

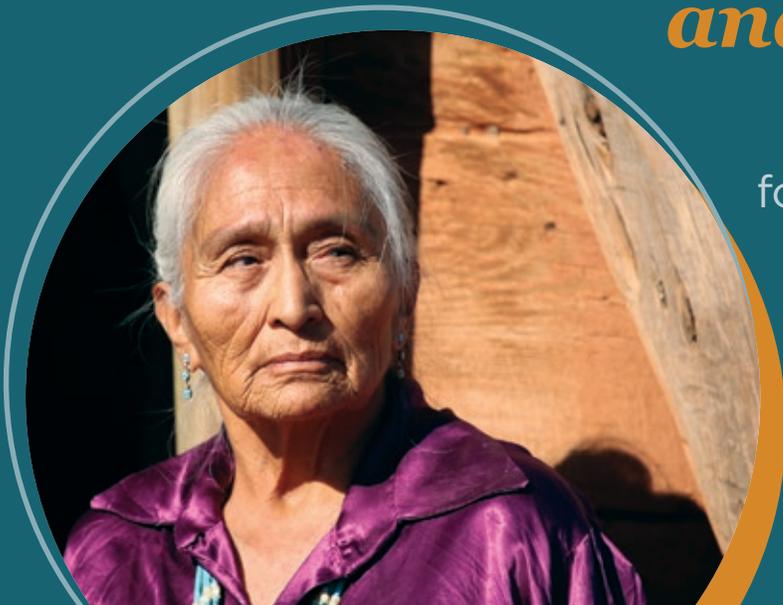


NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER *for*  
HEALTHY MARRIAGE *and* FAMILIES



Working  
with  
***American  
Indian and  
Alaska Native  
Individuals, Couples,  
and Families***

A Toolkit  
for Stakeholders





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# Introduction

Unlike any other population, American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people have a unique political status within the United States as citizens of tribes, States, and the United States. As AI/AN people cope with poverty and work to lift themselves out of that poverty, both Tribal and non-Indian safety-net service providers strive to help them achieve self-sufficiency. While 68 Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs operate to serve AI/AN people, more than half of all AI/AN people now live off of reservations far from Tribal services. Non-Tribal safety-net providers frequently have some responsibility for serving AI/AN people, on or off the reservation, but have little or no information about how to do that well. No population has a more complex or ineffective service system, and unfortunately, no population is as underserved (Cross, Earle, Solie, & Manness, 2000; Rayle, Chee, & Sand, 2006; Robinson-Zanartu, 1996).



Historically, agencies such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) controlled every aspect of life on Indian reservations (Deloria & Lytle, 1998), and people in poverty were hesitant to ask for help, lest their children be removed and placed in boarding schools or put up for adoption (Myers, 1981; Unger, 1977). Such an environment fostered dependency and broke down social norms. Given this legacy, distrust can be a significant barrier. Distrust is magnified when safety-net agencies are not aware of their responsibilities to serve AI/AN people as citizens of the State or county, or when the services provided are so out of alignment with the cultural values of AI/AN families that they feel unwelcome or misunderstood.

The confusion regarding who is responsible for services is not easily sorted out or overcome. However, in recent years tribes and States have increasingly found ways to collaborate. More and more Federal legislation requires States to “consult” with tribes regarding service provision. Tribes and urban Indian organizations are developing the capacity to collaborate with mainstream agencies. Even as tribes grow in their capacity to serve their members themselves, they also grow in their capacity to hold other jurisdictions accountable for services that should be provided to Tribal members.

More than ever before safety-net agencies have an opportunity to meet their obligations to collaborate with tribes and urban Indian organizations and to serve AI/AN families and individuals. To be successful in this work will require focused effort on the part of mainstream safety-net agencies to build capacity in this area. Knowledge about AI/AN communities and issues is essential. Developing skills in cross-cultural communication and collaboration will be critical in order to put knowledge into practice.

## Diversity of Tribes, Families, and Indian Cultures

American stereotypes of Indians, perpetuated by the media and many textbooks, incorrectly assume that all Indians look like 19th Century warriors of the plains. This image is so ingrained in the minds of most people that they are surprised to learn just how diverse AI/AN populations are. Broadly speaking, Tribal cultures are often grouped by geographical region and similarities in cultural traits. The Woodland tribes of the Northeast and Great Lakes share similarities with the Agrarian tribes of the Southeast. Midwestern plains tribes share common traits with, but differ from, the hunter-gatherer plateau tribes of the West. Northwest coastal salmon fishing tribes are very distinctly different from the coastal tribes further south in California, which are different still from the pueblo dwelling tribes of the Southwest (Hoxie, 1996). Alaska alone has 11 distinct cultures that can be categorized into five distinct groupings (Alaska Native Heritage Center, 2011).

Add to this diversity the fact that western influence has not impacted all tribes equally. The Iroquois Confederacy tribes of the Northeast and the Pueblos of the Southwest have each been dealing with Europeans for 500 years, and yet both have held onto their languages, spiritual teachings, and clan structures; other tribes lost nearly everything to colonialism. Even tribes in the same region may vary in terms of Tribal governance structures and the degree of assimilation, acculturation, and adoption of Christian beliefs among their citizens. Diversity may exist even on the same reservation with segments of the community being more or less traditional or of differing spiritual faiths.



Today, AI/AN people cover the racial spectrum with physical features that range from African to Caucasian. Many have Hispanic surnames out of historic contact with Spain; others are intermarried with the Latino culture. In any case, it is a mistake to not consider a person AI/AN just because he or she does not fit a particular racial or cultural stereotype. AI/AN is a political status, a cultural orientation, an ethnicity, and a racial descent. AI/ANs are not a “minority group.” They are citizens of dependent nation states within the boundaries of the United States with the unique political status of the first people of the land.

## Purpose of the Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help safety-net agencies and service providers acquire greater cultural competence in order to meet their obligations to serve AI/AN populations. The National Association of Social Workers defines cultural competence as the capacity to work effectively in the context of cultural differences (Cross, 2008). For agencies, cultural competence is defined as operating with a congruent set of policies, values, infrastructure, and services that support effective services for all populations (Cross, Bazron, Denis, & Isaacs, 1989).

This toolkit will help service providers:

- Understand the cultural, historical, political, and policy context when they engage AI/AN people;
- Increase and improve their capacity to collaborate with tribes and AI/AN organizations on services;
- Maximize their potential recruitment and retention of AI/AN families;
- Enhance the impact of services provided to AI/AN families; and
- Integrate healthy marriage and relationship skills into existing service delivery systems as part of a comprehensive, culturally appropriate, family-centered approach to promoting self-sufficiency.

Safety-net service providers will be able to use this toolkit as a guide to learning about, connecting with, and serving AI/AN populations. Agencies and stakeholders can use this toolkit in many ways (for example, as background reading for classes or training events, as a resource in the agency library, in orientation materials for new employees, and for discussion in staff and partner meetings).

It is a starting place for a conversation that will help build capacity of the providers and the AI/AN populations they serve. Both Tribal and mainstream populations can benefit from collaborative efforts by learning from the strengths of the other. Additionally, AI/AN families will receive more safety-net services that help them become increasingly self-sufficient.

Use this toolkit as a reference guide:

- To better understand the history and values of AI/AN people that impact current help-seeking behavior, service systems, and social conditions;
- To increase awareness of cultural identity and the impact of assimilation;
- To improve capacity for collaboration with tribes and AI/AN organizations; and
- To learn strategies for integrating healthy marriage and relationship skills into service delivery with AI/AN populations.

## Toolkit Structure

Each section of the toolkit includes material that addresses the core and most relevant issues discussed in the literature and among AI/AN scholars and service providers today. Each section answers questions and provides insights or examples that help the reader apply the information to improving services.

Cultural consideration and engaging AI/AN families will primarily benefit service providers but should also inform managers and administrators about how to work with tribes. The chapters on family issues and understanding the service system will help safety-net managers and leaders plan for the collaborative efforts that will address key issues of concern. Finally, both providers and managers will benefit from the chapter on integrating healthy relationship education into the safety net. References and resources cited will provide additional insight to those who want to dig deeper.

## Toolkit Sections

This toolkit is organized in seven sections:

- **Section 1: Historical Background**
- **Section 2: Implications of American Indian/Alaska Native History Today**
- **Section 3: Family Issues, Current Challenges, and Resilience**
- **Section 4: Cultural Considerations**
- **Section 5: Engaging American Indian/Alaska Native Families in Services**
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- **Section 7: Integration of Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education into Safety-Net Services**

## Common Terms and Definitions (Glossary)

This toolkit includes many terms and phrases that have particular meaning in AI/AN policy and/or culture. A glossary is included to help familiarize the reader with key terms and concepts in this publication. More importantly, the definitions included here can help service providers develop the basic knowledge necessary to serve AI/AN people well and navigate collaborative relationships with tribes and AI/AN organizations.

TERM	DEFINITION
<b>Acculturated:</b>	Describes an Indian person raised or enculturated with traditional American Indian values/worldviews, who maintains them, as well as the acquired behaviors necessary for functioning in mainstream American culture.
<b>Alaska Native:</b>	Any person who is a member of an Alaska Native tribe recognized by the Federal government.
<b>American Indian:</b>	Any person who is a member of an Indian tribe.
<b>Ancestry:</b>	Ancestral descent or lineage; persons initiating or comprising a line of descent.
<b>Assimilated:</b>	Describes an Indian person who was raised, identifies, or was enculturated with mainstream American values, relations, and behaviors and gives up or does not seek Indian values/worldviews.

TERM	DEFINITION
<b>Balance:</b>	Used culturally to describe a state of inner harmony; a wellness that comes from having various aspects of life in equilibrium.
<b>Bias:</b>	To have a set and often prejudiced outlook on a different group. To cause to have a prejudiced view; to prejudice or influence someone.
<b>Bigot:</b>	One who is obstinately or intolerantly devoted to his or her own opinions and prejudices toward a different racial or cultural group. A person rigidly devoted to his or her own group, creed, etc., who hates and is prejudiced against those holding different views.
<b>Bigotry:</b>	The attitude or behavior characteristic of a bigot; intolerance, prejudice, hate. The state of mind, acts, or beliefs characteristic of a bigot.
<b>Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA):</b>	Within the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Bureau of Indian Affairs is the Federal government office that handles the trust and treaty obligations toward Indians and Indian lands.
<b>Ceremony:</b>	A term frequently used to describe the performance of cultural and/or sacred rituals, which may include one person or hundreds of people, in which some aspect of the human experience is honored, celebrated, grieved, or recognized.
<b>Cultural Competence:</b>	The capacity to work effectively in the context of cultural differences.
<b>Cultural Forms of Communication:</b>	Patterns of speech that are culturally based, including the process by which speakers trade taking turns talking, the use of pauses and silence, and protocol around who speaks first in group settings.
<b>Cultural Identity:</b>	The degree of identification with one or more cultures.
<b>Cultural Loss:</b>	The feeling of grief and loss that comes from the passing out of existence of lifeways, language, healing practices, spiritual helpers, or the loss of people, land, resources, material traits, customs, or social forms of a racial, religious or social group.
<b>Cultural Obligation:</b>	The concept that belonging to the Indian culture carries with it the obligation to serve one's family, community, and people; the basis of interdependence and of being a good relative.
<b>Cultural Self-Hate:</b>	Internalized oppression expressed as hatred toward the self, characterized by extremely negative self-esteem and self-destructive behavior.
<b>Cultural Standards/Expectations:</b>	The prevailing ways of doing things in a cultural group or community; behavior or conditions viewed as acceptable, sometimes thought of as the minimum acceptable level.
<b>Culture:</b>	The integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon a capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group.
<b>Discrimination:</b>	The act of discriminating, which means to make a clear distinction or differentiation on the basis of prejudice. The process of distinguishing between two objects, ideas, situations, or the prejudgment of a people based on identifiable characteristics such as race, gender, religion, or ethnicity.
<b>Elder:</b>	A person, usually of advanced years, who has acquired status through his or her service, wisdom, or respectful conduct toward others.

