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Why culture and institutions matter to developing a tribal workforce

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Why culture and institutions matter to developing a tribal workforce

Coeur d'Alene Tribe (CDA) member Angelita Soto fillets a fish during the CDA Fisheries Program's culturally rooted summer youth internship program, 2015. (Photo: Gina Vaughn)

by [NCAI PTG](#)

[Op-ed Series: Building the human capacity to rebuild tribal nations](#)

NCAI PTG

In its multi-year project examining tribal workforce development approaches across the country, NCAI's Partnership for Tribal Governance (PTG) worked to identify and document key foundational strategies that are empowering tribal innovation and, in turn, workforce development success.

Distilling lessons learned from that endeavor, PTG identified 15 strategic considerations that tribal leaders, workforce development practitioners, and other decision-makers must tackle as they craft workforce development approaches capable of achieving their definition of what "success" looks like for tribal citizens and the nation as a whole. These mission critical aspects of workforce development have a direct bearing on the ability of tribal workforce development approaches to make a transformative, sustainable difference. The following explores two of those considerations: culture and institutions.

Culture

As with Native nation rebuilding generally, *culture* (more specifically, what some scholars refer to as "[cultural match](#)") plays a vital role in self-determined, effective workforce development solutions. Tribal nations that integrate their distinct cultures, core values, lifeways, and languages into their workforce development approaches *in concrete ways* enhance their ability to move the human capacity building needle in a positive, sustained direction. This is critical when taking over programs administered by the federal and state government, because those programs don't speak to tribal cultures or tap into their transformative power as mechanisms for overcoming challenges, strengthening families and communities, and guiding clients down paths to prosperous futures.

It's no coincidence that as tribal nations have exerted full control over their governance, more and more have recast their workforce development approaches to place tribal cultures at their functional cores. This can take many forms, from core values-based customer service ("caring for our own") to providing program participants with tangible options to participate in cultural activities or education along with workforce education/training. For example, one nation's Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation program asks applicants if they would like "the assistance of a person involved with Native healing or Spirituality to be involved with [their] rehabilitation planning?" Most embrace the opportunity.

Such approaches recognize that those who seek workforce education/training often struggle with psychological trauma and cultural alienation that can only be remedied through a real connection to – and reliance on – their culture as the wellspring for personal and professional empowerment. As one workforce development practitioner explains, "When tribal members were taken away and their families split up and their children sent to boarding schools, they lost their culture. We're finding that the culture can play a huge role in helping people heal and become self-sufficient."

The culture question not only entails determining where and how a tribal nation should infuse culture *into* its workforce development approach, but just as importantly, the *culture it seeks to foster through that approach and what it says to its people about what the nation values and will value moving forward*. For many nations, this involves specific measures designed to uproot the

entrenched dependency some citizens have on the government and seed personal and familial self-sufficiency in its place. Growing this culture can be achieved in many ways, such as by: giving clients a “hand-up versus a hand-out” by requiring them to give something (for example, community service) in return for the services they receive; forging work environments rooted in humility, mutual respect, and merit-based advancement; and attaching culture and service requirements to scholarship awards.

Institutions

The institutions (constitutions, laws, codes, policies, procedures, administrative mechanisms, reporting/communications structures, etc.) that a tribal nation uses to govern play a pivotal role in its ability to forge a workforce development approach capable of achieving its definition of success. Simply put, they are the *rules of the road* that a nation chooses to live by as it builds a brighter future for itself, in large part by developing its human capacity to accomplish that goal.

When these institutions aren't well thought out – or when they were created by someone else to advance someone else's objectives – they tend to provide a weak or unstable foundation upon which to build workforce development success (or do anything else that the nation seeks to achieve). Conversely, when these institutions are deliberately *designed by the nation* with accountability, consistency, culture, fairness, transparency, and the nation's [strategic vision](#) in mind, they foster the governmental and programmatic stability and deep institutional memory and know-how that a nation needs to realize its long-range human capacity building goals.

It follows, then, that as tribal nations engage in “nation rebuilding,” they are dedicating significant time, energy, thought, and action to assessing the origins and functionality of their institutions, and taking steps to strengthen them or create new ones so that the nation's governance system is capable of accomplishing its strategic objectives. Through constitutional reform, code development, new laws, overhauling administrative policies and procedures, and other institutional measures, they are building a firm foundation upon which to craft and sustain innovative, *tribal* approaches to workforce development. As one [report](#) on tribal workforce development points out, such institution building empowers tribal nations, enhancing their ability to create “comprehensive social service systems that offer efficiencies, expand available resources, and give [them] greater flexibility and capacity to effectively serve diverse client needs.”

