs for training and technical assistance, with more than half of survey respondents indicating a critical need for automated case management and data systems, improved service monitoring, tracking ICWA efforts, and outcomes tracking for families (See Table 1).



Table 1. Data and Technology Needs for Tribal Child Welfare Programs from General Survey

Data Collection and Technology	N	Mean	Critical need area for T/TA	Moderate need area for T/TA	Strength area (little or no need for T/TA)	Don't know
Automated case management and data system	211	1.41	59.4% (139)	24.4% (57)	6.4% (15)	9.8% (23)
Computer equipment (hardware and software)	213	1.72	44.4% (104)	27.4% (64)	19.2% (45)	9.0% (21)
Improved service monitoring and outcomes tracking system	209	1.39	60.1% (140)	24.0% (56)	5.6% (13)	10.3% (24)
Data analysis	206	1.43	58.3% (133)	25.0% (57)	7.0% (16)	9.6% (22)
Cross-systems data sharing	205	1.40	59.4% (136)	24.0% (55)	6.1% (14)	10.5% (24)
Selecting data systems and/or data system vendors	198	1.45	54.6% (125)	24.5% (56)	7.4% (17)	13.5% (31)

Tribal Child Welfare Practice: T/TA Recommendations	
<p><b>Recommendation:</b> Support the strengthening of tribal child welfare program infrastructure in order to improve practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation:</b> Support the use of culturally based practices in tribal child welfare</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>NRC4Tribes and the T/TA Network 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.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation:</b> Partner with the T/TA Network to support the development of MISs for tribal child welfare programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 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 to promote the development of MISs for tribal child welfare programs.</li> </ul>





## **Workforce Issues**

Child welfare workforce is the area of greatest strength and greatest challenge for tribal child welfare programs. Most tribal representatives spoke of the staff's experience, skills, knowledge, ability to engage with families, and commitment to doing whatever it takes to keep families together and children safe, as being their program's greatest strength. These interviewees spoke of the cohesion of the tribal child welfare workforce and about the peer support that can help to protect against burnout and vicarious trauma, as well as how the staff relies on traditional practices to heal both families and themselves.

However, chronic and substantial lack of resources for programs has led to understaffing. Most programs are working with too few workers to handle the number of cases (including ICWA cases). Due to the rural and often-isolated geographic location of most tribal communities, programs may also have difficulty recruiting qualified candidates and providing necessary training in critical areas of child welfare practice. Moreover, child welfare workers are tasked with working within their own communities and with a population that has experienced high levels of trauma and victimization. Thus tribal child welfare workers are serving a large number of families whose members may suffer from historical and intergenerational trauma, as well as have experienced a significant amount of contemporary personal trauma, and, importantly, with whom workers share common family relationships; cultural, tribal, and community experiences; and bonds. This closeness to the children and families with whom they work puts tribal child welfare workers at a high risk for experiencing vicarious, or secondary, traumatization. Workplace stressors such as high caseloads, long hours, and a lack of resources can add the burden of burnout to the pain of vicarious trauma, and together these conditions have the potential to reduce the effectiveness of workers and threaten their physical and emotional well-being.

The greatest challenges reported by child welfare directors included:

- Child welfare staff are overworked, overwhelmed, and burned out;
- Child welfare staff is at a high risk for experiencing vicarious, or secondary, traumatization that can threaten physical and emotional well-being and work effectiveness;
- Programs have difficulty recruiting qualified candidates; and
- Programs have difficulty providing needed training in critical areas of child welfare practice.



<b>Workforce Issues: T/TA Recommendations</b>	
<b>Recommendation:</b> <i>Address workforce issues in tribal child welfare programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li></ul>

### ***Foster Care and Adoption***

The majority of tribes felt that foster care programs should be managed by the tribe in order to keep children in their families and tribal communities and to maintain their connections to tribal culture and tradition. However, as in other areas of tribal child welfare programming, resources for program operations and worker salaries; foster home recruitment; and foster parent subsidies were described as “inadequate.” In addition, rigorous state background checks and strict requirements for housing adequacy make it difficult for some tribal foster care providers to become licensed by the state. Tribal child welfare programs reported that, although many Native people are willing to take in children (and especially relative children) who need care, they are frequently deterred by the scrutiny and bureaucracy of the licensing process.