TERM	DEFINITION
<b>Enculturation:</b>	The initial processes of human beings receiving and incorporating the values, beliefs, and expressive behaviors that equal the cultural community into which they were born and/or raised to about age 7. Most of this learning occurs through contact with family, peers, and members of the community.
<b>Enrollment:</b>	The common term for the process by which an American Indian tribe officially recognizes a citizen of that tribe.
<b>Ethnocentric:</b>	Viewing the world through only one cultural experience and excluding the validity of all others. Race is of central interest, based on the attitude that one's own group is superior.
<b>Ethnocentrism:</b>	The belief in the superiority of one's own ethnic group; an orientation or set of beliefs that holds that one's own culture, ethnic or racial group, or nation is the only legitimate one.
<b>Extended Family:</b>	Refers to the kinship group of individuals related by blood or marriage. While extended family in mainstream society usually only extends to first cousins, Indian cultures tend to include relations of very distant degrees and may use the terms aunt, uncle, or cousin in describing these.
<b>Federally Recognized Tribe:</b>	Any Indian tribe, band, or nation, or other organized group or community, including any Alaska Native village, which is recognized by the Federal government as a tribe. BIA recognizes regional Native Corporations as "Tribal organizations" for the purpose of distributing Federal dollars.
<b>Genocide:</b>	The systematic destruction of a racial, religious, ethnic, or social group through mass murder, starvation, isolation, and/or the forced removal and assimilation of their children.
<b>Heritage:</b>	Social traits and material forms passed down from preceding generations; traditions or the status acquired by a person through birth.
<b>Historic Trauma:</b>	Emotions and dynamics that are evident when the oppressive experience of a cultural group occurs repeatedly over several generations and/or is so traumatic and pervasive (e.g., genocide) that, as a people, it is impossible to resolve the trauma during the lifetime of those subjected to the trauma and the resulting social-emotional impact and dynamics are passed on to and experienced by future generations.
<b>Indian:</b>	The term Indian can be used in a cultural sense, legal sense, or ethnic/racial sense. A person may be ethnically/racially mixed but legally Indian, or ethnically/racially Indian but not legally. Despite legal status or ethnic mix, a person may be culturally Indian (see Cultural Identity). Different definitions are used in different contexts.
<b>Indian Country:</b>	Formally means all lands within the limits of any Indian reservation under the jurisdiction of the United States government, all dependent Indian communities within the United States (e.g., California Rancherias), and all Indian allotments (e.g., Oklahoma); informally used to describe the broadest general sense of Indian community, including lands, organizations, and activities. Informally, it may be used to describe any and all places that Indian people associate.
<b>Indian Health Service (IHS):</b>	Within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Indian Health Service is the governmental entity responsible for fulfilling the Federal trust responsibility for providing health services to American Indians and Alaska Natives from federally recognized tribes.
<b>Indian Nation:</b>	See Indian Tribe. (Each political entity names itself; therefore, some entities are tribes and others are nations.)

TERM	DEFINITION
<b>Indian Tribe:</b>	Any Indian tribe, band, or nation, or other organized group or community, including any Alaska Native village. In common usage it means a social/political organization of Indian people related by blood, language, and custom usually with power to govern itself.
<b>Institutional Racism:</b>	An organization or system that is practicing racism during the operation of or delivery of its services by systematically withholding access to rights or resources either intentionally or by default.
<b>Interdependency:</b>	The paradigm of we, we can do it; we can combine our talents, abilities, and resources to meet our basic human needs; together we can create something greater; an effective and advanced concept for achieving self-sufficiency (adapted from Covey Leadership Center, 1995).
<b>Intergenerational Grief:</b>	See Historic Trauma.
<b>Internalized Oppression:</b>	The taking into one's own psyche the racial prejudices and judgments of the dominant society and owning them as truth; the acceptance of a lesser status, understanding discrimination as a consequence of personal failure.
<b>Minority:</b>	The smaller in number of two groups constituting a whole; a group that differs in race, religion, or ethnic background from the larger group of which it is a part. Because it implies a quality of being the lesser part, this term is not viewed by some as appropriate to use for cultural groups. AI/AN populations generally reject the use of the term due to their unique political status under the U.S. Constitution.
<b>Natural Helper (Natural Healer):</b>	An individual who is known by the community as someone to rely on for help, counsel, advice, or ceremonial intervention in times of adversity.
<b>Oppression:</b>	The act of being oppressed, which means to burden harshly, unjustly, or tyrannically.
<b>Paternalism:</b>	A principal of authority in which one person or institution manages the affairs of another as a parent would a minor child; implies male dominance.
<b>Prejudice:</b>	A strong feeling about some subject, which is formed unfairly or before one knows the facts; a bias which leads to hostility toward members of races, religions, or nationalities other than one's own.
<b>Racism:</b>	Withholding access to rights or resources based on racial prejudice; discrimination based on the concept of race; the acted upon belief that one race is superior to another in ways related to biological inheritance, innately determined. The racism may be either covert or overt in nature. Covert racism is concealed, hidden, or secret. Overt racism is open and observable.
<b>Relational Worldview:</b>	Also called the cyclical or circular worldview, the relational worldview is a holistic view of human experience in which every aspect of life is related to all other aspects of life in a balance of mind, body, spirit, and context.
<b>Relations:</b>	A generic term used by some Indian people in referring to their extended family; a term sometimes used in a spiritual sense to include all living things, the earth, and its elements.

TERM	DEFINITION
<b>Reservation:</b>	The portion of this continent that an Indian tribe has retained for its own use and governance; lands designated by treaty or executive order to be within the limits of any Indian reservation under the jurisdiction of the United States government; all dependent Indian communities within the United States (e.g., California Rancherias); all Indian allotments (e.g., Oklahoma); additionally, “on or near reservation” is a term of art used in reference to a Tribal service area.
<b>Rites of Passage:</b>	Formal and informal events or milestones that mark the passage of a child’s development from dependent to provider.
<b>Self-Determination:</b>	A Federal Indian policy initiated in the 1970s that recognized that tribes would continue to exist as sovereign governments enacted in the form of laws that allow tribes to operate, under contract, services that would have been provided to them by the Federal government.
<b>Self-Governance:</b>	A Federal Indian policy enacted in legislation that provides a framework for Tribal governments to prioritize needs and allocate Federal resources locally.
<b>Sovereignty:</b>	Having the status of being a distinct political society, separated from others, capable of managing its own affairs and governing itself. As with other sovereigns, tribes cannot be sued without their own or Congressional consent.
<b>Spirituality:</b>	The portion of worldview that has to do with transcendence beyond the physical world; the nature of the spirit and one’s relationship with a higher power, the earth, environment, and relations; positive and negative forces operating in the cosmos.
<b>Stereotype:</b>	A preconceived and relatively fixed idea about a group or individual from a group usually based on superficial characteristics or over-generalizations or traits observed in some of the members of the group.
<b>Traditional Values:</b>	The historic cultural teachings, handed down from generation to generation, that instruct AI/AN people in the right ways to live and to be in the world.
<b>Treaty:</b>	An agreement between sovereign governments that has the force of law; the highest law of the land.
<b>Tribal Affiliation:</b>	The tribe in which an individual is enrolled and with which the individual has a legal and political relationship.
<b>Tribal Lands:</b>	Lands designed by treaty or legislation as belonging to or for the use of Tribal nations.
<b>Trust Responsibility:</b>	The obligation of the Federal government to honor the provision of treaties with Indian nations as required by the U.S. Constitution.
<b>Urban Indian:</b>	A term used to describe American Indians who were moved or have chosen to move to the city for work or educational reasons.
<b>Urban Indian Organization:</b>	A non-profit self-help, social, cultural, or service agency organized by and for the benefit of urban Indians.
<b>Worldview:</b>	A conceptual framework for understanding the world and how things work. The sum total of culturally based ideas, concepts, constructs, and paradigms, making up the understanding of human experience.

## Section 1

### Historical Background

The history of AI/AN people and their complex relationship with the United States government is important to today's service providers for several reasons. First, that history shapes the rights and responsibilities of tribes and of mainstream safety-net providers. It shapes the service delivery system and sets up unique relationships, opportunities, and barriers. Second, the history shapes the relationship between dominant and AI/AN cultures, with deep distrust and negative stereotypes on both sides. Finally, this history has been devastating, leaving AI/AN individuals with historic trauma, profound intergenerational grief, and a present day post-colonial environment in which discrimination and oppression continues. Many would say that we are today in a continuation of the colonial period because of the ongoing struggle of tribes to exist and function as sovereign nations. This history demonstrates why AI/AN nations and people are today working to “decolonize” themselves.



**St. Mary's Mission School, Omak, Washington, 1959**  
Courtesy of the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture

This section provides a broad overview of the history of AI/AN people, starting with pre-colonization and then moving through the colonial period, the removal and genocide period, the assimilation period, and the era of self-determination. Each of these periods contributed to contemporary AI/AN culture, government, and service structures.

### Pre-Colonization

During the pre-colonization period, AI/AN tribes had complex and rich cultures with sophisticated governance structures, kinship networks, trade, commerce, natural resource management, and social supports. Many tribes had clan structures, which met the human service needs in the community. There were no words in Tribal languages for “orphan” because there were no such things. Disease was rare, the diet was healthy, and the greatest dangers were from the elements, the natural environment, and conflict with other tribes. The governing processes of tribes varied greatly, from complex council structures to hereditary leadership posts handed down in families. During these times, each tribe held inherent power to govern itself, make laws, levy taxes, conduct trade, recognize marriages, and resolve disputes. The timeframe for this era was from time immemorial to about the 1600s (Deloria & Lytle, 1998).

## Colonial Period

The colonial period began with the coming of the Spanish to the southwest and the French, English, and Dutch to the east coast. While Columbus arrived in 1492 in what would later become the United States, AI/AN populations in this area were largely undisturbed for the next 200 years. For most of the 1700s, AI tribes still controlled trade and the trade routes. Many tribes played the colonial powers off against one another and kept a balance of power as successful military forces (Deloria & Lytle, 1998). European nations entered into treaties of alliance or peace with tribes, and Tribal leaders were entertained in the royal courts of Europe. This period established that tribes were nations with inherent powers of self-governance (Deloria & Lytle, 1998; Pevar, 2004).

During the American Revolution, the Seneca fought on the side of the British, the Oneida signed a treaty of neutrality, and the Delaware signed a treaty of alliance with the Revolutionary government. When the war ended and the British pulled back to what is now the Canadian border, the Seneca were still in military control of most of New York State. The United States signed a peace treaty with the Seneca. These treaties firmly established a government-to-government relationship and affirmed the sovereignty of tribes. Framers of the U.S. Constitution built these concepts into the founding document of our country, declaring Indian tribes to be “dependent nation states” and giving Congress the right to regulate the relationships between tribes and States, setting up the framework of Federal Indian policy (Wallace, 1970).

## Removal and Genocide

The next century brought about many changes, ushering in an era characterized by death and destruction. In any other country the actions of this era would be called genocide. Unfortunately, most of this history has been largely forgotten except by those whose families and lifeways were devastated. The seeds of this ugly period were planted in colonial times. European nations had come to this continent operating under the “Doctrine of Discovery.” This international law, issued by the Catholic Church, basically said that if a European nation planted a flag and a cross on the soil of the new world, the land, the resources, and the people belonged to the country making the claim. After the United States was formed, this same philosophy was expressed in the doctrine of “Manifest Destiny.” Under this doctrine, European Americans believed they were endowed by God to stretch from coast to coast acquiring all territory and resources. This attitude fueled western expansion, Native American removal, and war with Mexico (Miller, 2006).

Beginning in about 1830 a period of removal, warfare, starvation, and disease killed an estimated 10 million American Indians. (The same fate would befall Alaska Natives 90 years later with the Great Death.) In the plains, the buffalo, the primary food supply, were wiped out. In the Northwest, the canoes were burned and nets destroyed. In the

### *Trail of Tears*

**“I fought through the Civil War and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by thousands, but the Cherokee removal was the cruelest work I ever knew.” — Georgian Colonel in the Confederate Army, reflecting on his participation in the Trail of Tears (Foreman, 1938)**

East, crops were destroyed and orchards burned. Those who resisted were hunted down and killed (Thornton, 1987). Those who “cooperated” fared little better, as shown in the experience of those tribes moved west (literally at bayonet point) by the U.S. military. During the best known removal, the “Trail of Tears,” 15,000 Cherokees perished on the horrific march of more than 1,000 miles to Oklahoma Indian Territory (Foreman, 1932; Pevar, 2004).

By about 1870, just 40 years later, millions were dead or dying. By 1900, only 250,000 American Indians were left (Thornton, 1987). Those that still lived were confined to reservations under army occupation, dependent on the military for food, clothing, and shelter.

## Assimilation

The phrase “kill the Indian, save the man” characterizes the latter part of the 19th and much of the 20th century. This idea was not new, existing since at least 1819 when the Civilization Fund was created by Congress to “Save and Civilize the Indian.” Churches of various denominations were given grants to build missions and mission boarding schools and to convert Indians to Christianity. Different geographic regions were given to different churches, leaving concentrations of particular denominations in various tribes (Prucha, 1995). However, efforts to assimilate American Indians by annihilating their culture, lifeways, and family ties took on new urgency and prominence during this period.

In 1880, the Dawes Act allotted individual plots of land to Indians, an act expressly designed to break up the collectivist nature of Indian society and to promote individualism (Washburn, 1986). Around the same time, the first military boarding school opened with the official government mission to “kill the Indian, save the man.” By 1887, more than 200 schools had been established under Federal supervision, with an enrollment of more than 14,000 AI children (Pevar, 2004). Most of these children were forcibly removed from their families. Parents caught trying to hide their children to prevent their being taken to boarding school lost food rations (Smith, 2007; Unger, 1977). The harsh and punitive treatment in the schools is notorious: children were severely punished if they spoke their native language, practiced their religion, or engaged in any traditional practices. Children’s hair was cut, and most were not allowed contact with their families again (Smith, 2007).

American Indian people were made citizens of the United States in 1924. However, obtaining citizenship did little to improve the severe conditions for Tribal people in the United States. In 1928, reformers began to examine the shameful acts of the last century and a document called the Miriam Report called for a shift in policy from forced

### *Boarding Schools*

**“Native America knows all too well the reality of the boarding schools, where generations learned the fine art of standing in line single-file for hours without moving a hair, as a lesson in discipline; where our best and brightest earned graduation certificates for homemaking and masonry; where the sharp rules of immaculate living were instilled through blistered hands and knees on the floor with scouring toothbrushes; where mouths were scrubbed with lye and chlorine solutions for uttering Native words.” — Richard Monette, who attended a North Dakota boarding school (Smith, 2007)**

assimilation to humanitarian assimilation. In 1934 the Indian Reorganization Act mandated that every reservation had to have a constitutional democracy, and if a constitution was not created by the tribe or tribes on the reservation, the government would create one for them.