Institution building also helps tribal nations cultivate and retain the human capital they need to build even more of it. According to the [Native Nations Institute](#), finding and keeping capable people to develop a workforce depends not just on competitive pay, but “on creating a working environment that encourages professionalism, processes disputes fairly and effectively, and keeps politics in its place...The presence of such a system...can be a critical factor in encouraging top-quality people – tribal citizens or not – to invest time, energy, and ideas in the future of the nation instead of going to work someplace else.” As [one tribal leader](#) puts it, “Building accountability and transparency of the rules ends up being key to having equitable service delivery and equitable systems. And for our [tribal] members, the expectation that it doesn't matter who you elect, the level of service you receive and your opportunities are the same.”

For more information about how tribal nations are crafting innovative, self-governed approaches to workforce development, please click [here](#).

In part 4 of this op-ed series, NCAI’s Partnership for Tribal Governance explores two more strategic considerations for tribal workforce development: **leadership** and **funding**.

This essay is the third in a series of eight op-eds exploring the keys to success in – and the key strategic considerations for – tribal workforce development. It is drawn from a new [tribal workforce development toolkit](#) (see pages 12-15) produced by NCAI’s Partnership for Tribal Governance.

Op-ed Series:

The following five op-eds will each explore two other strategic considerations for tribal workforce development:

Op-ed #1: Tribal workforce development: Success starts with governance

Op-ed #2: Why strategic vision and integration matter to developing a tribal workforce

Op-ed #3: Why institutions and culture matter to developing a tribal workforce

*Op-ed #4: Why **leadership** and **funding** matter to developing a tribal workforce*

*Op-ed #5: Why **citizen engagement** and **assessment** matter to developing a tribal workforce*

*Op-ed #6: Why **removing obstacles** and **targeted solutions** matter to developing a tribal workforce*

*Op-ed #7: Why **closing the loop** and **advancement** matter to developing a tribal workforce*

*Op-ed #8: Why **partnerships** and **sustainability** matter to developing a tribal workforce*

“If you haven’t already, please subscribe to your local papers. Praise them when you think they’ve done a good job and criticize them when you think they could do better. We’re all in this together.” – New York Times Editorial Board

– “[Pacific islands have an obesity problem. The Tongan leader thinks a weight-loss competition could help](#)” Want to make it really interesting? How about Pacific Islanders vs. Buddhist Monks. (WaPo)

– “[War on Millennials: Southwest Is Banning Emotional Support Snakes](#)” Insert Samuel L. Jackson joke here. (VICE)

Circle of Blue

3,400 gallons Amount of water that volunteers have been hauling to wild horses in Colorado each day as drought impacts the horses' food and water supply. According to the Bureau of Land Management, between 650 and 750 horses live in Colorado's Sand Wash Basin. *U.S. News & World Report*

50 miles Length of an unexpected algae bloom in Lake Superior last week. Although it has mostly dissipated, researchers are still investigating the makeup and causes of the bloom. By the end of this week, test results should reveal whether the bloom was toxic. [*The New York Times*](#)

In context: [Circle of Blue's reporting on Great Lakes algae science, Studies, and Reports](#)

A study by Duke University found that the amount of water used for fracking throughout the United States rose by 770 percent between 2011 and 2016. Researchers also noted that the amount of wastewater produced by new wells in their first year of operation has soared by up to 1,440 percent. The study estimates that fracking's water footprint could increase by 50-fold over the next decade if water use continues to escalate. [*Science Daily*](#)

Fracking Water Use Skyrockets, Creating 1,440 Percent More Toxic Wastewater

By Alexander C. Kaufman, Huffington Post, 8/15/18

The controversial gas and oil drilling method threatens to exacerbate a looming crisis over water.

In 1902, tribal leader **Captain Jim wrote about the loss of tribal lands:** "Now on account of not having homes the Washoe Indians wander from place to place and learn these destructive habits which the white people have introduced. ... Some white men says that we have no business to drink whiskey if we know it to be dangerous, but they do the very same thing, yet they are supposed to be civilized men." (from DennisM)

National Mission

Job Corps is a no-cost education and career technical training program administered by the [U.S. Department of Labor](#) that helps young people ages 16 to 24 improve the quality of their lives through career technical and academic training. The Job Corps program is authorized by Title I-C of the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014](#) (supersedes WIA 1998). For more information about the Job Corps program at a national level, please visit our [Official Public Web Site](#).

Our Center's Mission

At Sierra Nevada Job Corps Center, we support the Job Corps program's mission to teach eligible young people the skills they need to become employable and independent and place them in meaningful jobs or further education.

Sierra Nevada Job Corps Center 14175 Mount Charleston St Reno, NV 89506-1241
Contact Us Call Job Corps today! [800 733-JOBS](#) [800 733-5627](#) [877 889-5627](#) TTY



Advanced Manufacturing

Welding

Average salary: \$36,000 per year

Length of training: 8-12 months

Participants will learn the most commonly utilized welding processes including welding terminology, weld design, welding safety, electrical theory, the weldability of metals, and welding



quality control.

