



2020 Regions IX and X Virtual Tribal TANF and NEW Technical Assistance Meeting
Building Capacity to Support Families in a New Reality
December 8–10, 2020

2020 Regions IX and X Virtual Tribal TANF and NEW Technical Assistance Meeting

Summary Report



Table of Contents

Overview	2
Day One – Tuesday, December 8, 2020	2
Welcome and Opening Remarks.....	2
Session 1: Expanding Your Program’s Capacity to Pivot in Response to COVID-19.....	3
Session 2: Rethinking the Office – Peer-to-Peer Guided Discussions.....	6
Day Two – Wednesday, December 9, 2020	8
Keynote: Priority Issues in Tribal Communities’ Health and Well-Being	8
Session 3: Identifying and Planning for Employment Opportunities in a COVID-19 Reality	9
Session 4: Preparing Participants for New Post-COVID-19 Opportunities	12
Day Three – Thursday, December 10, 2020.....	16
Listening Session with Divisional Tribal TANF Management, OFA Leadership, and Regional Staff.....	16
Session 5: Client Case Management in the Time of COVID-19	18
Session 6: Strategies for Identifying and Interrupting the Impact of Trauma in Caseworkers and Managers	20
Meeting Closing and Prayer	22



Overview

On December 8-10, 2020, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA), held the *Building Capacity to Support Families in a New Reality* virtual meeting for OFA Regions IX and X Tribal TANF and NEW programs. This meeting granted representatives from Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Native Employment Works (NEW) programs in Regions IX and X the opportunity to learn about promising practices and actionable implementation strategies to support families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the course of the meeting, attendees received presentations from experts and program administrators and participated in peer-to-peer guided discussions, breakout sessions, and a listening session with OFA leadership. Over 120 TANF and NEW representatives attended the meeting.

This report summarizes highlights from the *Building Capacity to Support Families in a New Reality* virtual meeting.

Day One – Tuesday, December 8, 2020

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Presenters:

- **Julie Fong**, Regional TANF Program Manager, Region IX, Office of Family Assistance
- **Clarence H. Carter**, Director, Office of Family Assistance

Prayer given by:

- **Rebekah A. HorseChief**, Federal Project Officer, Division of Tribal TANF Management, Office of Family Assistance

Julie Fong opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the first virtual Regions IX and X Tribal TANF meeting. She began her welcome with a land acknowledgement and encouraged attendees to research what indigenous lands on which they reside. Rebekah HorseChief provided the blessing, which acknowledged tribal elders, spiritual connectedness, and the importance of female leadership in tribes. Ms. Fong thanked attendees for their hard work and ability to adapt during a challenging year and introduced OFA Director, Clarence H. Carter, to give the opening remarks.

Mr. Carter welcomed participants with a call to use TANF funds to uplift vulnerable families. Programs should veer away from focusing simply on delivering services to helping participants grow beyond reliance on safety net services. Mr. Carter highlighted that OFA and its Regional staff have worked hard to keep programs running smoothly and towards the goal of family self-sufficiency. His vision for OFA



includes decreased need for safety net services as individuals and families move toward long-term self-sufficiency.

Mr. Carter also addressed the nearing end of his term as Director of OFA. He thanked everyone at OFA for their hard work and dedication during his time as Director and stated that he is looking forward to seeing what the TANF program continues to do for economically and socially vulnerable individuals and families. He ended his remarks by encouraging the audience to remember that though their jobs can be tough, their work is essential and important to help individuals and families meet their needs.

Session 1: Expanding Your Program's Capacity to Pivot in Response to COVID-19

Presenters:

- **Irene Flannery**, Director, Critical Infrastructure, AMERIND
- **DeeAnn Harris**, South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency (SPIPA)
- **Amber Young**, California Tribal TANF Partnership (CTTP)

Moderator:

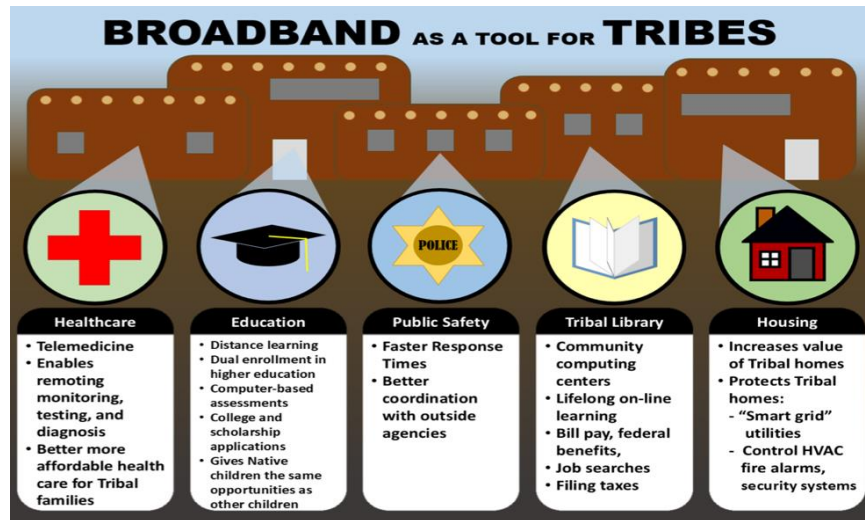
- **Julie Fong**, Program Specialist, Region IX, Office of Family Assistance



2020 Regions IX and X Virtual Tribal TANF and NEW Technical Assistance Meeting *Building Capacity to Support Families in a New Reality* December 8–10, 2020

Irene Flannery set the context of this session by providing an overview of the utility and accessibility of broadband to tribal populations, highlighting key federal programs providing broadband, and discussing AMERIND’s efforts to increase the availability of broadband on tribal land. As an essential tool for tribes, broadband enables the provision of critical services such as telemedicine, first-response services (e.g., paramedics), tribal libraries, community computing centers, and increases the value of tribal homes. Furthermore, distance learning and electronic health records require high-speed broadband, which is expensive to provide (see **Figure 1**¹).