At about that same time, the Snyder Act gave the BIA broad powers to act in the best interests of Indian people, which would come to include managing their personal finances, holding their property and related income in trust, removing children without due process, and relocating them (Johnson & Hamilton, 1994). Unfortunately, these localized broad powers with minimal oversight opened the door for mismanagement and abuse. In some States children were removed from families with mineral rights, parents were declared dead, and local judges became the guardians of the children's gas and oil wells. Corruption and mismanagement lead to the loss of \$42 billion of individual Indians' money over 75 years (Berger, 2014).

Timber companies financed Tribal elections to ensure leaders were elected who would favor leases with a particular company. Healthy timber lots were sold for salvage prices by foresters, who then received kickbacks for their efforts. As late as the late 1970s, non-Indian managers in Tribal programs systematically attacked the character of educated Tribal members in an attempt to maintain control of Federal funds (Stillwaggon, 1984).

In the 1950s the assimilationist movement turned again to actively attempting to extinguish Indian culture and communities. Hundreds of tribes were terminated from Federal recognition, simply told that the United States government would no longer recognize them as sovereign nations. Individuals were relocated from reservations to cities under the Federal "Relocations Programs," given brief training in a trade, and then left there (Wilkinson & Biggs, 1977). Public Law (PL) 280 was passed by Congress in an attempt to divest Federal interest in Indian reservations and to turn jurisdiction over to State governments. Under this law, State legislatures could pass laws to assume jurisdiction on reservations for civil and criminal matters or to pick and choose what they did and did not want to control. Eleven States chose to take some or all jurisdiction, leaving a patchwork quilt of unclear boundaries and jurisdictional disputes (Goldberg, 1974; Pevar, 2004).

Beginning in 1958, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), in partnership with the BIA, removed hundreds of Indian children from their families with no due process and placed them for adoption in eastern cities. This effort was expanded to other states that began to remove and place Indian children in non-Indian homes so that by the 1970s, 25% of all Indian children were in out-of-home care, with 95% in non-Indian homes and institutions (Fanshel, 1972; Smith & Merkel-Holguin, 1996; Unger, 1977).

### *Personal Testimony*

**Notably, many boarding schools and their horrors persisted into the modern era. Walter Littlemoon, a Lakota, recalled in a 2012 radio broadcast on South Dakota Public Radio, "They beat you with a...like a carriage whip...flexible end on it...hit you on the legs. And then there was a shorter...like a little horse cord...a little shorter whip. And they used that on your back or your shoulders. And the third one was what we called the ape stick. A boat paddle with holes drilled in it." (Kent, 2012)**

### *Case Example of Corruption and Mismanagement – the Kennerly Experience*

As early as 1930, and most likely much earlier, oil companies pumped thousands of barrels a week off [James Otis] Kennerly's land; this is documented in records by the Interior Department's own experts. Documents establish that payments were made to Interior in connection with the leasing of Kennerly's allotment.... However, according to Interior's own historians, after 1946 there are no documents regarding the lease of his land—no statements, no deposits, and no files. And, there was no money deposited into his account. So what happened? There is no doubt that the oil wells continue to pump on the land of James Otis Kennerly; you can see it for yourself. His son, James Jr., will take you out there tomorrow if you're interested.... And, every call or visit to Interior ends the same way—'we can't give you an explanation.'.... And what have been the consequences to the Kennerlys of this theft? For James Sr., a disabled vet, unable to work, it meant that he lived in abject poverty the remainder of his life.... Now James Kennerly, Jr. and his siblings share their father's land, but they do not receive any money from the oil that still pumps from that land.... He should be a millionaire, but like his father, lives in great poverty" (Elouise Cobell, 2007, pp. 12-14).

## Alaska Native History

The history of Alaska Natives is equally as devastating. Colonized by Russia in the 1700s, whole villages were subject to attack by Russian sailors and fishermen; no coastal community was free from colonial exploitation. After Alaska was purchased from Russia by the United States in 1867, Native Alaskans experienced renewed resource exploitation and colonization efforts, including "civilization" through Christian missions and schools. As in the lower 48, boarding and mission schools were used to strip the culture and language from the land (Barnhardt, 2001; Williams, 2009). Into the 1970s, native youth were taught that their culture was shameful, their relatives ignorant, and their way of life corrupt and outdated.

About 30 years after the United States purchased the Alaska territory, a gold rush swelled the non-Native population suddenly, exposing Native communities to alcohol, sexual exploitation, and diseases. In 1900, the "Great Death" swept across Alaska wiping out a quarter of the Alaska Native population, impacting generations (Williams, 2009; Wolfe, 1982). With the possibility of statehood in 1959 came a new problem—what to do with Native land claims. The Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act created a new and complex system that would effectively disempower Alaska Native tribes and remove their land and attempt to remove Tribal sovereignty from them (Schultz, 2000).

## Self-Determination

Fortunately, several things happened in the 1960s and 1970s to change Federal Indian policy. The War on Poverty programs began to help impoverished Indian tribes. The Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act began to give Indian people new leverage to fight oppression. The American Indian Movement and its militant actions brought the attention of key celebrities, advocates, and politicians and began to change the American consciousness.

When Richard Nixon became President, he brought with him the influence of the American Friends Service Committee and a new Federal Indian policy called Self-Determination. This policy was the recognition that Indian people were not going to cease to exist and that their destiny should be in their own hands as sovereign dependent nations (Castile, 1998).

The Indian Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975 ushered in a new era in which tribes could contract to provide themselves any service provided by the BIA. This Act was followed by a decade of legislation that would change the face of Indian Country, including the Indian Religious Freedom Act, the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, the Indian Civil Rights Act, and the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), among others. With these legislative changes, tribes began to build infrastructure and capacity to provide their own services. Indian advocacy and interest groups emerged, furthering the capacity of Tribal services (Philp, 1986).

From the 1990s through today, Indian tribes have gained the right to operate their own child care, Head Start, child support enforcement, TANF, family preservation, foster care, and children's mental health programs. Tribes that were terminated from Federal recognition have been restored, and the assimilationist policies of the past have been discredited as acts of cultural genocide. In many places Tribal economies are flourishing and new investments are being made in education, health care, housing, employment, and social services.

## Continuing Struggle for Survival

While there has been significant progress, challenges remain. AI/AN tribes fight every day to protect their sovereignty against those who believe that tribes have “special rights” and seek to strip tribes of those rights for their own gain. Tribes are now active participants in State legislatures as both elected politicians and in lobbying efforts. Tribal organizations walk the halls of Congress to monitor and influence public policy and work with administration officials to ensure that the rights afforded to them under the laws of the land are upheld. AI/AN tribes are even involved in international affairs and have gained support from the United Nations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

## Section 2

# Implications of American Indian/Alaska Native History Today

The historical experience of AI/AN people has implications for how safety-net service providers serve and interact with individual AI/AN people in need of help, as well as how safety-net agencies connect and collaborate with tribes and urban Indian organizations today. This chapter discusses how mainstream safety-net agencies will need to engage tribes as self-determined sovereign nations nested within specific State contexts.

This chapter also discusses how safety-net service providers will need to recognize and create strategies for dealing with the dynamics of race equity issues, stereotyping, historic distrust, and the devastation of male roles in serving AI/AN individuals. It also covers the fact that practitioners will need to carefully consider their personal assumptions about who is AI/AN, what religion AI/AN people practice, where AI/AN people live (geographically), and what their housing situation may be.

## Tribal Sovereignty

European countries recognized tribes as nations, as did the founding fathers of the United States. When dealing with tribes, safety-net agencies should be dealing with governments. Understanding the origins and nature of sovereignty can help. The right of a tribe to self-govern is not something that was taken from or given to them by colonial governments. Self-governance is an inherent right and basic principle officially acknowledged in the early years of this country's history. Tribal sovereignty pre-dates the existence of the United States (Pevar, 2004; Wilkinson, 2005). Felix Cohen, as quoted in Wilkinson (2005), describes it this way: "...those powers which are lawfully vested in an Indian tribe are not, in general, delegated powers granted by express acts of Congress, but rather inherent powers of a limited sovereignty which has never been extinguished" (p. 61).

The right of Indian nations to control their internal affairs remains intact. Tribes retain the right to establish and enforce laws, levy taxes, manage natural resources, and provide for social services and education on Tribal land. Further, tribes have sovereignty over the custody and protection of enrolled children—or those eligible for enrollment—who live on or off reservation land and become involved in the child welfare system (Pevar, 2004).

### *On Possessing Sovereignty*

**According to Wilkins and Lomawaima (2002), possessing sovereignty means that a nation "...defines itself and its citizens, exercises self-government and the right to treaty with other nations, applies its jurisdiction over the internal legal affairs of its citizens and sub-parts (such as States), claims political jurisdiction over the lands within its borders, and may define certain rights that inhere in its citizens (or others)" (p. 4).**

## Tribal-State Relations

Federal Indian policy has created a situation in which the relationships between tribes and States differ in almost every State. Due to circumstances such as when a State became a State, as in the case of Alaska and Oklahoma, or whether a State elected to exercise PL 280, the rules for engagement with tribes are different from State to State. Regardless of these differences, the relationship between a State and tribe is always a government-to-government relationship requiring that collaboration develop through proper channels.

Safety-net providers will need to investigate Tribal-State relations. Most States have a State Indian Commission, an inter-Tribal organization, or State government department designated to handle these issues. Seeking out these connections will enhance the possibility of making the right connection.

One aspect of Tribal-State relations that safety-net providers need to keep in mind is jurisdiction. As already discussed, Tribal courts, where established, may have jurisdiction over child support enforcement, child custody in divorce proceedings, divorce, spousal support, and other civil matters. In working with Indian clients these issues may require communication and coordination with Tribal programs, even at a distance.

## Impact of Self-Determination

The self-determination era has had a strongly positive effect on AI/AN populations. In the past 40 years there has been a revival of Tribal cultures, emergence of Tribal economies, and development of Tribal schools, social services, and health care.

A safety-net provider should not assume that the status of a Tribal community is one of poverty or wealth. Rather, it is imperative that each provider learn for each new community the status of that community and the unique challenges and conditions they face at this moment in history.

## Where AI/AN People Live

Due to the Indian Removal Act, the reservation era, relocation programs, and other historical issues, safety-net agencies and stakeholders may not know that AI/AN people exist in their service areas. Across the country there are urban Indian centers that grew out of the need for self-help and/or a need to have cultural gathering places; at least 32 such urban Indian centers provide services ranging from health care to cultural enrichment. For most AI/AN people in urban areas, these are the first points of contact for safety-net services. Stakeholders and agencies that wish to reach out to AI/AN populations will find it necessary to connect to their local AI/AN organizations, which may be in urban settings. In these communities collaboration will be the most effective approach. A simple Internet search using search terms such as “American Indian,” “Alaska Native,” and “organization” with the city name is a good place to start seeking out local urban Indian centers.

## Who Is American Indian or Alaska Native?

One of the rights reserved to a sovereign nation is the right to determine who its citizens are. Prior to the Dawes Act, membership in tribes was handled solely by the custom and traditions of each tribe. However, when the Federal government decided to allot individual Indians parcels of land they needed a plan to track who was a member of a tribe. The BIA decided on the idea of “enrollment.” Literally, this meant putting the names of the members of the tribe down on a roll. Further, to qualify for enrollment, “blood quantum” eligibility was established. Never before had an individual needed to have more than one-quarter “blood” to be considered a member of a tribe.

While these processes may have seemed benign, they have had devastating results. In AI/AN families, some children may be eligible for membership and others not. With generations of boarding schools and Tribal intermarriage, some children are one-eighth of eight different tribes; while “full blood” Indian, they may not be eligible for enrollment in any tribe. AI/AN identity has become a major issue. As adoption and other programs have removed children from their tribes and communities and as discrimination forced many families to hide their identities, many people do not know if they are eligible for enrollment, or if so, how to become enrolled.

### *Enrollment Tips*

**Every tribe in the nation determines its own enrollment criteria and process. The only way to achieve enrollment is through the Tribal enrollment office. This office will have the necessary forms. Basic identity documents such as birth certificates are usually required. A family history chart showing as much information as possible, including dates and places of birth, maiden names, and prior addresses may also be helpful.**

Safety-net agencies can help individuals discover their identity and work with a tribe to determine if and how someone may become enrolled. If not eligible, safety-net agencies can still help people connect culturally with AI/AN organizations.

## Racialized Issues and Stereotypes

The history of Federal Indian policy often contributes to the dynamics regarding political or economic issues. Non-native people and some service providers believe that AI/AN people are completely taken care of by the government. Many still believe that every Indian gets a monthly check from the government or that AI/AN people do not pay taxes. These myths and stereotypes give rise to resentment and prejudices that AI/AN people feel in how they are treated by service agencies. When AI/AN access to rights or resources is perceived as being “special” or “protected,” such as with affirmative action, Indian preference, or Indian Health Services, then non-Natives may feel threatened and respond negatively. The economic or political issues become racialized. Tensions can grow between groups, and agency staff may find cross-cultural work to be more difficult or even undesirable.