A strong concern exists on the part of a number of tribes that they cannot meet state and federal policy requirements in regard to adoption, and that some policy regulations might not support the customary adoptions and more lenient time frames for termination of parental rights that they rely on in order to keep families together. Tribal child welfare program directors, workers, foster parents, community providers, and others identified the following need areas for T/TA:

- Increased training and preparation for tribal foster parents;
- Better assessment of the needs of children being placed in tribal foster homes;
- More information for foster parents about the background and problems of the foster children being placed in their homes;
- Notification of foster parents as to the array of tribal and state/county services that are potentially available;



- Assistance for tribal foster care workers, so they may become more familiar with state/county foster care policies, regulations, and procedures;
- Ability to inform tribal foster parents more thoroughly of state/county regulations and to assist in helping them determine if they have met these requirements;
- Coordination between tribal and state/county child welfare programs to provide the most comprehensive level of support and services possible to tribal foster parents and foster children; and
- Access to resources for foster parents, especially when they are not licensed formally by the state.

Foster Care and Adoption: T/TA Recommendations	
<p><b>Recommendation:</b> <i>Promote the development and maintenance of successful tribal foster care and adoption (permanency) programs</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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 to maintain their connections to tribal culture and tradition; assist tribes and states 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.</li> </ul>

### ***Indian Child Welfare Act***

Most tribes interviewed for the needs assessment reported that states and counties comply with ICWA by notifying them when member children are taken into the custody of these departments, and very few jurisdictional disputes were reported. However, many of those interviewed felt that, in general, state/county workers did not understand or correctly interpret ICWA, and that this created a barrier to collaborating successfully on ICWA cases. In addition, state/county workers often were seen as not accepting the need for ICWA and lacking awareness of important cultural aspects and tribal processes, such as enrollment.

Many participants also expressed that tribes do not have the financial resources and staff capacity necessary to address the large number of ICWA cases in states and counties across the United States that involve their member children. T/TA is needed to foster communication between the states and tribes in order to develop mutually agreed upon strategies in regard to ICWA compliance; collaboration



between state and tribal child welfare departments on ICWA cases; and appropriate foster care services for American Indian/Alaska Native children.

Availability of tribal resources was a major consideration in whether a tribe requested a transfer of jurisdiction to the tribal court, which is a provision of ICWA. When tribes did not request transfers of jurisdiction, it was often because they could not provide the services needed by a child. Tribal participants reported that they often transferred cases in order to give families more time to complete requirements and to give tribal child welfare workers more opportunities to assist families in ways that were believed to be more culturally appropriate. Tribes also commonly transferred ICWA cases in order to avoid state courts from adopting children away from family, tribe, and community. Table 2, below, summarizes ICWA work issues and needs that were identified by participants.

*Table 2. Indian Child Welfare Act Work Issues and Needs*

Indian Child Welfare Act Work Issues and Needs
Development of tribal ICWA policies and procedures
Resources for more tribal workers dedicated to ICWA cases
Timely receipt of ICWA notifications from states and counties
Need for training of state and county workers on ICWA legal and practice aspects
Increasing state and county workers' understanding of why ICWA is needed
Increasing understanding and awareness of tribes and reservation contexts on the part of state and county workers
Increased compliance with ICWA placement preferences, especially placement with extended family and other tribal kin
Widely differing perceptions on the parts of tribal and state/county child welfare staff regarding the quality and level of state/tribal collaboration and state ICWA compliance
Continuing adoption of tribal children by non-Indians in state and county courts

Indian Child Welfare Act: T/TA Recommendations	
<p><b>Recommendation:</b> <i>Support tribes and states in their efforts to work collaboratively in order to ensure ICWA compliance and culturally appropriate services for American Indian/Alaska Native children and families</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T/TA is needed to foster communication between the states and tribes in order to develop mutually agreed upon strategies in regard to ICWA compliance; collaboration between state and tribal child welfare departments on ICWA cases; and appropriate foster care services for American Indian/Alaska Native children.</li> </ul>



## ***Legal and Judicial***

A majority of tribes participating in this needs assessment administer their own tribal court and have access to an attorney either working directly for the child welfare agency or as a staff attorney for the tribe. Many tribal courts allow lay advocates to practice as long as they are familiar with tribal law and have paid a fee. Several participants indicated the use of traditional court systems such as Peacemaking Courts. These courts are operated by the tribe and follow the tribe's customs and traditions in settling disputes among members.