[Learn More](#)

Automotive and Machine Repair

Maintenance and Light Repair Average salary: \$36,000 per year Length of training: 8-18 months

Test vehicle systems and parts, identify mechanical problems, perform basic maintenance, repair and replace parts, and interact with clients. Work on engines, transmissions, drive belts, brakes, electronic steering systems, diagnostic tools, power tools, and common hand tools. [Learn More](#)



Facilities Maintenance Average salary: \$35,000 per year Length of training: 8-12 months

Facilities maintenance workers perform routine repairs and preventive maintenance to ensure building systems operate efficiently. [Learn More](#)



Carpentry Average salary: \$35,000 per year Length of training: 8-12 months

Job Corps offers a basic Carpentry program, a Carpentry Trainee, Apprentice program through Home Builders Institute (HBI), and a Carpentry, Pre-Apprentice program through United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBCJA). All training programs are hands-on and are similar in curriculum and requirements.

[Learn More](#)



Cement Masonry Average salary: \$35,000 per year Length of training: 8-12 months

As a cement mason, your job will include filling roads, driveways, sidewalks, bridges, foundations, and parking lots with cement. You will also make concrete beams, columns, and panels. [Learn More](#)



Electrical Average salary: \$34,000 per year Length of training: 8-12 months

Job Corps offers a basic Electrical program and an Electrical Trainee, Pre-Apprentice program through Home Builders Institute (HBI). All training programs are hands-on and are similar in curriculum and requirements. [Learn More](#)



Painting **Average salary: \$35,000 per year** **Length of training: 8-12 months**
Painters prepare and paint interior and exterior surfaces on residential and commercial properties. Most painters learn their trade on the job or through an apprenticeship. [Learn More](#)



Plastering **Average salary: \$30,000 per year** **Length of training: 8-12 months**
Plastering involves applying interior and exterior plaster, cement, stucco, or similar materials to coat internal walls and ceilings. [Learn More](#)



Finance and Business

Office Administration **Average salary: \$32,000 per year** **Length of training: 8-12 months**
Office administrators perform daily duties that include financial planning, record keeping, billing, personnel, inventory, and logistics, within a business. [MoreLearn](#)



Healthcare

Certified Nurse Assistant **Average salary: \$24,000 per year** **Length of training: 8-12 months**
Home health aides are non-licensed members of the home care team that assist patients who wish to receive care in the comfort of their own home with daily living. [Learn More](#)



Medical Office Support Average salary: \$33,000 per year Length of training: 8-12 months
Medical office support staff work at the front desk of a medical office. They perform a variety of tasks vital to the operation of a medical office including dealing with patients, filing medical documents and handling insurance forms, and handling anything that comes up in a clinical office. [Learn More](#)



Pharmacy Technician Average salary: \$29,000 per year Length of training: 8-12 months
Under the direction of a pharmacist, a pharmacy technician will measure, mix, count out, label, and prepare medications. They also often interact with patients and answer their questions. [Learn More](#)



Homeland Security

Security and Protective Services Average salary: \$24,000 per year
Length of training: 8-12 months

Guard, patrol, detect, deter, observe, report, protect, and monitor premises, to prevent theft, violence, or infractions of rules. [Learn More](#)



Hospitality

Culinary Arts Average salary: \$20,000 per year Length of training: 8-12 months

A culinary artist wears many hats including chef and cook. They are responsible for not only making the food taste great but making it look fabulous as well. [Learn More](#)



Hotel and Lodging Average salary: \$20,000 per year Length of training: 8-12 months

A wide range of roles exist in the hotel and lodging industry, from servers and chefs to housekeepers and concierges. Those who can do these jobs well will always be employed.

[Learn More](#)

And if you have a chance to go their \$13/three course “Fine Dining” lunch is a real treat.

There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow men. True nobility lies in being superior to your former self.” – Ernest Hemingway

Strategies for Sustainable Food Systems in Smart Cities By Henry Gordon-Smith

In addition to the needs on the entrepreneurship side, it also became readily apparent that the urban farming industry is siloed and frequently disconnected from the outside world. To address this we have created workshops and conferences that focus on bringing people of diverse backgrounds together and introducing urban agriculture to a wider audience than just ag-tech entrepreneurs. [Read Article](#)

[Ryan Zinke Tells California How To Stop Wildfires: Cut Down Trees](#)

By Mary Papenfuss, Huffington Post, 8/13/18

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke traveled to California on Sunday with advice on how to stop the state’s destructive wildfires: Remove trees from national forests.

[Ryan Zinke blames ‘environmental terrorist groups’ for severity of California wildfires](#)

By Erin B. Logan, Washington Post, 8/15/18

Wildfires strike California every year. But they’re getting worse, causing deaths and uprooting communities. But who is to blame for these increasingly destructive wildfires?

According to Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, it’s “environmental terrorist groups.”