Another factor that influences practice is American society’s maintenance of stereotypical images of AI/AN people. Unfortunately, the media, textbooks, and pop culture have conditioned most people to have negative impressions of AI/AN individuals. Many service providers have unrealistic fears of their AI/AN clients and stereotypical ideas about their

lives. Because most people learn about AI/AN culture through the mainstream lens, perceptions of AI/AN people are often frozen in time. Images of the stoic warrior live alongside those of the drunken Indian. Reservations are depicted as impoverished slums in the wilderness, devoid of culture or functional people. These images are damaging and untrue. Every Tribal community has whole and healthy individuals, leaders, elders, and young people. Problems are real and in many cases severe but do not reflect the quality and character of the culture or the people. In addition, service providers tend to form their opinions by the people they meet. If the only people a service provider meets are those in the client population, then their view of the culture can be shaped by reinforced stereotypes.

Providers should seek to learn the dynamics inherent in working cross-culturally because this will be crucial to establishing rapport with their AI/AN clients.

## Historic Distrust

In general, given the history of AI/AN people, mainstream service providers will likely encounter a dynamic that has been called “historic distrust.” Historic distrust refers to a shared group sense of distrust of another culture based on a history of negative treatment by that culture (Lockhart, 1981).

In safety-net services, AI/AN groups have historically been dealt with very negatively. For example, prior to the ICWA of 1978, Native American children were removed from their families 20 times more often than all other children with devastating results for the culture. In 1976, research revealed that 25% of all Native American children were in substitute care (American Indian Policy Review Commission, 1976). During this time, the welfare agency was the one most likely to have initiated an Indian child’s removal (Unger, 1977).

Because few families went untouched, most Native American families today are cautious about the system, avoiding even potentially positive interaction, such as becoming foster parents. Native American families have reason to be cautious about seeking help. However, their resistance is often interpreted by practitioners as an indicator of risk.

Historic distrust is a dynamic that can occur between a helper of the dominant society and a client of a specific cultural community. Part of what each brings to the helping relationship is the history of the relationship between their people. Usually, the client is much more acutely aware of this than the helper because the helper may be unfamiliar with the group’s history. Service providers may also be culturally unaware or not know how to work through this issue and, thus, interpret healthy caution as “resistance.”

### *Foundations of Historic Distrust: The Legacy of Child Removal*

**Said one Native American in her Congressional testimony before the American Indian Policy Review Commission in 1976, “I can remember the welfare worker coming and taking some of my cousins and friends. I didn’t know why and I didn’t question it. It was just done and it had always been done” (American Indian Policy Review Commission, 1976).**

Directly related to historic distrust are issues of intergenerational grief and historic trauma. There are few, if any, AI/AN families that were untouched by widespread death from war, starvation, and disease. Boarding schools ravaged families. Many children were taken at 4 or 5 years old and never returned. Those who did return did not know how to live according to traditions. Many could not feed themselves in a time and place where subsistence lifestyles meant the difference between survival and not. Today, safety-net agencies will see many clients who directly carry the burden of historic trauma, with poor parenting skills, poor relationship skills, and unresolved trauma that inhibits their self-sufficiency.

## Influence on Employment and Work Habits

Historically, AI/AN people worked to live, not to make a living. Subsistence in the form of hunting, gathering, or agriculture is hard work. It is hard work that has to be performed in harmony with the environment, the seasons, and social relations. Historically and culturally, AI/AN people lived in anticipation of the seasonal cycles; work was future oriented and purposeful. If the nets were not ready when the fish were running, people would starve. If the baskets were not made in time for berry picking, the birds got the berries. If tools did not get made, seeds did not get planted. The work ethic was such that everyone did their part as a collective, contributing labor in exchange for a portion of the harvest or catch.

Across the country a pattern of intentional destruction of this way of life devastated communities. In the Northwest, canoes were burned so tribes could not fish. In the plains, the buffalo herds were destroyed so the tribes could not hunt. In the East, fields and orchards were burned so that tribes could not grow food. As late as the 1990s Tribal fisherman were prevented from subsistence fishing. Today in Alaska, Tribal fisheries are being reduced by State laws and by corporate over-fishing, leaving families in some villages without enough to eat. The losses were and still are traumatic.

As lifeways were intentionally decimated, the Federal government fostered dependence among AI/AN people with commodity food programs, removal of children to boarding schools, and work programs that made little sense culturally. Work for work's sake and work to "make a living" are western values. Work for the well-being of the people makes sense for AI/AN culturally. As a result, it has taken generations for AI/AN people to recover from the loss of meaningful work and to find new meaning in a cash economy.

All of these issues are particularly poignant in Alaska today. It is only in the last 50 to 60 years that these issues have been played out in the State, and many continue to this day. Coastal or island fishing villages look out on historically rich fishing grounds where they can no longer fish. Families who still live a subsistence lifestyle have children who no longer know how to prepare foods for winter storage or how to create clothing or make needed tools. As dependency on a mechanized society grows, work is shifting and employment is replacing working to live.

## Devastation of Male Roles

Traditionally, AI/AN men were providers, protectors, mentors, and leaders. Destruction of the food sources, confinement to reservations, military rule, displacement of spiritual and traditional leaders, and curtailment of trade and travel meant that traditional male roles in families were almost extinguished. Boarding schools attempted to prepare boys and young

men for menial roles in the non-Indian world without addressing the cultural expectations for being a man. Later, when almost every aspect of life was controlled by federal policies, not being allowed to manage finances meant that few people developed fiscal literacy. The Snyder Act fostered dependency, leaving Indian men little opportunity to learn new roles, even as old roles were extinguished. These conditions often led to substance abuse and other risk-taking behavior. Many compensated by joining the military. More American Indians per capita have served in the military than any other population, and more have been killed in action. While veterans are respected highly in the culture, post-traumatic stress from these experiences has contributed to relationship problems, parenting problems, and many other challenges.

Safety-net agencies will be more effective if they are aware of these issues, honor the service of AI/AN veterans, and use helping approaches, discussed later in this toolkit, to help men understand their own challenges in the context of this history.

## Religions and Spirituality

As a result of the Civilization Fund and other government support of church-related activities in Indian Country, there is a great deal of diversity in spiritual beliefs in Tribal communities. Unfortunately, these differences can manifest in the form of conflict between belief systems. In some places persecution of persons who continue to believe and practice in traditional form continues. These issues can divide a community into factions and also influence the political process.

On the positive side, safety-net service providers may find partners in local churches that may be a major part of service delivery. On the other hand, safety-net providers should be cautious to avoid internal community conflicts that restrict outreach. They should not make assumptions about the spiritual beliefs of any Indian person.

## Housing

One often misunderstood issue on reservations is the shortage of housing. One consequence of land being held in trust by the Federal government is that banks cannot foreclose on mortgages. Until recently, financing to build or buy a home was almost impossible on an Indian reservation. Today both Federal and Tribal programs are changing this, but the housing shortage often means that service providers cannot find housing to take jobs on reservations, and overcrowding conditions exist as many families may live in the housing that is available. This is further complicated by the interdependent nature of the culture in which relatives rely on one another as their safety net.

Safety-net providers should be aware of these issues and not judge clients who are living in overcrowded conditions or unable to find housing. Frequently, housing rules for government programs are seriously out of alignment with the realities of the situation and the values of the culture. Developing strategies to work around these issues can be helpful.

## Conclusion

Both individual professionals and entire agencies have various levels of capacity to deal with the issues discussed here. Many are making progress and are beginning to provide responsive services. Others are just beginning to look at the issues. Safety-net providers seeking to serve AI/AN people more effectively can begin by investigating Tribal-State relations where they operate, learning for each relevant tribe the status of that community and the unique challenges and conditions they face at this moment in history. Connecting to the local AI/AN organization will also be helpful. Safety-net agencies may be able to help individuals discover their identity and connect politically and/or culturally with other AI/AN people.



Practitioners must also be conscious of the dynamics inherent in working cross-culturally with AI/AN people to ensure they do not attribute failure to establish rapport to a stereotype, react in a backlash, or interpret healthy caution among AI/AN people as resistance. Safety-net agencies will be more effective if they are aware of these issues and question assumptions they may have about who AI/AN people are, where (and in what conditions) they live, and what religion they may be.

It is important for safety-net providers to recognize that while safety-net agencies will see many clients who directly carry the burden of historic trauma and the devastation of male roles, with unresolved trauma that inhibits their self-sufficiency, they can serve these individuals in ways that meet their needs.



## Section 3

# Family Issues, Current Challenges, and Resilience

AI/AN families face some of the most challenging historical and current circumstances in which to raise children, find meaningful work, and maintain healthy relationships. Despite such adverse conditions, most AI/AN families grow strong and thrive due to their resilience, cultural strengths, and interdependence. This section provides an overview of available data and basic demographic information about AI/AN families. It offers insight into the challenges they face.

A wide range of issues are discussed in this section. This section summarizes domestic violence and child maltreatment issues. It discusses parenting in the context of the impact of boarding schools, child welfare removals, and devastating disease, and highlights them in the context of poverty, stark economic conditions, and severe substance abuse. The section ends with a discussion of strengths and resilience, which will give the reader a better perspective on why, despite great odds, AI/AN people continue to survive and even thrive.

### *AI/AN Data*

**Composite American Community Survey data are used for much of the AI/AN demographic data presented here, as it is often the only way data are available for AI/AN people. This is due to relatively small sample sizes of AI/AN populations. Small sample sizes, as well as complexities with the way AI/AN “race” is codified and data are analyzed, frequently render AI/AN experiences indiscernible in data. This is especially true at the local level. The unique characteristics of local AI/AN communities get lost when data reported by race leave out an “AI/AN” category altogether. Often national data have to stand in to describe the experience of AI/AN people, obscuring and rendering invisible the local lived experience (Curry-Stevens, Cross-Hemmer, Maher, & Meier, 2011).**

## Marriage and Family

Data about AI/AN marriage and family formation tell part of the AI/AN story. AI/AN people are less likely to be married than the general population. Only 37% of AI/ANs are married, compared to 48% of all Americans. Correspondingly, AI/ANs are more likely to be divorced, separated, or to have never married. However, AI/ANs are about as likely as all Americans to live in households with other family members (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010–2012). At least some of these data can be explained by a cultural tendency for couples to live together without marriage, as well as for people to live in extended family households. However, the divorce rates may be further explained by the challenges of poverty and historic trauma described later in this section.

In 2010, there were more than 1,164,000 AI/AN family households in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Characteristics of these families include:

- **AI/AN households are larger than average.** Composite data (2010–2012) show the average number of people in an AI/AN family is 3.6 persons compared to the general population’s average family size, which is 3.2 persons (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010–2012).
- **AI/AN households are more likely to be female-headed households.** In 2010, 355,448 or 21% of all AI/AN families were female-headed with no husband present, compared to 13% of all American families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
- **AI/AN dads are more likely to head households as single dads.** In 2010, 71,567 or 4% of all AI/AN families with children were male-headed with no wife present, compared to 2% of all American families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).
- **AI/AN families are more likely to be grand-families.** Composite data show that twice as many AI/AN people over 30 live with their grandchildren, and just over half (51%) of these are responsible for their grandchildren’s care. The corresponding rate for all American grandparents responsible for the care of grandchildren they live with is 39% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010–2012).

AI/AN families today face many challenges that influence the health of their relationships. They are more likely to be impacted by poverty, substance abuse, violence, and trauma. Tribal communities and service providers are working hard to overcome historical experiences that have left deep scars. This section discusses these concerns in more detail. Understanding these issues should increase the provider’s awareness about AI/AN family stressors and help enhance service provision to AI/AN individuals, couples, and families.

## Economic and Social Context

Economic conditions complicate family life for AI/AN people. Poverty, unemployment, and low income all increase pressures on the family, contributing to stressful environments that hinder healthy relationships. Specifically:

- **AI/AN people have the highest poverty rate of any racial group in the nation.** Composite data show that the poverty rate for AI/AN people is 29%, twice the national poverty rate of 13% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010–2012). The average poverty rate on reservations is likely much higher; in 2009 it was 36.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).
- **AI/AN families are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than the general population.** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 24% of AI/AN families live in poverty, compared to 9% of all families in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010–2012). In 2009, 62% of AI/AN children lived in low income homes, 34% of AI/AN children lived in families with incomes below the Federal poverty line, and an additional 28% lived in families whose income was between 100% and 200% of the poverty line (Chau, Thampi, & Wight, 2010).
- **Female-headed AI/AN households are particularly susceptible to poverty.** Composite data show that 42% of female-headed AI/AN families live in poverty compared to 27% of all American female-headed families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010–2012).

- **AI/AN live on much lower incomes.** The median household income for AI/AN people is \$36,096, whereas the median American household income is \$51,771 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010–2012).
- **AI/AN individuals are more likely to be unemployed.** In 2010, the AI/AN unemployment rate was around 15.2%, compared to the white unemployment rate of 9.1% (Austin, 2010). Unemployment statistics, however, only count those actively seeking work. Because AI/ANs are more likely to experience long spells of unemployment and/or have a more difficult time finding work, they are more likely to cease actively seeking work. Therefore, these numbers are likely an underestimate of AI/AN unemployment.