FIGURE 1: BROADBAND AS A TOOL FOR TRIBES



To illustrate the availability of broadband on tribal land, Ms. Flannery pulled data from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). According to the FCC:

- 30 percent of tribal residents do not have access to high-speed broadband.
- 50 percent of rural tribal residents do not have access to high-speed broadband.
- 30 percent of tribal residents do not have consistent connectivity.
- Nine percent of tribal residents have no broadband connectivity at all.

She then explored the causes of significant disparities in broadband connectivity on tribal lands when compared to non-tribal lands, organized into two categories, 1) deployment and accessibility, and 2) adoption and affordability. The first category refers to the lack of construction of fiber networks on tribal lands; without the physical fiber networks present, there is no way broadband can be established. The second category, adoption and affordability, refers to the need for services to be affordable to allow

¹ Image inserted from PowerPoint slides provided by Irene Flannery, AMERIND.



for equity in access to broadband. Stay at home orders and financial strain due to the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated both challenges.

Ms. Flannery highlighted three federal programs which aim to increase the availability and affordability of broadband on tribal land:

- [Federal E-Rate Program](#): The E-Rate program provides discounts on the cost of broadband service and construction of fiber networks to elementary schools and libraries. It is available nationwide. AMERIND has worked with the Federal E-Rate program to bring funding to tribally owned fiber networks and tribal communities.
- [The Universal Service Fund](#): The Universal Service Fund is made available through taxes collected by the FCC. Lifeline, a phone service often provided by social safety support programs, is funded by this stream. Lifeline offers services specific to tribal needs.
- [2.5 GHz Rural Tribal Priority](#): The 2.5 GHz Rural Tribal Priority Window was an opportunity for tribal lands to obtain tribally owned Spectrum licenses. It was made available to federally recognized tribes. This opportunity gave tribes control over their own service provision and provided them with a bankable economic asset.

To provide a practitioner perspective, DeeAnn Harris shared strategies SPIPA has implemented to adapt the provision of services to clients, transition to remote work, and streamline client intake processes to keep up with increased caseloads during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- [Transitioning to remote work](#): To offset the initial overload of federal and state information at the start of the pandemic, SPIPA assigned staff to take notes during federal conferences, listening sessions and webinars, and held debriefs to organize and comprehend key guidelines. They also ordered laptops and other home office equipment so staff could work from home and established a VPN network to ensure client and organizational confidentiality. Acknowledging increased stress levels among staff, leadership also began to hold check-ins to assess staff and program needs.
- [Streamlining client intake procedures](#): SPIPA designated primary and secondary case managers to streamline client intake procedures. The first case manager conducts the initial client intake and the second case manager processes the application paperwork. Forms were made digitally available and fillable, and the SPIPA team merged paperwork on eligibility criteria. They began to accept forms and signatures verbally over the phone and in the form of emails and texts. In addition, they streamlined services by assigning one staff member to track all service requests and route them to the appropriate staff for approval.
- [Supporting public health in office spaces](#): First, SPIPA redesigned their office intake area. This included setting up an isolated side door where only clients enter and exit. Second, they stocked their offices with sneeze guards, Lysol wipes, masks, gloves, and zero contact thermometers. Finally, for clients without the equipment and tools to manage their cases virtually, the team set up socially distanced tables outside the office where clients can fill out intake paperwork.



- Amplifying and adapting services to clients: SPIPA sent clients surveys by mail and phone to assess their needs and barriers related to managing their cases virtually. They shifted their mindset away from their pre-pandemic long-term goals on workforce development to a crisis management mindset, which was focused on providing participants with the basic services they need immediately. SPIPA’s TANF program began providing virtual parenting workshops such as Parenting Café, placed recordings on YouTube to increase accessibility, and helped clients restore their driver’s licenses virtually.

To close, Amber Young from CTPP provided an overview of cybersecurity and shared a few of the strategies her organization has implemented to ensure client and organizational confidentiality during the COVID-19 era, when a great deal of information is shared electronically.

Ms. Young shared strategies CTPP has used to enhance security, including the use of DocuSign for the collection of client documents. She suggested Dropbox or similar platforms for digitally storing client files, a document sharing website which organizations can pay for monthly to account for changing work from home orders. In addition, CTPP will be implementing “Mind Cast,” a tool that allows for the easy encryption of emails. Programs need to be especially careful of cyberattacks, which have targeted some tribes during the pandemic. It is important to train staff on links they should and should not be clicking, as 65 percent of cyber breaches are internal.

Cybersecurity is defined as the application of web security tools and staff training around web security measures; this includes the practice of defending laptops, servers, mobile devices, electronic systems, networks, and data.

Session 2: Rethinking the Office – Peer-to-Peer Guided Discussions

Moderator:

- **Jennifer Senechal**, Program Specialist, Region IX, Office of Family Assistance

This session provided time for a peer-to-peer discussion of the topics and resources discussed in Session 1, *Expanding Your Program’s Capacity to Pivot in Response to COVID-19*. Jennifer Senechal provided some time for attendees to ask any questions about Session 1 and introduced Session 2. Participants were then randomly assigned to a breakout room with a facilitator that provided a series of guided questions to encourage discussion among participants.

A summary of the questions and answers discussed within the breakout rooms is provided in **Table 1**.