Most tribal child welfare codes, especially those that have been in existence for a decade or more, are what one interviewee called a "general child welfare code," meaning that the code was modeled after a state code or the result of a general code template received from the BIA during the early years of tribal child welfare development. Many participants believed that their code still needed some type of revision to make it more specific to the tribe's culture and traditions. In addition, several participants reported that the tribe did not have a children's code but was in the process of developing one.

The majority of interview participants identified the Child Protection Team (CPT) concept as the team most widely utilized in reviewing child welfare cases. Some participants stated their CPT needed more structure to operate effectively, and that it could benefit from training regarding the roles and responsibilities of CPT members. Tribal CPTs were generally composed of tribal child welfare staff, community members, tribal enrollment, law enforcement, tribal court staff, behavioral health staff, a social service director, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, a U.S. attorney, the BIA, state or county social workers, schools, court-appointed special advocates, judges, attorneys, and prosecutors. Tribal representatives also served on county CPTs.

<b>Legal and Judicial: T/TA Recommendations</b>	
<b>Recommendation:</b> <i>Support the strengthening of the tribal child welfare program infrastructure in order to improve practice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The NRC4Tribes should assist tribes in assessing the need for modification of their children's code to meet their desired outcomes for their child welfare system and provide T/TA for developing a Tribal Children's Code that aligns with their practice model; reflects the culture and values of the tribe; and includes federal child welfare requirements.</li></ul>



## ***Tribal Child Welfare Operations***

### **Tribal/State Agreements**

Nearly half of the tribes that participated in the needs assessment that currently have a tribal/state agreement (about one-third of respondents) felt that their agreements were working insofar as the tribe agreed with the terms, the agreement was consistently honored by the state, and the tribe and state worked collaboratively to serve Indian children and families in a culturally appropriate way. These “satisfied” tribes were likely to

- Have an agreement that clarifies jurisdictional authority and how services are provided to protect American Indian/Alaska Native children;
- Meet regularly with state child welfare representatives who were part of state or tribal advisory committees, forums, or CPT/Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) groups; and
- Have a close working relationship with at least one key individual from the state child welfare system, although this relationship may have taken years to build.

*“When [our state] wrote their Indian Child Welfare laws, their Indian Child Welfare Practice Manuals, and any other agreements that they have developed or thought about or wanted to have, they have what they call Tribal Consultation, which is a real formal event where they ask input from the tribes and they allow the tribes to weigh in or out on almost everything. And while it’s sometimes tedious and sometimes hair-pulling, the alternative would be just dreadful. . . . They literally do a great job.”*  
–Tribal Child Welfare Director

Those tribes that reported challenges working with their tribal/state agreements cited a lack of communication; a lack of state/county adherence to the terms and spirit of the agreement (namely, failure of states to notify tribes as per ICWA); and issues with the agreement.

Many tribes who reported strong working relationships with their state child welfare programs credit this to a developmental process of relationship building and a longer history of collaboration, as well as motivation on the part of both the state and the tribe to work in partnership and mutual respect in order to achieve the common goal of serving children and families.