### *The Myth of Indian Gaming*

Today, frequently asked questions about AI/AN tribes are, “Do all tribes have casinos?” and “If tribes are getting rich off of casinos why do families still face poverty?” In 2013, approximately 235 tribes operated gaming facilities (National Indian Gaming Commission [NIGC], 2014). A handful of high-profile operations, mostly near large metropolitan areas, have done very well. They generate about 40% of all Indian gaming revenue (Native American Rights Fund [NARF], n.d.). Most of these have established generous charitable giving programs to serve the surrounding community. However, these operations are the exception, rather than the rule. Only about a third of tribes with gaming facilities give per capita payments from gaming revenue (NIGC, n.d.). The remaining Tribal operations are only marginally profitable (NARF, n.d.). Many are bingo only. Most of those without gaming facilities are too remote for gaming to be feasible.

Research has consistently demonstrated that living in poverty has a wide range of negative effects across a variety of life domains, impacting academic success, physical and mental health, social functioning, and overall well-being. Thus, given the level of poverty and economic stress among AI/AN families, it is not surprising that:

- **AI/AN children are served by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) at a higher percentage than any other group of children.** A 2008 report found that 14% of AI/AN children were served by the IDEA, whereas 9% of the general student population was served by the IDEA (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008).
- **AI/AN children are less likely to graduate from high school.** In 2009, approximately 47,000 AI/AN youth between the ages of 16 and 24 had not completed high school or a high school equivalent. The high school drop-out rate for AI/AN students was estimated at 14.3%, the second highest of any other group of students (the national average estimate was 8.2%) (Aud et al., 2011).
- **One-fifth of AI/AN girls are mothers before they enter their twenties.** In 2007, 21% of all AI/AN teen girls would be mothers before turning 20 years old, compared to 16% of teen girls nationally (Suellentrop & Hunter, 2009).

- **Pregnant AI/AN women are less likely to receive prenatal care for the entirety of their pregnancy.** Only 68% of AI/AN women who give birth receive prenatal care starting in the first trimester, compared to 82% of the total population. Additionally, 8% of AI/AN women who give birth receive prenatal care starting in the third trimester, or do not receive prenatal care at all, compared to 4% of all women who give birth (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011).
- **The AI/AN youth population is more affected by gang involvement than any other population.** Surprisingly, 15% of Native American youth are involved in gangs, compared to 8% of Latino youth and 6% of African American youth populations nationally (Glesmann, Krisberg, & Marchionna, 2009).
- **Adult AI/AN men are incarcerated at a higher rate.** AI/AN men are incarcerated at a rate of 1,571.2 per 100,000, compared to 981.1 of all adult men (James, Salganicoff, Ranji, Goodwin, & Duckett, 2012).

Although poverty alone does not necessarily determine these negative outcomes, it is an additional stressor for families that combines with compounding factors (such as those described below) in a cyclical way to contribute to social problems in AI/AN communities. When it is difficult to find meaningful work, and when male roles are constrained due to a lack of a functioning economy, family life can focus almost entirely on survival and coping, which may leave families with little energy and few resources for self-improvement.

## Historical Trauma, Mental and Behavioral Health

The concept of historical trauma as it relates to AI/AN people and communities originates from studies that examined the lingering effects of the German Holocaust on the children and grandchildren of families affected (Yellow Horse Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). Researchers and experts believe that the shared experience by AI/AN people of historic traumatic events (such as displacement, forced assimilation, suppression of language and culture, and boarding schools) creates a legacy of unresolved grief that, when untreated, is passed down through generations and experienced in ways that reflect reactions to trauma (Blackstock, Cross, George, Brown, & Formsma, 2006; Yellow Horse Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). Today, safety-net agencies will see many clients who directly carry the burden of this historic trauma with poor parenting and relationship skills, as well as unresolved trauma that inhibits their self-sufficiency.



**Tulalip Indian School, ca. 1912**

Courtesy of Museum of History & Industry,  
Ferdinand Brady Collection

As might be expected of people with a long history of historic trauma, personal trauma, and a lack of services, AI/AN adults often face severe mental and behavioral health issues. Specifically:

- **AI/AN adults experience mental health disorders at rates higher than any other population.** Among U.S. adults aged 18 and over, AI/AN adults have shown the highest rate of serious psychological distress within the last year (25.9%) and the highest rate of a major depressive episode within the last year (12.1%) (Urban Indian Health Institute, 2012).
- **AI/AN adults have high rates of alcohol and illicit drug use problems.** In 2011, the rate of substance dependence or abuse was higher for AI/AN individuals (at 16.8%) than any other racial or ethnic group. For comparison, the rate among whites was 8.2% (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2012).

Mental health and substance abuse issues affect intimate relationships and parenting behaviors, placing AI/AN adults and children at greater risk of victimization. Untreated trauma and substance misuse also contribute to violence in the home.

## Violence Against Women

For many complex reasons, violence has become a serious problem in many Tribal communities. First, jurisdictional issues have meant that in many areas of the country non-Indian men who commit acts of domestic violence on Indian reservations are virtually immune from prosecution (Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe, 1978; Futures Without Violence, n.d.). In addition, many AI/AN men, growing up without strong social norms and without positive roles, learned abusive behaviors, especially in boarding schools (Smith, 2007). Some AI/AN men coming back from military service came back with post-traumatic stress disorder, further complicating the issue of violence.

AI/AN women are disproportionately likely to experience intimate partner violence (IPV or domestic violence). Specifically:

- **AI/AN women are more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to experience intimate partner violence.** More than a third (39%) of AI/AN women report having experienced IPV at some point in their lives (Black & Breiding, 2008). These assault rates are estimated to be as much as 50% higher than the next most victimized demographic (Perry, 2004). Unfortunately, this finding has remained constant over many years. A large national study from 1998 found that AI/AN women were the most likely racial group to report a physical assault by an intimate partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).
- **Not only are AI/AN women more likely to be injured than women of all other groups during a physical assault, but more of these injuries require medical care** (Bachman, Zaykowski, Kallmyer, Poteyeva, & Lanier, 2008).

- **AI/AN women experience much higher levels of sexual violence than other women.** Data gathered by the U.S. Department of Justice indicate that AI/AN women are more than 2.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than women in the United States in general (Perry, 2004); other studies suggest 34% (or more than one in three) Native American women will be raped during their lifetime, whereas for women as a whole the risk is less than one in five (Tjaden & Thonennes, 2000).

Notably, a larger percent of victimization against AI/AN women is committed by white offenders compared to AI/AN offenders (Bachman et al., 2008). About one-quarter of all cases of family violence (violence involving spouses) against American Indians involve a non-Native perpetrator, a rate of interracial violence five times the rate of interracial violence involving other racial groups (Futures Without Violence, n.d.).

### DATA RESOURCES

- Futures Without Violence has a comprehensive fact sheet on violence against AI/AN women (Futures Without Violence, n.d.).
- The National Indian Child Welfare Association offers a fact sheet on trauma and AI/AN children (National Indian Child Welfare Association, 2014).
- The Indian Health Service offers many fact sheets on Indian health disparities and specific health care topics concerning AI/AN people (Indian Health Service, n.d.).

## Parenting, Child Trauma, and Maltreatment Issues

As discussed previously, AI/AN families today still bear the legacy of the impacts of confinement to reservations, the destruction of food sources, starvation, military rule, displacement of spiritual and traditional leaders, and the devastation of traditional male roles. Diseases such as tuberculosis, influenza, measles, and smallpox also took a heavy toll, devastating AI/AN populations. Vast numbers of people died, leaving children without care and in many cases without ways to resolve the grief of such massive losses.

Perhaps the most devastating historical legacy, however, was the destruction and systematic dismantling of AI/AN families through the use of boarding schools and, later, the child welfare and adoption systems. Parents were powerless against the forces taking their children. Boarding schools and removals left families and whole communities without children. Normal family bonds were threatened, and the social norms that arise out of adults raising children were nearly erased. Positive parenting practices were greatly undermined.

For children, boarding schools left them to be “parented” in harsh institutional settings. These schools were devoid of nurturing. Virtually imprisoned in the schools, children experienced a devastating litany of abuses—forced assimilation, grueling labor, starvation, inadequate medical care, and widespread sexual and physical abuse (Smith, 2007). Later, in the pre-ICWA adoption era, research revealed that 25% to 35% of all Native American children were removed from their families (Unger, 1977). These children were placed with white families, usually far from where they had lived.

Today, AI/AN youth experience various forms of trauma at higher rates than the rest of the U.S. youth population. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define trauma as “an event, or series of events, that causes moderate to severe stress reactions. Traumatic events are characterized by a sense of horror, helplessness, serious injury, or the threat of serious injury or death, affecting those who suffer injuries or loss. They may also affect people who have witnessed the event” (CDC, n.d.). For this reason, witnessing an act of violence can be equally as traumatic as being the victim.

The CDC Adverse Childhood Experiences study provides a framework for identifying traumatic events youths may have experienced that have lasting effects on their mental and physical well-being. These events include abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual) and neglect (emotional or physical), violence in the home, substance abuse in the home, incarcerated parents, divorce or separation of parents, and mental health problems with one or more parents (CDC, n.d.). AI/AN children and youth are more likely to:

- Have experienced or witnessed the divorce or separation of their parents or caregivers;
- Live in homes where they will witness violence against or between their parents;
- Live with parents and caregivers who struggle with substance abuse;
- Have grown up in a home where one or more of the adults faced mental health issues; and
- Have incarcerated parents or caregivers.

In addition, AI/AN children and youth experience the trauma of child abuse and neglect at higher rates than the general population. AI/AN children experience a rate of child abuse and neglect of 12.4 per 1,000 children, compared to the national rate of 9.2 per 1,000 children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

In general, AI/AN children are more likely to have had at least one of the adverse childhood experiences described above, as well as more likely to have had more (cumulative) adverse childhood experiences than the average American (Koss et al., 2003). Add to this historical trauma, which must be considered when discussing AI/AN youth’s current experiences with violence, grief, and trauma. Historical trauma does not account for ongoing traumatic experiences and losses, but rather represents a separate experience of grief and trauma unique to populations who have experienced genocide and other extreme historical disenfranchisement. Historic trauma is often compounded by the contemporary experiences of grief and trauma that AI/AN youth face.

Perhaps not surprisingly, AI/AN youth have more serious problems with mental health disorders. Specifically, AI/AN youth have higher rates of anxiety, substance abuse, and depression. Scholars consider the high rate of mental health problems to be due in part to issues of racial discrimination, geographic isolation, and cultural identity conflicts, all of which have roots in historic personal and group rejection, disenfranchisement, and the relocation of entire communities from traditional lands to reservations (Olson & Wahab, 2006).

Suicide is a major issue for AI/AN youth. In 2006, suicide was the second leading cause of death for AI/AN youth ages 10 to 24. Suicide was the cause of death for 23.1%, 20.6%, and 20.4% of all deaths for the age groups of 10- to 14-year olds, 15- to 19-year olds, and 20- to 24-year olds, respectively. These are all vastly greater than the percentages for the general population across these ages, which were 6.3%, 11.3%, and 12.5%, respectively (Heron, 2010).

## Resilience and Hope

Despite these challenges, recent literature has identified other contextual factors that can help ameliorate these risks. For many AI/AN people, individual and community strengths are linked to the traditions of their ancestors. A study of two AI/AN communities found lower substance abuse and related trauma in the community that had maintained its cultural traditions (O'Connell et al., 2007). Other studies have reported the positive effects of cultural identity on negative outcomes such as suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, n.d.), school dropout (Feliciano, 2001), and substance abuse (Moran & Reaman, 2002).

The awareness of and loyalty to one's culture of origin is also linked to positive outcomes such as:

- School success (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFromboise, 2001);
- Higher self-esteem (Kulis, Napoli, & Marsiglia, 2002);
- Higher social functioning (Jones & Galliher, 2007);
- Increased resilience (LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006); and
- Improved physical and psychological health (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993).

Additionally, one study shows that community identity and participation, expressed through teens visiting older relatives and volunteering to help elders and others, were associated with lower depression, alcohol use, anti-social behavior, and levels of internalizing dysfunctional behaviors (Whitesell, 2008). Another study concluded factors that were protective for AI/AN youth included Tribal language, ceremonies, and powwows (Mmari, Blum, & Teufel-Shone, 2010).

These recent studies naming culture as a mitigating force that reduces risk support what indigenous people have held in their hearts for so long. Tribal programs are working to undo the historic displacement of mechanisms of cultural transmission. Community leaders are working to restore storytelling, the oral tradition, Tribal languages, elder roles, and spirituality to Tribal people, understanding that these are important factors that support resilience.

### *“Re-membering”*

**Theda Newbreast, a noted American Indian community advocate, said, “Colonization dismembered our culture, dismembered our families, and dismembered our social norms. Our job is ‘Re-membering. By remembering the traditional teaching of the culture about how to live, Tribal people can help foster resilience and survival. Tribal programs are working to restore hope and dignity to overcome the adverse conditions that have become so pervasive in Indian Country.**

Today, families are rediscovering traditional teaching about parenting, using traditional ceremony to heal unresolved historical trauma, and rebuilding the social norms that support positive child development. New legislation and strong advocacy by AI/AN women, also supported by AI/AN men, have begun to make a major difference in overcoming the issue of interpersonal violence. Some AI/AN communities are developing culturally sensitive interventions both within and outside of the criminal justice system; these family or community forums emphasize restorative and reparative approaches to justice (Futures Without Violence, n.d.). Native communities have begun the work of healing from the violence.