2020 Regions IX and X Virtual Tribal TANF and NEW Technical Assistance Meeting
Building Capacity to Support Families in a New Reality
December 8–10, 2020

Table 1: Peer-to-Peer Discussions on Rethinking the Office		
<p>Pick one idea, resource, or experience from Session 1 that resonated with you. Are there any lessons from this that you might apply to your TANF/NEW program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find ways to digitize processes that do not require personal contact. • Help staff recognize that email can be a gateway to security breaches. • Focus on strategies for making cybersecurity stronger for tribes. 	<p>What is one strategy you may have used already to make virtually engaging with clients more effective, and what is one strategy you would try to apply in the future?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement virtual welcome packets for clients. • Transition to a paperless intake process. • Adapt classes to be engaging, family-oriented, and virtual. • Streamline processes to complete tasks in one sitting. • Utilize online meeting platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. 	<p>What are some challenges that come with staying virtually connected to clients and working from home? How has your organization adapted to these challenges?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding safe ways for clients to send in information if technology access/broadband is an issue. • Securing laptops for all staff. • Varying levels of digital literacy across staff and clients. • Ensuring the digital safety of confidential information. • Varying access to technology/computer access among staff and clients.
<p>What innovative opportunities or partnerships exist in your area to address client’s needs? Do these strategies address digital inclusion? How might resources increase access to the tools and skills needed to be successful in a digital environment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School partnerships help programs get laptops or tablets to clients and their children. • Partnerships with other tribal and non-tribal programs meet the technology needs of clients. • Grantors and non-profits help fill in resource gaps. A virtual environment can make it easier to connect with new partners (in some cases). 	<p>Are there practices your program has adopted in response to the pandemic that may become permanent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to process grants, reports, and other documents digitally. • Virtual trainings and options for virtual signatures for clients. • Installation of sneeze guards or plexiglass in program offices. 	<p>What lesson have you learned that might be beneficial to another program, director, or manager?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek waivers to address job search requirements. • Virtual job fairs have been very beneficial for multiple programs. • The shift to a virtual workforce has created opportunities for tech literacy among staff, clients, and tribes as a whole.



Day Two – Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Keynote: Priority Issues in Tribal Communities' Health and Well-Being

Presenters:

- **Stan Koutstaal**, Ph.D., Division Director, Tribal TANF Management and Regional Operations, Office of Family Assistance
- **Denise Edwards**, M.A. (Tuscarora Nation), Branch Chief, Division of Tribal TANF Management, Office of Family Assistance

Moderator:

- **Julie Fong**, Program Specialist, Region IX, Office of Family Assistance

Dr. Stan Koutstaal began the keynote session by reviewing federal guidance for continuing the provision of TANF services as outlined in the TANF-ACF-PI-2020-01 [document published on the OFA website](#).

Below are key guidelines for tribes to consider:

- Programs must make an amendment any time they change their program plan. Typically, this must be done 30 days in advance of the change; however, considering the pandemic, ACF is suggesting tribes seek preliminary approval from their Regional Program Manager via email to obtain retroactive approval for program changes.
- ACF cannot waive work requirements, but it can grant relief from any penalty that would result from not meeting requirements. ACF is committed to granting relief from penalties to the greatest extent possible.
- Non-Recurrent Short-Term Benefits (NRST benefits) may be used to provide families with immediate short-term cash assistance. Tribes may define what a needy family is for benefit eligibility; however, they should note that broadly citing the COVID-19 pandemic is not sufficient evidence of a crisis. NRST benefits are designed to deal with a specific crisis or episode of need, are not intended to meet recurrent or ongoing needs, and do not extend beyond four months. Acceptable crisis criteria include things such as purchasing laptops for distance learning and covering hotel fees resulting from fire damages to property.

In addition to discussing TANF adaptations amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Koutstaal spoke about the prevalence of missing and murdered Native Americans and federal actions to address this crisis. He explained that the rate of violent victimization among native communities is very high; 81 percent of women and 84 percent of men have reported experiencing violence in their lifetime. The Social Determinants of Health predisposing native communities to high rates of violence include psychological/emotional vulnerability and economic instability.



President Trump signed an Executive Order for a task force to address the crisis of missing and murdered American Indians. ACF contributed to the task force framework and plans to continue to contribute to the coordination of HHS policies and programs to help Native Americans address this tragic problem. Dr. Koutstaal also mentioned that TANF practitioners can use TANF funds for preventative activities.

Session 3: Identifying and Planning for Employment Opportunities in a COVID-19 Reality

Presenters:

- **Theresa Lujan**, Director, Indian and Native American Employment Rights Program (INAERP)
- **Evette Cullen**, Tribal Liaison, Nevada Department of Health and Human Services
- **Mike Yoder**, Workforce Development Manager, Nevada Department of Health and Human Services
- **Isla Young**, Senior Program Development & Engagement Specialist, Governor's Office of Workforce Innovation (OWINN), State of Nevada

Moderator:

- **Elma Reber**, Region IX Program Specialist, Office of Family Assistance

Theresa Lujan began the session with a discussion of federal and programmatic efforts to connect Native Americans with jobs. At the federal level, the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) works to protect workers, promote diversity, and enforce the law. OFCCP holds those who do business with the federal government (contractors and subcontractors) responsible for complying with legal requirements including affirmative action and not discriminating based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, national origin, disability, or status as a protected veteran. OFCCP offers compliance assistance to federal contractors, conducts compliance evaluations, and conducts complaint investigations.

The Indian and Native American Employment Rights Program (INAERP) serves as a liaison between federal contractors and Native Americans seeking employment. INAERP was created in 2013 and advances awareness of employment rights and job opportunities for American Indians and Alaska Natives who work for or seek employment with companies doing business with the federal government. The program assists with establishing relationships between federal Native American community recruitment sources where federal contract work is being performed. For example, INAERP works with the construction industry to connect Indian and Native American job seekers with employment opportunities in their communities. They are continuing this work virtually when possible.

Federal contractors and subcontractors are encouraged to extend a publicly announced hiring preference to Indians living on or near Indian reservations or other recognized tribal lands in connection with employment opportunities on or near those lands. Preferences in hiring can be publicly stated on job postings, radio, newsletters, and tribal meetings.