Tribal Child Welfare Operations: T/TA Recommendations	
<b>Recommendation:</b> <i>Support the strengthening and improvement of tribal/state relationships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>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.</li></ul>

### **Tribal Child Welfare Program Funding**

Funding for tribal child welfare programs comes from a variety of federal, state and local sources, including funding administered by BIA through the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 and its Services to Children and Elderly Families, funding through grants to tribal courts, and funding administered by Health and Human Services (HHS) through Title IV-B (Subpart 1, Child Welfare Services and Subpart 2, Promoting Safe and Stable Families) and Title IV-E Foster Care.<sup>3</sup> A 2004 study of selected tribal child welfare programs found that the majority of funding comes from the BIA (just under 70%), and HHS-administered funding accounted for just 25%, with 2% from Title IV-E and 7% from Title IV-B.<sup>4</sup> Although HHS funding through Title IV-B and Title IV-E is a relatively small source of funding for tribal child welfare programs, it is an important resource for tribes because it supports the operation of Title IV-E foster care programs, reimburses tribes for eligible services, and provides Title IV-E-eligible training for caseworkers and foster parents. Prior to 2008, Title IV-E funding was available directly to states but was available only indirectly to tribes through tribal/state agreements. As of 2008, there were approximately 90 tribes with tribal/state agreements, and 70 of these allowed for either maintenance, administrative, or training activities funded by Title IV-E.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-351) now allows for direct Title IV-E funding to eligible tribes for foster care, adoption assistance, guardianship placements, and independent living services. Currently, tribes may apply for a one-time grant to assist in

<sup>3</sup> From "Implementation of Promoting Safe and Stable Families by American Indian Tribes: Final Report–Volume 1," by James Bell Associates, February 27, 2004. Available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse\\_neglect/implement\\_prom/reports/imp\\_of\\_pro/imp\\_of\\_pro\\_title.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/implement_prom/reports/imp_of_pro/imp_of_pro_title.html).

<sup>4</sup> From "Analysis of Funding Resources and Strategies among American Indian Tribes: Findings from the Study of Implementation of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) Program by American Indian Tribes," by James Bell Associates, March 31, 2004, p. 5. Available at [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse\\_neglect/implement\\_prom/reports/fund\\_res/fund\\_res\\_title.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/implement_prom/reports/fund_res/fund_res_title.html).



the development of a tribal IV-E plan. Seven tribes received the initial federal planning grants to develop a direct Title IV-E plan in the fall of 2009. Four more tribes received these grants in the fall of 2010. In addition, one tribe submitted a Title IV-E plan to the CB without applying first for a Title IV-E planning grant.

*Title IV-B Funding.* The majority of the survey respondents (64%) were familiar with Title IV-B funding, and 45% reported that they currently receive Title IV-B funding. For those not receiving this funding, the primary reasons included a time-consuming application and management process (35%); a lack of information about the process (21%); eligibility (14%); and other reasons (28%), such as lack of buy in from their tribal court or state/county agencies.

*Title IV-E Funding: Through Tribal/State Agreements.* The majority of survey respondents were familiar with Title IV-E funding (68%), and 47% of respondents reported that they currently receive funding through a tribal/state IV-E agreement. Of the 45 tribal directors who were interviewed either in person or by telephone, 11 reported that they currently receive Title IV-E funding through a tribal/state agreement, and 27 reported that they do not.

*“Statistically, with the Title IV-E, it tailors to the big tribes. We happen to have a unique way. We’re still interested in getting to foster care payments, establishing foster parents. I want that to increase on the reservation.”*

*–Tribal Child Welfare Director*

*Title IV-E Funding: Through Direct Funding.* Many tribes who participated in the needs assessment stated that they were interested in learning more about direct Title IV-E funding. Others said that they were beginning to look at the feasibility of developing a Title IV-E plan. When asked about level of interest in direct Title IV-E funding in the general survey, about 22% (or 40 respondents) were definitely interested

*“We don’t have the funding to hire more staff that can be on call. Staff are needing to update training skills each year, but the funding isn’t there for staff to attend trainings, and to maybe even go to other Indian sites to see how they’re doing things, and get contacts from there.”*

*–Tribal Child Welfare Director*

while 21% (38 respondents) were definitely not interested, and 57% (106 respondents) were unsure. Several of the tribes that were interviewed shared that they were in the beginning stages of planning for eligibility to access Title IV-E funding. Some tribes that currently operate tribal/state IV-E agreements have stated that they will “wait and see” how the direct access to Title IV-E works before leaving the agreement that they currently have with their state. A number of

needs assessment participants expressed that some tribes may be cautious and want evidence of how





direct Title IV-E funding is working for other tribes before they embark on an effort to develop their own agreements to directly access this funding source.