## Section 4

### Cultural Considerations

This section examines how the pre-colonization and colonization history, as well as recent and current events, have shaped contemporary AI/AN cultures and identities. The use of the plural here is intentional because there continue to be, from time immemorial, distinct regional and Tribal differences, as well as contemporary differences based on evolving expressions of AI/AN identity in a changing world.

This section provides information about the values and characteristics of indigenous people to enhance self-sufficiency and providers' understanding of AI/AN cultures and people.

Practitioners can use this information to successfully navigate cross-cultural dynamics of difference with individual AI/AN clients, and agencies can use it to successfully collaborate with Tribal partners. This information can also be used to consider cultural relevance in programming, to ensure it is congruent with cultural values, contributes to positive cultural identity, and avoids services that force assimilation on AI/AN people.



### Culture and Identity in Context

Discussion of contemporary AI/AN cultures should be in the context of historical impacts, including the diversity of cultural identities expressed by individuals and families; AI/AN individuals exist on an identity continuum that ranges from very traditional to very assimilated. Those on the most traditional end of the scale are likely to speak their own Tribal language; practice traditional Tribal spiritual practices; dress traditionally; live a traditional lifestyle relying on subsistence, talent, role, or trade for support; and hold to traditional values, culturally defined mannerisms, and communication patterns. Their worldview is a collectivist and holistic worldview shaped by indigenous thought and ways of being. There are still today many people who embody this way of life. Surprisingly they may be from tribes with more than 400 years of contact or they may be from tribes whose contact is relatively recent (100 years or less). They may be Indian only or mixed race. They may appear racially AI/AN or may physically have features of any number of other races.

On the other end of the scale are people who have experienced nearly total assimilation. They also may appear with a variety of physical racial characteristics. These individuals usually know little of their traditional Tribal culture, as they were raised in mainstream

American society. Historic events took them from their tribes by forced removal of earlier generations; persecution, discrimination, and shame; or relocation, conversion, or separation. For Native people, assimilation was seldom a voluntary process. Individuals on the assimilated end of the scale are culturally mainstream American with only remnants of Native traits or behaviors. For example, they may perform certain family rituals and not know why, or they may exhibit communication patterns that are rooted in their heritage. They are usually as devoid of knowledge about their own culture as the rest of American society.

From these two extremes all manner of combinations are possible. In the middle are people who constantly code switch, shifting from the patterns of one culture to the other in a matter of seconds depending on context. A person's place on this identity continuum can be by random chance given their personal experience with the historical context, or it can be by choice. AI/AN people can be comfortable with their identity anywhere along the continuum or be very troubled by their identity. Some experience great pride in heritage. Others feel shame and even cultural self-hate; the prejudice and stereotyping in American society sends a message—"It is not okay to be who you are, but you can't be one of us." Almost every image in the media tells AI/ANs that they are dysfunctional, mystical, or extinct. Without help on the most fundamental question of one's place in humanity, many individuals cannot reconcile the identity challenge and turn to substance abuse, high-risk behaviors, and alternative identities such as gangs.

AI/AN tribes and organizations have begun to address these issues with programs designed to support identity formation and the development of a positive cultural identity. Research shows that a positive cultural identity is associated with numerous affirming outcomes for AI/AN people, especially youth. Safety-net agencies and stakeholders should ensure that any programming developed for the benefit of AI/AN populations contributes to a positive cultural identity and starts where the client is at in the development of that identity.

## The Role of American Values

To understand another culture, it is essential to understand your own. Understanding the predominant values of mainstream America is a good jumping off place for understanding AI/AN cultures. In American society, linear cause-and-effect thinking predominates. Scientific inquiry reduces the world into its smallest parts, compartmentalizes, and categorizes. These values are manifest in helping agencies that address narrow slices of life, are funded in silos, and are measured for their cause-and-effect impact. The cultural phenomenon of "Evidence Based Practice" is the quintessential example of this approach. In this linear context, American society values 24-hour clock time, rules, eligibility criteria, documentation, knowledge, and money.

Other values shape American society as well, including hard work, individualism, independence, materialism, education, altruism, dominance over nature, hierarchy, institutions, a system of laws, liberty, and the nuclear family. These values are manifested in the very nature of the human services system. The system is compartmentalized into programs to support employment, income assistance, education, self-sufficiency, housing, and nuclear families.

Few Americans think of themselves as having a culture. This is a product of power and privilege. When you are part of a dominant culture you do not have to think about culture; yet every decision, behavior, profession, helping practice, or theory is culturally based. People from a dominant culture are conditioned to behave as if their way is the legitimate way of being. The norm is to bring dominant methods of helping to people who have distinctly different cultural beliefs, needs, and values, only to fail to be helpful. The dominant society tends to blame this failure on the individual or their culture rather than the inadequacy of their own tools.

Culture is a preferred set of methods for a group to meet its basic human needs. American culture is organized to meet basic human needs through the lens of its own values. Remembering that these values are often different from the values of those served can help the safety-net provider not blame the victim and support collaborations that avoid services that continue to force assimilation on AI/AN people.

This section presents information that is at risk of creating new stereotypes in place of the old. However, there are general elements of AI/AN cultures that are common across indigenous people. By learning about these, especially in contrast with the general characteristics of American society, safety-net service providers can enhance their ability to understand AI/AN cultures and people.



## Worldview

While the worldview of American society could be characterized as a linear worldview, indigenous Tribal societies tend to have a more relational or cyclical worldview. In a relational worldview the world is understood as a complex set of cycles and patterns that influence human behavior. This relational worldview is more holistic and tends to understand wellness as a balance among the mind, body, spirit, and relationships. This worldview still accommodates linear cause and effect. However, it tends to embrace the unknown influences in addition to what can be seen, and it tends to accept that many cause-and-effect relationships are operating at the same time. Life in this worldview has a fundamentally spiritual basis.

This worldview results in valuing relationships, process, spirituality, harmony with nature, and interdependence. These societies value work for what it contributes to the balance and time as it relates to the cycles and patterns of nature and life. Tribal societies see knowledge as valuable in context. They usually view family relationships as interdependent

extended kinship networks of people. One's worldview shapes values and values shape behavior. Within the context of cultural values, each person has free will to behave as he or she wishes, but understanding values can help service providers understand the influences that shape or limit the choices individuals may make in a given circumstance.

## Spirituality

A traditional elder was asked by a Christian theology professor when he prayed. The elder replied, "Well let's see, when I wake I give thanks to the Creator for a new day. I stretch my bones and put my feet on the floor. I give thanks for being alive and being able to move about the earth. I go down to the kitchen where my wife is cooking breakfast and I give thanks for her love and care and for the food. Shall I go on?" Traditional spirituality tends to be fully integrated into daily living. In traditional teaching spirituality is indistinguishable from life and is described as a way of life rather than a religion.

AI/AN people generally have a deep respect for spirituality, whether traditional (pre-colonization) or Christian (post-colonization). Some groups practice a combination of both. Many Tribal communities (as described in the history section) have strong organized churches that are now part of the contemporary AI/AN culture.

Whether Christian or traditional, the usual custom is for community or even business meetings to open with a prayer. Usually an elder will be asked to give the blessing. Whenever possible the prayer is given in the native language. Those unfamiliar with the custom or uncomfortable with it are welcome to step out or just to observe in silence.

## Time

Given the cyclical nature of a relational worldview, the past, present, and future are all one co-occurring event with the ever present promise of renewal. In this view, history is much more current. To the average American 100 years is a long time. To an AI/AN, the last 100 years is in the current memory of elders due to the stories handed down in families from generation to generation.

American society values preparing for the future and saving now for the unknown time ahead. The dominant culture's relationship with time is one of fear and mastery. In the dominant society, time is money, time is spent, and time is a crucial resource for the production of goods and services. AI/AN societies value preparing for the future, but more in the sense that the patterns and cycles of life tell us how to prepare. Traditional



AI/AN life meant preparing for the coming season. It was accepted with the faith that, if one took care of the relationship with the earth and the Creator, the promise of renewal would manifest. The relationship of indigenous people with time is one of faith and harmony. In traditional AI/AN society, it was crucial to know the time to show up to gather the berries when they ripened or to fish when the fish ran, or to plant the corn to ripen before the frost. To do that, individuals had to have the baskets made, the nets ready, or the ground prepared. They had to have all of these things and many more done on time, along with ceremonies, business, and defense.

Both cultures value time, but they manifest and prioritize these values differently. It is the power and privilege of the dominant culture that allow it to judge the other as less functional. When the AI/AN family or individual does not show up on time for an appointment or meeting it may be due to conflicting values. If a family member or relative was in need that might take priority. If a subsistence activity needed attention that might take priority. If an elder stopped to talk, that relationship could take priority. When AI/AN individuals do not adhere to the cultural expectations of their own world first they risk losing the social and cultural capital that ensures their survival. Not showing up may or may not be a lack of responsibility. A person may have been acting responsibly toward a greater obligation.

## Interdependence

In Tribal societies around the world, interdependence is more highly valued than independence. In these societies, an individual is unlikely to survive outside the tribe. Where American society tends to value individualism, AI/AN cultures tend to value collectivism. Where American society celebrates individual accomplishments, AI/AN cultures tend to celebrate contributions to the well-being of the group. Leaders are valued for what they bring to their community rather than personal accomplishment.

In traditional AI/AN families, children are guided from an early age to make a transition from dependency to providership. Where mainstream culture values “getting out on your own,” AI/AN cultures value becoming an autonomous adult while remaining in close proximity to extended family.

Self-sufficiency takes on a different context. AI/AN cultures learn independent living skills through providing for others. Safety-net agencies that offer transition services for youth need to understand their classes on “independent living” are designed to teach people how to live in accordance with mainstream values and may not be relevant for AI/AN youth. “Community service” programs accomplish the same thing in AI/AN society but are much more in line with the cultural values. Ironically, community service in mainstream society is often a punishment.

## Sharing and Saving

One expression of the relational worldview and notions of interdependence can be seen in sharing and saving behaviors. Where dominant culture encourages taking care of yourself first, AI/AN people will often put the group before the self. In some tribes wealth was historically measured by what you gave away, not what you saved. Sharing of food, housing, and money are common and represent a form of social capital. The more you

share with others when you have it, the more likely others will share with you when you are in need. Withholding from others is a cultural taboo. Sharing scarce resources now (instead of rationing or laying them away for your own use later) is saving for the future—building up social capital for future return in lean times.

Safety-net agencies will come into conflict with this value when relatives share food stamps, housing, financial aid, or transportation against the regulations of the provider. Thus young people who get housing through transition services programs and then let their homeless family move in are taking care of relatives and relationships and making an investment in social and cultural capital; they are not showing careless disregard for rules and regulations.

## Extended Family

Kinship is the central organizing factor of AI/AN culture and life. Extended family relations in AI/AN cultures are considered much closer relatives than in most of American society. Historically, in many tribes, aunts and uncles were called mom and dad and cousins were called brother and sister. Tribal languages have words for relatives that cannot be translated into English because they are descriptive of lineage and ancestry.

Tribes are, in essence, collections of families. Some organize those families into clan systems. Family loyalty is strong. In places where these traditions are intact, most safety-net services are actually provided through informal extended family relationships.

The negative impacts of historical practices that broke up families, removed children, and took people far from their natural supports cannot be overstated. However, in the cities, AI/AN people learned to create new kinship networks in the form of urban Indian groups and organizations, recreating elements of the interdependent communities that are the hallmark of AI/AN culture historically.

## Child Rearing

Traditional teachings about child rearing almost universally regard children as sacred, pregnancy as a sacred time, and children as gifts of the Creator. Traditional child rearing was characterized by patience and kindness. Early explorers and clergy saw AI/AN child rearing as permissive and indulgent. Everyone in the extended family was responsible for nurturing, teaching, training, and caring for children. Discipline came in the form of learning internal self-control—the society depended on it. In the oral tradition of Tribal people, stories, legends, and teachings communicated values and ensured close bonding and healthy brain development. Children and youth were respected members of the community and developed a great deal of autonomy at an early age, often working hard to transition from being dependent on others to providing for others.

Perhaps there is no other aspect of AI/AN culture that was more damaged through the intentional actions of the Federal government to “kill the Indian, save the man” as done elsewhere. Today, AI/AN cultures are reclaiming and relearning traditional child rearing practices, but the shadow of historical trauma haunts virtually all AI/AN families today.

## Elders and Ancestors

Ancestors are relatives that have passed on. “Elder” is a title of status gained by exhibiting service to the community, nurturing the family, or possessing cultural knowledge or wisdom.

There seem to be no rigid criteria for elderhood. Some people distinguish between elders and “olders.” Olders are simply old people who conduct themselves in ways that are contrary to cultural values. They are still valued, cared for, and respected, but they may not get the same reverence that is afforded an elder.