Evette Cullen discussed social supports to tribes located in Nevada. There are 27 tribes in Nevada, and six of them are serviced via tribal health clinics by Nevada’s Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) including TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid. Because many of the tribal nations are not geographically accessible, Nevada DHHS extends TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid benefits via virtual consultations. Nevada DHHS uses state-issued cell phones to contact clients and connect them to as many eligible services as possible, especially during the pandemic. In closing, Ms. Cullen highlighted the importance of networking and partnerships as fundamental to program success.

Mike Yoder built on the information shared and discussed Workforce Connections, Southern Nevada’s local workforce development board. He emphasized that workforce boards are essential to effectively engaging employers to build job opportunities for individuals in Nevada. Engaging with workforce boards can be a useful strategy for tribes who are looking to create new employer partners and employment opportunities for tribal members. He also shared that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Workforce Connections acquired 200 laptops to distribute amongst their partners to provide clients with the tools they need to seek and participate in jobs and job training. This example highlights that local workforce development boards can assist tribal programs not only with employment opportunities and employer partners, but also with critical digital resources.

Also from Nevada, Isla Young outlined the OWINN’s key focus areas related to workforce development. OWINN was created in 2016 to serve as a statewide workforce coordinating agency tasked with collaborating with K-12 education, postsecondary education, business and industry, and the publicly-funded workforce system. OWINN is focused on the following high-growth industries: healthcare, advanced manufacturing, information technology (IT), logistics, and skilled trades. There are multiple opportunities for tribal communities to partner with and connect with OWINN, along with funding opportunities such as apprenticeship and work-based learning mentor grants.

Session 3 Breakout Sessions

This session concluded with to peer-to-peer discussions. Participants were randomly placed into breakout rooms to discuss and reflect on lessons learned and how strategies can be applied for individual contexts. Facilitators in each room asked questions to help guide discussion among participants. A summary of questions and answers is included in **Table 2**.




2020 Regions IX and X Virtual Tribal TANF and NEW Technical Assistance Meeting
Building Capacity to Support Families in a New Reality
December 8–10, 2020

Table 2: Peer-to-Peer Discussions on Employment Opportunities in a COVID-19 Reality

<p>When assessing employment opportunities impacted by COVID-19, what obstacles has your program faced and what strategies have you used to respond?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted surveys to assess level of comfort with various jobs because participants were hesitant about re-entering workforce due to COVID-19. As COVID-19 cases went down, this strategy allowed program to scale up placements based on client comfort levels. • Expanded virtual resources, including virtual workshops and “Cell-Ed,” an employment-based program. • Used time to focus on increasing basic skills training, including basic computer skills. • Received support on how to use Adobe Standards including the creation of forms; now teaching clients how to use these tools. • Moved to Microsoft Teams; allows for better connection and communication teams. • Supplemented with co-funding; would like more info on what is allowable regarding this in the future. 	<p>Think about one local industry, occupation, or employer that changed their business model resulting from COVID-19. How might this industry/occupation/employer be engaged to provide new opportunities or paths for employment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used former restaurant staff to deliver take-out food and orders to keep them employed. • Adapted application process to engage clients virtually in activities what were previously classroom-based. Trained existing staff to perform these new roles. • Used CARE funds to have a person at the front of office check temperatures, ensure mask compliance, distribute hand sanitizer, and conduct a health and safety survey. • Partnered with casinos who have been hiring for front health and safety desk roles. • Created online job fair to engage employers with Zoom info sessions.
<p>Are there additional partnerships that might be beneficial to your program or clients? What might they be and why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to develop partnerships with local schools and colleges (which are a great resource for internship programs). • Have data staff partner with digital providers, including database providers, to better facilitate use of technology considering the pandemic. • Consider any new industries that may have moved to the area recently (do not keep the same list of employer partners for multiple years). • Partner with Rotary and other community service organizations. Networking through service clubs has been very effective for finding employer partnerships. • Learn more about one-stop eligibility processes on reservations and how this is done. 	<p>Has your TANF/NEW program (and/or plan) changed since the start of COVID-19? Do you have any updates which may be useful for other programs?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added procedures for clients to get help with electronics as a supportive service, which they did not have before. • Worked with contractor who issues Chromebooks to participants, helping them get discounted pricing. • Switched to virtual classes (basic computer skills, workplace skills, tech literacy, etc.). • Offered incentives for clients to earn money for a laptop/phone (e.g., for perfect virtual class attendance). • Provided training for clients to learn to fix and repair computers, providing them in-demand skills.



Session 4: Preparing Participants for New Post-COVID-19 Opportunities

Presenters:

- **Katy Ciotti**, TANF Director, The Morongo Band of Mission Indians
- **Drew Hanson**, Director of Academic Success, Salish Kootenai College
- **Ryan Howard**, Executive Director, Owens Valley Career Development Center (OVCDC)
- **Andrew Hanson**, Director of Academic Success, Salish Kootenai College
- **Katy Ciotti**, TANF Director, The Morongo Band of Mission Indians

Moderator:

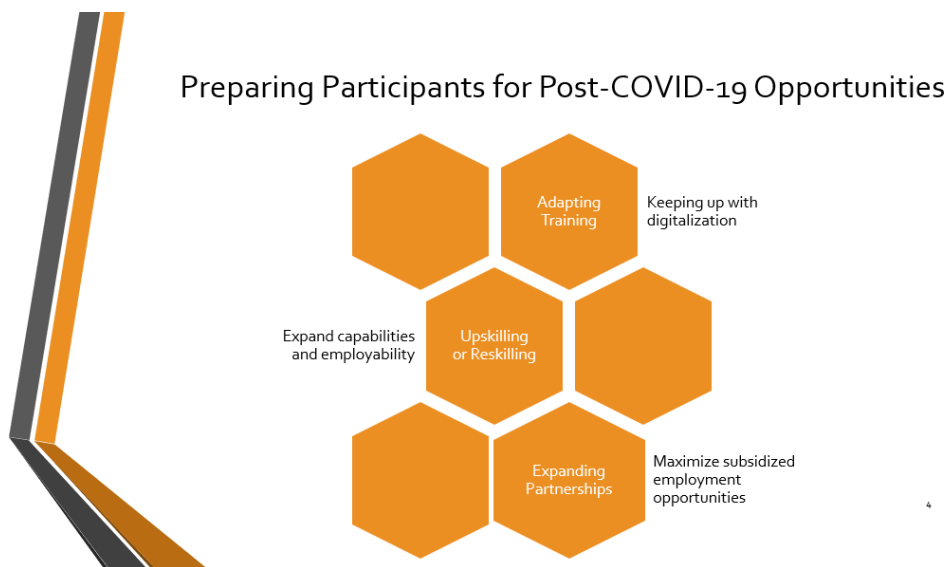
- **Patrick Heiman**, Program Specialist, Region X, Office of Family Assistance

Katy Ciotti shared an overview of the Morongo Tribe's TANF caseload, including strategies the Tribe implemented to pivot employment and training services in a post-COVID environment. Morongo's average caseload is about 110 clients. Of that average caseload, Morongo typically provides 68 to 78 percent of participants with TANF assistance. In addition to standard TANF cash assistance, Morongo also provides diversion and emergency NRST benefits. To address evolving needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, Morongo has shifted and scaled their programs toward remote work and pivoted the services they provide participants to account for increasing digitalization and automation in the labor market.



Morongo has identified three core areas to better adapt the employment training services they provide: adapting training, upskilling/reskilling, and expanding partnerships (see **Figure 2**²).

FIGURE 2: MORONGO'S STRATEGIES FOR PREPARING PARTICIPANTS FOR EMPLOYMENT POST-COVID-19



To ease the transition to remote work and service provision, Morongo has increased their technological equipment and provided supportive services and incentives to staff. They have also increased staff training on video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Facebook Live, and YouTube. On the user-end, they have moved core work activities over to virtual services including education, work readiness, career development, and job placement services.

To conclude, Ms. Ciotti shared insights around leveraging partnerships. She suggests programs be strategic in the partnerships they foster; partnerships should be aligned with the skills and interests of participants, focus on small businesses which tend to render higher success rates, set clear expectations with potential partners, and be flexible to meet employers' needs by designating a central contact person and modifying placements and reimbursement processes as needed.

Drew Hanson explored the impacts COVID-19 has had on higher education through his experiences at Salish Kootenai College. From his perspective, higher education was already unhealthy prior to COVID-19. For example, the cost of college was rising, there was a disconnect between higher education and well-paying jobs, and there were significant equity issues. COVID-19 has forced the education industry to accelerate communication and organizational processes and do whatever it takes to avoid student

² Image inserted from PowerPoint slides provided by Katy Ciotti, The Morongo Band of Mission Indians



2020 Regions IX and X Virtual Tribal TANF and NEW Technical Assistance Meeting

Building Capacity to Support Families in a New Reality

December 8–10, 2020

dropouts during this crisis. Given this rapid shift, higher education at Salish Kootenai College has experienced several advantages and disadvantages, which are outlined in **Table 3**.

Advantages to higher education amid COVID-19	Disadvantages to higher education amid COVID-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highest student enrollment in several years between spring and fall semesters at Salish Kootenai College due to increased virtual offerings, as well as more evening classes. This led to increased access for students to materials and information.• Automation and digitalization of many processes.• Increased availability of student support services, including tutoring and mental health services.• Heightened urgency for having conversations about difficult changes. For example, Salish Kootenai College realized they were only offering a small number of evening classes; this pushed colleges to re-think accessibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Varied quality levels between new and adapted services because of rapid shifts.• Exacerbated digital divide among students.• Limited access to the technology necessary to participate in virtual learning.• Current lack of long-term solutions; funding for startup costs for newly adapted services is not sustainable.• A crisis mentality meant that big projects for the College are put on the back burner.

Mr. Hanson concluded by discussing his views on next steps for colleges in the COVID-19 era. He hopes efforts to increase accessibility and the availability of technological infrastructure will be scaled and remain as lasting changes. He anticipates traditional colleges will be forced to consider stackable degrees and flexible timelines, which would allow students to stop classes and return when they are able.

Ryan Howard concluded this session by sharing strategies that OVDC has implemented prior to and amid the COVID-19 pandemic to respond nimbly to challenges. He pointed to the fact that OVDC is located within extreme geography that exposes tribal members to huge temperature differences, unpredictable weather patterns, extreme altitudes, and rapid seasonal changes. As a result, residents have had to learn and practice resilience for thousands of years.

OVDC has provided short-term education and certificates linking to employment opportunities since 1976. They also carefully track job growth areas and focus on establishing and maintaining partnerships to account for varied geographies (rural, urban, rancherias, and reservations) in which participants work. Amid COVID-19, OVDC has modified curriculum to virtual delivery formats.

To close, Mr. Howard discussed participant services provided through OVDC's American Indian Apprenticeship Initiative. These services include intensive construction and green energy training for current and future workforce opportunities and partnerships with local trade unions and other workforce stakeholders. OVDC creates contract agreements to ensure employers will hire participants upon completion of their training. After completing the curriculum, TANF participants are placed in jobs with union contractors for pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeship training. This allows them to ultimately exit TANF programs due to increased wages and benefits.




2020 Regions IX and X Virtual Tribal TANF and NEW Technical Assistance Meeting
Building Capacity to Support Families in a New Reality
December 8–10, 2020

Session 4 Breakout Sessions

This session concluded with peer-to-peer brainstorming discussions. Participants were randomly placed in smaller breakout rooms with facilitators, who guided the discussions. A summary of questions and answers recorded in the breakout rooms is included in **Table 4**.