## **SUMMARY OF TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NEEDS**

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Table 3, below, summarizes a number of areas in which needs assessment participants indicated that they could utilize training and technical assistance from the NRC4Tribes and the T/TA Network. Table 4 follows with a summary of the recommendations that are presented in the complete needs assessment findings report.

*Table 3. Training and Technical Assistance Needs Areas for Tribal Child Welfare Programs*

### **Training and Technical Assistance Needs Areas for Tribal Child Welfare Programs**

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Increasing tribal child welfare program capacity and organizational effectiveness by:

- Casework skills for addressing child and family issues;
- Incorporating tribal values, customs, and traditional practices;
- Developing or revising policies and procedures (including a Children’s Code);
- Collecting data and evaluating program operations and child welfare outcomes;
- MIS data systems and technology (software and hardware); and
- Community outreach and involvement.

Developing collaborative partnerships

- between tribal and state child welfare systems
- with community providers
- with departments within the tribe

Assistance in leveraging community, tribal, and state resources

Training in legal issues and court systems as these pertain to child welfare work

Training in practice and legal aspects of the ICWA

Assistance in heightening third parties’ (e.g., courts, tribal council, foster parents, law enforcement, and community members) understanding of child welfare work

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Table 4. Findings Supplement: Summarized Recommendations for T/TA

Summarized T/TA Recommendations	
Recommendation	Implementation Strategies
<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b> <i>Support the strengthening of the tribal child welfare program infrastructure to improve practice</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> <i>Support the use of culturally based practices in tribal child welfare</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 3:</b> <i>Partner with the T/TA Network to support the development of MISs for tribal child welfare programs</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NRC4Tribes can partner with the T/TA Network, and particularly the National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology (NRCWDT), to support dissemination of knowledge, and promote the development of MISs for tribal child welfare programs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 4:</b> <i>Promote the development and maintenance of successful tribal foster care and adoption (permanency) programs</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 5:</b> <i>Support the strengthening and improvement of tribal/state relationships</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 6:</b> <i>Build tribal child welfare peer networks</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 7:</b> <i>Address workforce issues in tribal child welfare programs</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul>



Summarized T/TA Recommendations	
Recommendation	Implementation Strategies
<b>Recommendation 8:</b> <i>Enhance multidisciplinary collaboration for prevention services</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 9:</b> <i>Ensure a targeted T/TA that meets the individualized needs of tribes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 10:</b> <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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSIONS

The information presented in these findings suggest many opportunities for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF)/CB T/TA Network to partner with tribes, at their invitation, in strengthening the capacity of their child welfare programs in order to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of American Indian and Alaskan Native children and families.

Many tribal child welfare programs find themselves at a crucial developmental stage in which they feel that they must increase their organizational capacity in order to meet the growing demand to provide services to children and families living in their tribal communities, as well as address ICWA cases that involve their member children who live in urban areas and outside the boundaries of the tribal nation. At the same time, funding, which historically has been scarce, continues to be limited or tied to programs that also require increased tribal capacity and staff oversight. Moreover, families and children face evermore complex social, emotional, and material needs that frequently require staff members to be trained in more advanced and specialized approaches to intervention and treatment.

In order to craft strategies that truly support capacity building and program improvement, it will be important to share findings and assessments with tribal communities. In this way, tribes can use the



information to better inform their own efforts to build programs and meet the child welfare needs of tribal children and families. Although a tremendous amount of information regarding the state of tribal child welfare programs and the issues with which they deal was shared in this needs assessment, notable are the issues that have been very well documented but did not emerge in this assessment. These include areas such as the prevalence of child sexual abuse in tribal communities; the dearth of resources for mental health and substance abuse treatment; the extent of ICWA noncompliance by states; and the struggles that tribal child welfare workers have in collaborating with state workers.

The NRC4Tribes needs assessment has been successful in using a culturally based approach to systematically gather information about the strengths, challenges, and needs of tribal child welfare programs. However, these findings are but the first step in summarizing this information and in building a more comprehensive foundation of knowledge about tribal child welfare programs.