At community events in most tribes, elders are served first along with guests and visitors from a distance. Youth are expected to get water, carry plates, and in general make sure that the elders are comfortable. Special seating may be reserved. When an elder speaks, he or she is not interrupted no matter how long they talk. Outsiders often become very uncomfortable with the time elders take when speaking, but should relax and listen to the meaning behind their stories.



## Respect

In a relational culture, respect and honor are highly important. However, historically, the interdependent nature of Tribal life shaped what is respected and how respect is shown. Where mainstream Americans respect position, titles, and educational status, most AI/AN cultures value letters behind one’s name or one’s job title very little. Where mainstream America respects professions, youth, knowledge, and power, AI/AN people are much more likely to be concerned with humility, wisdom, service, and listening.

How respect is shown can also be different. Where a firm handshake in American society is a sign of power and respect, a light handshake is an act of humility and a symbol of respect in some AI/AN cultures. American society often shows respect by being direct, while AI/AN people consider being indirect and communicating through stories or examples respectful.

## Non-Interference

Indigenous people also value non-interference. It grows out of the relational worldview’s focus on balance and harmony, as well as the cultural value on interdependence. In American society everyone freely gives advice to others, offers criticism, or gives unsolicited directions. From what kind of car you should buy, to what to do on vacation,

to what class to take at school, there is no end to telling people how to live, act, feel, and what to want. In AI/AN cultures people are much more reserved in this area. Because relationships are highly valued, these cultures often find it rude to tell other people what they should do, feel, want, like, or enjoy. Worst is pointing out an error or criticizing positively or negatively a talent or gift. Singling out an individual for praise can also be very uncomfortable because it sets the individual above the group, potentially damaging the harmony and balance of relationships.

## Pride

While it is a cultural taboo to be singled out for praise, it is also taboo to lose face. Being shamed or embarrassed in public is, for many AI/AN people, one of the worst experiences in life. Sometimes children will not ask questions in class for fear of making an embarrassing mistake or sounding stupid. Service providers should be aware that many AI/AN people will not ask for help and will not ask for clarification when they do not understand. Both non-interference and pride are operating here. As the person politely nods their head as if they understand, they are avoiding being seen as ignorant and protecting the helper from being embarrassed for not being clear.

## Language and Communication Patterns

Communication issues are discussed later in Section 5. However, it is important to note that many traditional people grew up speaking their native language as their first language. When safety-net providers speak with traditional people either in development of a collaborative effort or as clients, the providers should be aware that these traditional people may be translating English into their own language and back—code switching to be able to answer questions that may not make sense culturally.

In meetings, AI/AN people may exhibit comfort with long pauses and silences that are uncomfortable in most mainstream American settings. In many AI/AN settings people will assess who has the most status within the culture and allow elders and leaders to speak first if they wish. People tend to be very careful not to interrupt or cut someone off. They will not use direct questions unless someone is being confrontational. They will frequently use humor to correct rude behavior or to level the status of someone who has violated the cultural norm of humility. When AI/AN people tease or joke with an outsider it is a sign that the person has been accepted and is building rapport.

## Conflict Resolution

In a relationship-based culture, people often relate intensely. This may be positive or negative. Conflict is common and can present significant barriers to cooperation or collaboration. Common conflict resolution skills and tools may help resolve minor conflicts. Slowing down communication so that people do not make assumptions about the meaning behind words or actions can also help. In some tribes, individuals may use ritual, ceremony, and/or gifts to right a wrong. Service providers that attempt to teach conflict resolution skills to AI/AN clients would do well to ask how the person learned to resolve conflicts in their family or what traditions they are aware of in their community for solving problems between people. Most importantly, keeping a positive relationship and working

to ensure high regard is a barrier against conflict. AI/AN people are forgiving with people that adhere to the cultural values or protocols but have little patience for people who do not recognize when they have offended.

## Historic/Intergenerational Trauma

Historic or intergenerational trauma results when a people have experienced severe persecution, prejudice, violence, or cultural destruction. The history described earlier was so damaging that family life became severely impacted.

### *“Beware”*

**A mother was raised by forcefully relocated grandparents who speak only their native language because her mother died soon after birth in an epidemic. She was beaten in boarding school for speaking her language and called racial slurs daily. Once she returned to her reservation in poverty with no skills to live the subsistence life of earlier generations and no parenting skills, she became pregnant. She taught her children to be frightened about expressing their cultural identity openly. Her child, who has learned to be hyper-vigilant, witnesses an elder thrown against a wall by a non-Indian shop owner and beaten. The child later experiences a panic reaction when followed around a store just because she is AI/AN. She marries a man with post-traumatic stress and ends up in a violent relationship. Her child, who has witnessed the violence in the home, reacts to authority in panic and is unable to comply with the demands of a police officer and is incarcerated for the fight-or-flight behavior associated with trauma.**

When service providers see behavior that does not make sense in the immediate context of the individual, they should look to historic and intergenerational trauma as the root cause. Providers can help by being trauma informed and by engaging clients in building awareness and skills that help them heal the trauma of generations.

## Help-Seeking Behavior

How AI/AN people seek out help has been affected by the history and by culture. Many times AI/AN people will seek out mainstream providers because they have come to believe the stereotypes and cannot see anyone from their own culture as competent. Fear of being shamed can also cause AI/AN people to not go for help either within or outside their culture. Others fear that if they go to non-Indians for help they risk losing their children, housing, or job. While some will not go to professionals or formal agencies from their own culture, many will seek out natural helpers. Healers, spiritual leaders, elders, or relatives are often the first to be asked. For emergency housing, people may move in with relatives. For employment or food, people turn to elders for help where they may get included in subsistence activities. For relationship problems, they may seek out spiritual advice, and for symptoms of stress or depression, they may seek out traditional treatment such as

healing rituals or ceremonies. Even when seeking services from mainstream providers many AI/AN people will also be working with a natural helper.

Service providers should be aware that families may be engaged in both formal and informal services. They also need to be aware of the fear of outsiders threatening the integrity of the family and they need to be aware that people may have strong opinions about service providers from their own community.

## Conclusion

Each AI/AN person is an individual and may be anywhere along a continuum of AI/AN cultural identity. Thus, all of the issues discussed above will apply to every person in a unique way. However, learning about the common values and characteristics of indigenous people can help the service provider understand the influences that shape or limit the choices AI/AN individuals may make in a given circumstance.

With this knowledge, a practitioner can recognize that when AI/AN clients share resources with their second cousins in violation of a regulation, show up late to a meeting, or nod their heads even though they seem not to understand, it may be a result of differing values. Safety-net providers should remember that these values are often different from the values of those creating, running, and operating the service system, helping them avoid attributing such choices to negative qualities in the individual.

Further, if safety-net agencies can become conscious of the ways their service interventions are designed to teach people to live in accordance with mainstream values, they can begin to appreciate that these services may not be relevant for AI/AN people. They can at least be transparent and tell clients that the services will help the client deal with the mainstream world but perhaps will not be as useful at home. Safety-net agencies then have the opportunity to open themselves up to partnerships with AI/AN tribes or organizations to develop services supportive to AI/AN people.



## Section 5

# Engaging American Indian and Alaska Native Families in Services

To engage AI/AN families and individuals in services, safety-net providers must first engage tribes and or AI/AN organizations. This section will provide practical information on how to collaborate with tribes and urban Indian organizations to reach AI/AN populations. Effective outreach to individuals and families happens through relationships. The section also includes tips on recruitment, increasing participation, and retention of AI/AN families. It provides strategies for family engagement, including strategies for cross-cultural communication and tips for the use of culturally based social marketing. An additional section will address the importance of youth engagement and provide tips for stakeholders that wish to engage youth.

Central to successful engagement of AI/AN tribes, organizations, families, and individuals is an approach built upon respect for the people that values their culture. The following principles help set the stage for engagement.

## Touchstone of Hope Guiding Values

At an international convening of indigenous people and mainstream child welfare leaders participants identified key values to guide work between cultures to improve outcomes for indigenous children. These values include self-determination, culture and language, a holistic approach, structural interventions, and non-discrimination. These principles apply equally to safety-net services and are essential to successful collaboration efforts and outreach to AI/AN tribes, organizations, families, and individuals. They set a basis for a respectful and meaningful relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people working to serve the needs of children and families.

### Self-Determination

- Indigenous people are in the best position to make decisions that affect indigenous children, youth, families, and communities.
- Indigenous people are in the best position to lead the development of child welfare laws, policies, research, and practices that affect their communities.
- Non-indigenous child welfare workers need the capacity and understanding to work effectively with indigenous communities, experts, children, youth, and families.
- Only adequate and sustained resources will enable indigenous communities to implement self-determination in child welfare.
- The role of children and young people in making decisions that affect them must be recognized.

## Culture and Language

- Culture is ingrained in all child welfare theory, research, policy, and practice. There is no culturally neutral practice or practitioner.
- Child welfare policy and practice are most effective when they reflect and reinforce the intrinsic and distinct aspects of indigenous cultures.
- Guidelines and evaluation processes for culturally appropriate child welfare are strongest when established by indigenous communities, reflecting local culture and context.
- Language is the essence of culture, and child welfare knowledge, policy, and practice are most relevant when expressed in the language of the community served.

## Holistic Approach

- Child welfare approaches that reflect the reality of the whole child preserve the continuity of relationships and recognize that the child is shaped by her/his culture (including traditions, spirituality, and social customs), environment, social relationships, and specific abilities and traits.
- Effective child welfare services take a lifelong approach to making decisions and give due consideration to both short- and long-term impacts of interventions.
- Relevant child welfare interventions acknowledge that non-indigenous and indigenous children and youth are citizens of the world. This means that the child welfare systems must ensure that all children and youth in their care have opportunities to understand, interact with, and respect people of different cultures.

## Structural Interventions

- Protecting the safety of children and youth must include resolving risk at the level of the child, family, and community. Without redress of structural risks, there is little chance that the number of indigenous children and youth in care will be reduced.
- Consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, child welfare providers should not remove children or youth from their homes due to poverty. Impoverished families must be provided with the economic and social supports necessary to safely care for their children and youth.
- Social workers must learn to differentiate between structural (also known as distal) risks and family risks to a child or youth, and develop meaningful responses to both.
- Substance misuse is a major problem, and child welfare must develop programs to redress neglect arising from parental substance misuse—preferably in tandem with culturally based addictions experts and services—within the context of the economic poverty of many communities.

## Non-Discrimination

- Indigenous children and youth receiving child welfare services should not receive inferior services simply because they are indigenous.
- Indigenous people are entitled to equal access to child welfare resources that are responsive to their needs and the unique cultural context of their experience.
- Indigenous people are entitled to equal access to ancillary resources related to child welfare, such as services offered by the voluntary sector and all levels of government.
- Indigenous ways of knowledge must be given full credence when child welfare work is carried out with indigenous children, youth, and their families, and indigenous interventions used as a first priority (Blackstock, Cross, George, Brown, & Formsma, 2006).

## Planning for Engaging AI/AN Families

Safety-net providers develop the capacity to engage AI/AN families over time through training, experience, guidance, and self-evaluation. Engagement occurs in a complex interplay between practice and policy, set in the context of both the politics and the culture of the system. Engagement is not something that happens merely as a result of some training or education. It is a process dependent upon a commitment to provide quality services to everyone and a willingness to change. It can be accomplished best when policy, practice, and attitudes come together in a congruent service system.



Engagement should be a mission-level issue. Agency policy that sets minimum standards for providing services to diverse cultures can support the development of specific engagement strategies for AI/AN populations. Agency policies that require adequate identification of the cultural identity of clients and data collection about the needs of specific groups are essential.

## Community Participation

An effective engagement strategy listens to the AI/AN voices in the service area and empowers communities, families, and individuals. Empowerment, as such, involves the exchange of resources between the agency reaching out and the community being served to increase the functional capability of both.

Planning that brings together the safety-net agency and AI/AN groups is an undertaking designed to respond simultaneously to various cultural mind sets. Outreach to AI/ANs must include a process that exhibits a commitment to seeking the varying cultural viewpoints represented in the service area population. Providers must include people of diverse AI/AN identities in the outreach and planning process, and the goals of the service must be consistent with the goals of various groups.

Incorporating AI/AN outreach into a strategic plan breaks down the process into manageable parts with reasonable timelines. The first step toward such a process is community involvement. To achieve the necessary level of community involvement, safety-net agencies must establish linkages with existing networks in the Indian community. When working with tribes, an outside agency should always work through the Tribal government, recognizing its sovereign authority. Once that authority is consulted, community- or agency-level work can proceed. Government-operated services have an obligation to tribes to respect the unique government-to-government relationship between States and tribes. This is also true of political subdivisions as well.

### *Safety-Net Collaboration*

**Recently an emergency preparedness agency engaged in mission-level planning regarding potential natural disasters. As part of the strategic planning process it assessed the changing and unmet needs in its service area. Two American Indian tribes were prominent on the list of local governments. The organization interviewed local AI/AN leaders, held listening sessions in Indian communities, and relied on existing relationships with past and present American Indian advisory board members. Through this work the agency learned of the priorities of tribes. It found where its own priorities and needs overlapped with those of the tribes. As a result, the agency adopted an aggressive collaborative approach, and one of the local tribes agreed to become a staging area for disaster response and to be the site of a stockpile of emergency supplies for surrounding counties. The tribes and the safety-net organization benefited from this ongoing relationship.**

In addition, training programs and program evaluations can be greatly enhanced by community participation in design and implementation. Most importantly, agencies must commit the resources needed to consult the AI/AN community, cultural advisors, and leaders. The development of ongoing relationships that foster mutual respect enhances the effectiveness of the consultation process. Key individuals within each AI/AN community should be asked to serve on advisory bodies, task force groups, or evaluation teams.