Table 4: Peer-to-Peer Discussions on Preparing Participants for Post-COVID-19 Opportunities	
<p>Are there new opportunities for career pathways programs considering the pandemic, or existing opportunities that may be worth pursuing? What steps might you take to formalize career pathway partnerships for your Tribal TANF program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify an applicant pool and to set up partnerships. • Match skills attainment with prior work experience. • Ensure flexibility of recruitment standards. • Consider new methods of engagement with partners. • Think about subsidized employment as a valuable option to induce hiring. • Engage employer partners in teleconferences to identify their needs; understand that employers face a learning curve too. 	<p>What are some strategies for linking clients to virtual employment and training opportunities? How do you encourage participant interaction with these activities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with both community colleges and tribal colleges (whichever are available) to create work participation activities for participants. • Reach out to colleges and get involved in CEU programs for potential work participation credits. • Create a sense of routine by establishing specific service themes on a specific day of the week. For example, Monday is homework support, Tuesday is skill building, Wednesday is work readiness, Thursday is mental health, and Friday is emergency preparation. • Provide participants with incentives for completing online training. • Allow participants time to break out and meet with employer partners during virtual career fairs. Participants value one-on-one time with employers even when it is in a virtual setting.
<p>What questions should your office ask when assessing whether a partner is a good fit for your community and cultural contexts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When searching for employment partnerships, seek out employers who are willing to rotate job positions between multiple community members. This increases the number of people who receive job skills and training, especially for programs in small and/or rural communities with limited opportunities. • Another program asks contractors if they are planning to bring in employees from other areas to work near native land and if they would consider employing tribal residents. If contractors bring in outside workers, tribal residents are often not aware of opportunities near their reservations. • Look for employers who can be patient with slow and spotty broadband access. 	<p>How does your office track partnership engagement efforts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One program participated in strategic planning to think about priority areas and collaboration. This includes discussion on how to develop meaningful partnerships and ways to track these, including mechanisms to report on them. • One tribe requires quarterly reports to be done on partners to ensure the program is engaging in meaningful partnerships where they can articulate the benefit.



Day Three – Thursday, December 10, 2020

Listening Session with Divisional Tribal TANF Management, OFA Leadership, and Regional Staff

During this session, participants had the opportunity to dialogue with OFA Division of Tribal TANF Management leadership and OFA Regions IX and X program staff, to ask questions, and openly discuss issues relevant to their programs and communities.

Panel:

- **Stan Koutstaal**, Ph.D., Division Director, Tribal TANF Management and Regional Operations, Office of Family Assistance
- **Denise Edwards**, M.A. (Tuscarora Nation), Branch Chief, Division of Tribal TANF Management, Office of Family Assistance

Moderator:

- **Julie Fong**, Region IX TANF Program Manager, Office of Family Assistance (moderator)

During this session, participants had the opportunity to dialogue with Division of Tribal TANF Management leadership and Regions IX and X program staff to ask questions and openly discuss issues relevant to their programs and communities. Participants were encouraged to e-mail questions in advance of the session. A summary of the questions and answers provided is below:

Question #1: With the focus of mental health on clients, what is being done to support the mental health of staff? Staff are juggling fear, grief, and trauma.

One of the sessions today is focused on ways to support staff (*see notes from Strategies for Identifying and Interrupting the Impact of Trauma in Caseworkers and Managers session*).

Question #2: How have you come to understand tribal needs, and are there particular ways tribes can share needs with you? What resources are available?

In Region X, staff learn from their grantees' work and foster open communication through these partnerships. Similarly, Region IX sees themselves as partners to the tribes, and Program Specialists foster those relationships directly through the work they do with tribes. For example, this meeting was designed for the tribes and directly by tribal input.

Question #3: Will there be future Native Employment Works (NEW) grant opportunities?

NEW was granted to tribes and coalitions that previously implemented a jobs program. Since that is the basis for awarding new grants, the pool of eligible tribes remains the same. While the program is ongoing, it is not anticipated that it will expand to many tribes who do not already have NEW programs.



Question #4: Sometimes multiple Tribal TANF programs have similar questions for OFA. In these instances, can OFA share responses to everyone for consistency? This would help us help our participants more quickly.

OFA always aspires to do this and will continue to do so. Another step would be to post a Q&A on the OFA website; they will announce if/once this occurs.

Question #5: Are there any creative or innovative changes to tribal plans during the pandemic that helped programs serve families in different ways?

Yes, there have been a variety of creative changes made to tribal plans. A couple of these examples include:

- Some programs have distributed NRST benefits to participants in need.
- Many programs are creating “care boxes” that include basic assistance and essential items.
- Some programs are sending out activity boxes that include traditional game and craft items to support well-being while spending time at home.
- Many programs are pivoting their services to accommodate clients in need during COVID-19. Examples include setting up tables in communities to distribute items and cash assistance checks or delivering these items to participants’ doorsteps.

Questions #6: Is there an update on the TANF report automation refresh? Also, will timely TANF data reports be available via the OFA website because of the upgrade?

OFA has contracted a company that will be redeveloping the legacy data system. OFA anticipates it will be fully available and redesigned in the next year and a half to two years. The redevelopment will hopefully enable more direct data entry from the tribes to the website.

Regarding the delay, this is currently a challenge since the system is not automated and tribal data is compiled and posted together. Since some tribes are still working on data collection and submission, it delays the posting of the report.

Question #7: Our program has a Data Tech position, and I do not know what the job entails. Do other programs have this job position within their program? If so, what does it require?

Different tribes have different processes for how data is collected from participants and entered in the system. Once entered in, it needs to be transferred from the tribe’s system into the OFA system. The Data Tech might manage this work as well as analyze it to better understand the tribe’s data. Data security and cybersecurity might also be a role for the Data Tech.

Question #8: Could a Tribal TANF program assist with vaccine support services, or offer a family an incentive for receiving a vaccine?

When submitting inquiries like this, include a rationale for how this service would fulfill the goals and purpose of TANF. If there are opportunities for TANF participants to receive work experience through distribution, that would be very important to include. The next element to consider is how this scenario



aligns with your tribal plan. When crafting a response to this, work with your Program Specialist as needed.

Session 5: Client Case Management in the Time of COVID-19

Presenters:

- **Geni Cowan**, Ph.D., Owner/Senior Consultant, Eagle Blue Associates
- **Maria Aguirre-Mendoza**, Executive Director, Soboba Tribal TANF
- **Carey Reyes**, Director, Colville Tribal TANF

Moderator:

- **Samuel Stitt**, Program Specialist, Region X, Office of Family Assistance

Dr. Geni Cowan discussed managing mental health during a crisis by highlighting how common mental health concerns like stress, fear, anxiety, anger, grief, loss, hopelessness, and helplessness have been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. She also made a point to remind case managers that they are not licensed mental health professionals and should not be expected to handle these symptoms on their own. It is important that case managers learn to recognize these symptoms and understand when clients need to be referred out.

While isolation is the best way to help protect staff and clients physically during the pandemic, it can also negatively impact or worsen mental health. Mental health is further impacted by socio-economic challenges, which have also been exacerbated by the pandemic. Case managers can expect some of the following behaviors from clients:

- Anger/frustration
- Irregular sleep/nutrition
- Nervous behaviors like nail biting
- Anger at the government
- Sense of desperation
- Despair
- Worsening chronic physical and mental health problems

Dr. Cowan reminded case managers that while clients may be used to living with instability, COVID-19 has brought new challenges and more responsibilities for them to juggle on top of the instability to which they may be already accustomed. Case managers need to support clients as they navigate added responsibilities with limited resources.

Maria Aguirre-Mendoza shared her perspective as a Tribal TANF leader. Prior to the pandemic, mental health was a component of the case management process for the Soboba Tribal TANF program, and throughout COVID-19, they have continued to provide mental health support and services to clients. All clients receive a mental health counseling assessment as a part of intake procedures. If case managers



notice additional mental health services are needed, clients are referred to their onsite mental health specialist.

Mental health counseling services are a part of clients' work plans, which allows clients to receive work participation credit while receiving these services. Counseling services allow staff to better identify barriers to success and often work to uncover areas where referrals may be needed. Issues such as domestic violence and other familial needs can be uncovered during counseling sessions with clients.

The counseling services provided at Soboba Tribal TANF program sites include individual, group, and couple options, animal and equine therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing treatment, play therapy, and art therapy. The Tribal TANF program takes a holistic approach to mental health services that enables clients to break down barriers to reaching self-sufficiency.

Carey Reyes discussed how COVID-19 has impacted the Colville Tribal TANF program's day-to-day functions and their ability to provide services to clients. Her tribe experienced a total shutdown in March when the pandemic first started, leaving the program wondering how to adapt their services. Now that the tribe has opened back up in limited capacities, social workers come into the office every other day on alternating schedules. Staff work from home on the days they do not come into the office.

Ms. Reyes shared that staff bought laptops for themselves to be able to work from home. The Tribal TANF program also bought laptops for each family with school-age children to allow for distance learning. While there have been some shifts to remote work, services provided to clients have not changed significantly. Clients are still able to text, call, and email when necessary. If clients need to drop something off at the program office or to receive gas vouchers, they can call staff and meet them outside the office building. The emergency operations center works with clients that are in quarantine. Ms. Reyes stated that there has not been an increase in TANF cases, but they have noticed a slight increase in child-only cases.

Dr. Cowan closed the session by discussing some strategies case managers can use to support clients during the pandemic. While case workers should practice self-care first, she stressed the importance of also caring for clients.



For Yourself

- Reach out to others if you want to talk
- Sleep well, for enough time, and consistently
- Exercise your body and mind
- Maintain contact with friends and family (even virtually)
- Acknowledge feelings of stress
- Seek external support from co-workers, supervisors, and colleagues
- Be creative!

For Your Clients

- Acknowledge and validate their emotions
- Check in with them on if they show out-of-the-ordinary behaviors
- Maintain regular contact when possible
- Connect them to mental health professionals
- Work with them to build in time management skills (problem solving, crisis management, etc.)
- Build home-schooling schools
- Teach self-care

She ended with a reminder about the importance of referring out for mental health services when needed and stressed the importance of being there to support clients as they navigate changes brought on by the pandemic.

Session 6: Strategies for Identifying and Interrupting the Impact of Trauma in Caseworkers and Managers

Presenters:

- **Nicole Bossard**, Ph.D., Consultant and Positivity Strategist, ICF
- **Barbara Pierce**, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Social Work at Indiana University; Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar Fellow

Moderator:

- **Julie Fong**, Region IX TANF Program Manager, Office of Family Assistance

Ms. Fong opened this session by discussing the *why* behind including a session solely focused on building resilience while experiencing trauma. She acknowledged various sources of stress over the course of 2020, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the California wildfires. She also recognized that impacts of crises have been particularly unrelenting for tribal communities. Over the past year, tribes have reached out to Regional Program Managers to request ways they can support staff and prevent staff burnout. This session was developed to provide tribes with actionable strategies and resources to build their resilience and support thriving communities.

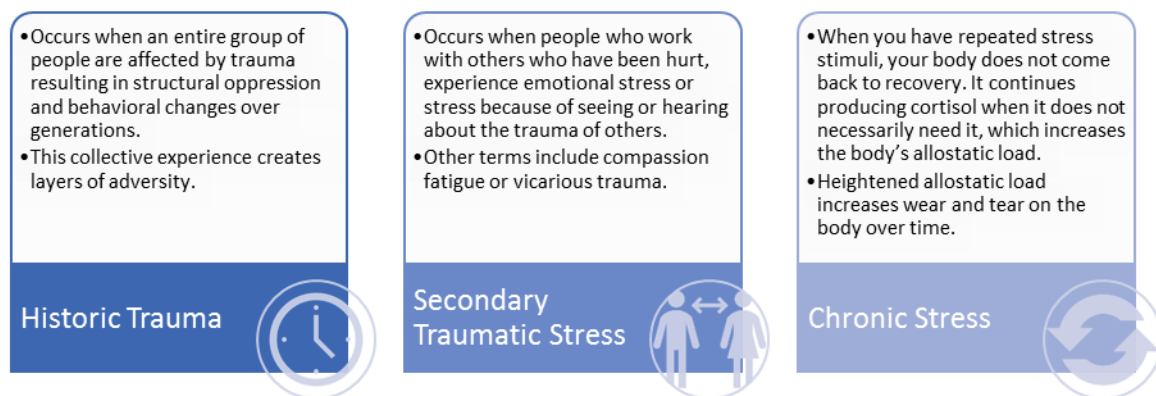
Dr. Nicole Bossard set the stage by asking the audience to reflect on why they felt it was important for them to join this session today. She asked they think holistically, and broke the audience into small breakout rooms to discuss the following prompt: Why is it important for you, your team, your agency, and the community you serve to be a part of this conversation today? During group report outs, many



2020 Regions IX and X Virtual Tribal TANF and NEW Technical Assistance Meeting Building Capacity to Support Families in a New Reality December 8–10, 2020

participants shared that they were in attendance because they felt a need to heal, learn about coping skills, spread love, and get inspired about continuing their critical work.

The first component of the workshop encouraged participants to understand different types of stress. Dr. Barbara Pierce clarified that not all stress is bad; in fact, some stress is useful. Positive stress produces the release of adrenalin during moments of crisis to help us react quickly or concentrate more acutely when needed. However, stress associated with trauma, and stress that is experienced chronically, can hurt the body. This kind of trauma can be historic, primary, or secondary. Within tribal communities, it can be all three.



The second part of the workshop focused on identifying symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS). Dr. Pierce identified symptoms of STS and signs of emotional dysregulation:

- In **individuals**, STS symptoms may include anxiety, fear and worry, isolation, sadness, changes in sleeping or eating patterns, illness flares, trouble focusing or intrusive thoughts, and relational conflicts.
- In **teams**, STS symptoms may present as increased worker absenteeism and subsequent increased pressure on other team members, increased work conflicts as short tempers flare, withdrawal from colleagues, avoidance of stressful or traumatic tasks, stress, negativity and fear among colleagues, inability to hear or respond to supervision or support, and low morale.
- In **organizations**, STS symptoms may include constant changes in work relationships, diminished inter-team relationships, breaking workplace rules as a result of apathy, lack of vision for the future and flexibility, decreased work output, negative attitude toward clients, decreased progress toward outcome indicators, increased turnover, increased costs to the agency, increased mental health and other costs to clients, lack of respect for deadlines, negativity toward management, reluctance to change, and the belief that improvement is not possible.

Across all groups, signs of emotional dysregulation include anger, increased heart rate, muscle tension, feeling overwhelmed or vulnerable, and becoming physically out of control or violent.



The third component of Dr. Pierce’s presentation focused on defining resilience (see text box) and sharing insights around how to build resilience at the individual, team, and organizational level. Dr. Pierce emphasized the most important elements of building resilience are self-reflection, self-awareness, optimism, and seeking and using support. These habits contribute to taking care of the whole individual, encompassing mind, body, and soul.

Resilience is the idea that people can bounce back from adversity.

Secondary resilience is the idea that people can learn from the struggles around them and see the positive in what is going on around them.

To conclude, Dr. Pierce suggested responsibilities for building resilience at the individual, supervisory, and organizational level. Individual interventions include eating well, getting adequate sleep, taking walks, setting work-life boundaries, engaging in mindfulness training, taking vacations, meditating, and connecting with religious/spiritual beliefs. Supervisors can support resilience building by encouraging staff to take breaks and vacations, holding weekly check-ins, and engaging in reflective supervision. She suggested organizational leaders do their part by providing social support to staff, sending out weekly coping tips and self-care reminders, acknowledging difficult situations, and setting up a safe space for listening sessions among staff. At the organizational level, Dr. Pierce emphasized leaders set the climate and should be open to suggestions, proactive about addressing and preventing stress, and sensitive to staff needs.

To close out this session, Dr. Bossard placed participants in breakout rooms to discuss the following prompt: What could I do to build more resilience in my team? How can I contribute to increasing the whole organization’s resiliency? Following the breakout rooms, participants shared a few strategies they intend to implement, including encouraging team walks outside, providing weekly staff check-ins, practicing daily meditation, exercising regularly, and encouraging staff to maintain self-care routines.

Meeting Closing and Prayer

Presenter:

- **Julie Fong**, Regional TANF Program Manager, Region IX, Office of Family Assistance

Prayer given by:

- **Frank Canizales**, Social Services Director, Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians

Ms. Fong adjourned the meeting with a summary of themes gleaned across the three days. She thanked participants for their participation and interaction, especially given their busy schedules, challenges thrown at them by COVID-19, and difficulties with virtual connections. Ms. Fong also thanked all the meeting’s speakers for sharing their knowledge and expertise on issues that were so vital for TANF/NEW program staff, as well as for the clients and families they served.

Frank Canizales provided the closing prayer, ensuring inclusion of both Grandmother and Grandfather. He asked for blessings for the communities in which participants serve and acknowledged all those who have been lost this year. He closed the meeting by wishing all participants a happy holiday season and by asking that everyone be thankful for the gift of life.