### **Social Marketing**

Mainstream safety-net agencies often rely on social marketing to reach their client populations. Social marketing can be an effective strategy to inform AI/AN populations about available services, but not without adaptation. Things like brochures, posters, public service announcements, newsletters, web pages, and social media will usually not attract an AI/AN audience even when in places where they can be seen. Today, as in the past,

AI/AN populations have their own media; they need messages that speak to them and need those messages directed to specific audiences.

AI/AN cultures are historically oral tradition societies. These cultures primarily transfer information through storytelling, word-of-mouth communication, events, gatherings, and social engagements. Today, radio, cell phones, and the internet are augmenting the oral tradition. Social media has become an effective tool to tap traditional word of mouth communication.

Agencies that want to get the word out to AI/AN communities about their services should first consider who they want to communicate with. For example, elders are likely to listen to the radio or get their messages through contact with their peers. Events, presentations, and direct contact where they gather are most effective. Adults will be more likely to get messages through the media, the work place, or other service providers. Social media is increasingly important. Youth can most effectively be reached through social media and events.

Design, photos, and content all need to speak to the AI/AN audience, whatever the age, with a visual message that is locally tailored. Pictures of plains Indians being used to attract native audiences in the Southwest or woodland Northeast will send a clear signal to the local AI/AN audience that the agency has no idea of the local population.

Today several Indian-owned businesses work in the area of communications and social marketing. Mainstream safety-net agencies may want to seek out and contract with one for consultation to adapt their usual approaches.

### *Good Intentions*

**A Head Start program, hoping to recruit American Indian families, found a volunteer with communications experience but with little cultural knowledge. The program was about to publish an ad featuring a picture of a prominent Head Start alumnus with an illustration from a completely different tribe. When the alum was proudly sent the ad draft, he asked the Head Start program not to publish it. The program only then questioned the designer's cultural knowledge. Through dialogue the appropriate changes were made and the ad was published.**

## **Service Designs**

Interventions that incorporate the concept of equal and nondiscriminatory services are central to effective practice, as well as services matched to the client population. To address the needs of AI/AN communities, the planning process should include a needs assessment or, when working with a tribe, relying on needs assessments already conducted by the tribe. Service utilization rates are not recommended as reliable for assessing the needs of AI/AN groups due to inadequate past outreach or services.

The administrative level of any safety-net agency operationalizes the commitment to collaboration with tribes and Indian organizations, and outreach to families. Agencies can enhance outreach and collaboration through administrative tools or processes. For example, advisory committees or Tribal liaison positions are helpful in keeping the organization in tune with events and needs in AI/AN communities.

Essential to this process is some form of self-assessment. It can start with determining the demographic characteristics of the AI/AN population and the nature of existing relationships. Assessing whether the staff and governing boards are representative of the client population is an important element. In addition, it is important to assess the degree to which services and programs are accessible to AI/AN communities, both physically and culturally, and whether or not the philosophical orientations of the services are compatible with the belief systems of the communities being served. Such a self-assessment addresses whether or not the system has the capacity to adapt its services to meet the needs of an AI/AN client population.

Staffing and training guidelines help ensure that all staff are informed about AI/AN cultures and that AI/AN individuals are recruited and retained on the staff where possible.

Agencies can ensure that appropriate resources and networks are established in support of outreach to AI/AN communities. All service providers should make training and orientation to the client's culture and community routine and mandatory.

Consultants versed in AI/AN culture can be used to help build networks, select advisors, design helping approaches, or conduct evaluations. Consultants or designated staff can also act as brokers between the formal system and natural helping networks.

Through consultation and advice, agencies should cite services to best reach the target communities. On occasion this may mean using an interagency agreement for co-location with Tribal services.

Agencies interested in collaboration with tribes can encourage or develop new approaches or adjust existing ones to fit the cultural context of AI/AN communities. Flexibility and the capacity to reach out and link to the informal systems, Tribal services, and the complex service system touching Indian Country are essential.

### *Tribal Liaison Offices*

**Several State social service departments maintain a high-level "Tribal liaison" position. In Oregon this position takes the lead on outreach to tribes, handling the communication in the government-to-government relationship. Tribes rely on this liaison to set up meetings between leaders, to negotiate inter-governmental agreements and contracts, and to solve problems as they arise. Safety-net agencies under the auspices of a State government should determine if there is a position in State government that can assist with Tribal collaboration.**

### *Co-Location Strategy*

**One California Tribal consortium was engaged in advocacy with a local county regarding access to county services. For years the relationship had been distant and at times adversarial. Three tribes together received a planning grant and invited the county to join the effort. The result was a county office located in the Tribal social services building. By co-locating services, both sides improved capacity and services.**

## Engaging Families and Individuals

Models designed to respond to the context of the AI/AN client population help ensure meaningful services. Cross-cultural practice skills (e.g., intervention, assessment, counseling, etc.) developed through training and supervision help ensure that the AI/AN family or individual will feel welcome and that the services they receive have been helpful.

### Holistic/Context-Driven Approach

It is important to view the AI/AN client in a holistic manner in the context of culture, community, and family. All aspects of the individual (i.e., mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual) are the realm of the practitioner's interventions as long as those interventions are guided by the context in which the client exists. Self-determination should be a top priority by the service provider. Providers should not focus services on assimilation or adoption of mainstream values, but on adaptation and adjustment to the expectations of the non-native world, as well as identity and self-concept. When helping AI/AN clients navigate the complex area of living in two cultures (for example, understanding the expectations of an employer), it can be valuable for an AI/AN client to have a cultural plan as part of his or her service plan.

#### *Just Fishing?*

**In many Northwest tribes, salmon are not only the main source of protein in the diet but also hold a significant place culturally in spiritual beliefs and practices. Salmon runs are marked for many with ceremony and ritual. One student in a non-Indian training program told his instructor that he had to miss an exam to go fishing. Once the instructor learned the cultural implications for this student, he made accommodations for the student. The instructor learned the student's family was responsible for catching the fish for a feast to feed hundreds of people and fish are only caught during a run, sometimes requiring around the clock effort by everyone. Later the instructor would discuss with the student the implications for future employment.**

### Community-Based Models

Agencies doing outreach to AI/AN families may need to spend time in the home and community. They may seek out key individuals in each community with whom they work to educate the community about available services. It is valuable when service providers become identified as part of the community and become, in some instances, informal extended family members or natural helpers.

## Family or Individual Assessments

Family assessments should be based on functional behavior in the context of the culture, community, and family. Caution should be exercised when using existing assessment measures as they can be culturally biased or ethnocentric and can yield incorrect results. Results should be interpreted by cultural experts or given less credence than when the family is of the dominant culture. Service providers should ideally have training in ethnographic interviewing and assessment of such issues as assimilation, cultural identity, and integrity of primary network of support.

## Targeted Helping Approaches

Some practitioners specifically target some of their approaches to people of AI/AN populations. These techniques can be learned and integrated into practice. For example, ethnographic interviewing is a technique specifically designed to develop an understanding of the client's view of his or her culture. Using this technique, which relies on interviewing skills first used in anthropology, the practitioner can view the world through another cultural lens. For example, a provider might ask clients what constitutes a family in their culture and who they regard as family. By focusing on the clients' definition, the service provider learns to see "family" through the clients' eyes.

AI/AN providers have been using identity enhancement as a practice approach for several years. The goal of this type of service or intervention is to help the child and family build a positive image of themselves as part of a valuable culture. This approach links group esteem with self-esteem and helps overcome cultural self-hatred and denial of identity.

Values clarification is another useful intervention when the values of the client and the larger society are in conflict. Few individuals realize the importance of their values, and those that do seldom are aware of how the values of the society around them may differ from their own. Clarification of values and cultural origins can be very beneficial. Once clarified, this information can be used in context stretching or cultural mapping.

Cultural mapping or context stretching is an approach that helps the client see problems in the context of cultural differences. For example, the Native American parent who is having difficulty with behavior management can begin to learn how generations of Native American children raised in government boarding schools never learned essential elements of positive parenting. The problem is reframed from a personal deficit to a people deprived of a birth-right issue.

Network or extended family interventions are also useful practice adaptations. Because the extended family is usually the first resource for people of color seeking help, it can be very useful to provide

### *Facilitating Natural Supports*

**A grandmother was unable on her own to provide childcare for a school-age child with a learning disability. With support from a safety-net agency, a family group meeting was held and the family came up with a plan among the relatives to share transportation needs, homework help, and wood cutting. The grandmother was able to get the financial help and support she needed to care for her grandchild so the mother could continue to work a night shift job.**

assistance to the family in such a way as to empower the interdependence of the family system. This may mean that the practitioner contacts a grandmother, aunt, or other relative and offers a supportive ear, resources, or information. Often, extended families that would ordinarily be unable to care for a difficult child, for example, can do so with the institutional support from an agency.

Youth engagement in Tribal settings can be enhanced by some very basic approaches. Youth, like others in the culture, are at various stages of assimilation or acculturation. They are as into social media as any youth their age and concerned about the same things. Some may be struggling with identity in a world that says that it is not okay to be AI/AN but neither can you be part of the mainstream. Unfortunately, AI/AN youth are highly likely to be subject to micro assaults, racial slurs, and open bigotry. Youth are looking for places and relationships of safety. It is important to talk to them as valuable human beings, with dignity and respect, even if they are not verbal. Most AI/AN youth will judge your sincerity and safety before they invest in the relationship. Putting youth to work in meaningful roles, asking them to do community service, and helping them discover their place in the community are the most successful youth engagement strategies in Indian Country (Friesen et al., n.d.).

### *The Role of Elders*

**At the Native American Youth and Family Center in Portland, Oregon, a Youth and Elders Council does advocacy work for the urban Indian community. Youth from all social conditions work side by side with elders, learning the issues, learning to be spokespersons, and assuming responsible roles under the watchful eye and support of caring elders.**

## Cross-Cultural Communication, Tips, and Strategies

The following material is adapted from *Cross-Cultural Skills in Indian Child Welfare*, a publication of the National Indian Child Welfare Association (1987).

Engaging AI/AN people is entirely dependent on communication. Communication is shaped by language, custom, and culture; despite assimilation, communication patterns among AI/AN populations can vary markedly from mainstream society. It is essential that safety-net agencies prepare their leaders and staff with cross-cultural communication and interviewing skills. The first step is self-awareness; remember—"I have a culture." Everyone has a culture, or multiple cultures, that shape their behavior and, more specifically, communication patterns. In the same way that people from different areas have accents, they also talk faster or slower, pause for different lengths of time, or use more or less gesturing. A non-judgmental attitude based in curiosity is the most basic value to apply. In cross-cultural communication, assumptions about what things mean will inhibit learning. What means one thing in one culture will mean something else in the next culture. Mainstream service providers must also be aware that communication occurs in the context of history, and power and privilege differences. The dynamics that are inherent in the differences between cultures are magnified many times when one party in the communication feels the other has power over his or her life. The key to overcoming these dynamics is respect, not only respect for the person but for the caution or concern that may be present due to historic distrust.

The more cultural knowledge the mainstream provider can develop, the greater the chance of bridging the cultural gap. When the service provider approaches the AI/AN family with a willingness to learn and to respect a different way of communicating, the chance of successful engagement increases.

### **Tips for Cross-Cultural Interviewing AI/AN**

- Expect that the Indian client may or may not make eye contact during the interview according to local custom, as well as gender and age-related patterns.
- Expect that the client may offer a gentle handshake as a sign of respect.
- Expect that the client may use a subdued tone of voice.
- Expect that several family members may come to the interview but communicate through a spokesperson.
- Expect that clock time will be more important to you than the client.
- If the interview is in the home of the client, the worker will likely be offered a beverage and/or food. It is important to accept.
- Remember that the client's readiness to share will largely depend on how comfortable he or she feels with the interviewer.
- Use body language that indicates your concern and interest but respect the client's space by avoiding standing too close or talking too loud or fast.
- Personal questions may be addressed to you. It is important to share enough of yourself with the client to let the client know you are human. But the focus must remain on the client's situation. Be careful not to impose your personal values on the client.
- Casual conversation is an important part of building rapport. Take time to engage in some non-work related conversation to establish who you are as a person. Practice the art of visiting.
- Pauses and silences during the interview are important. Let the silences last as long as the client seems to be readying to speak.

### ***American Indian, Alaska Native, Native American, Indigenous? Which is correct?***

**Naming AI/AN people is a tricky political dilemma. When addressing Alaska Natives, there is no doubt.**

**“Alaska Native” is the correct term. In the lower 48 most American Indians refer to themselves as “Indian, American Indian,” or as a citizen of their own tribe. However, opinions range on this and it is best to ask, “What is your preference when someone refers to your culture?” Most people will answer honestly and appreciate the question.**

- Avoid intrusive questions. Do ask for clarification when you don't understand. Statements like, "I need some help to understand why this happened," are an invitation to talk. The client can choose to respond depending on personal readiness.
- If questions are not answered, make note of them. Because many Indian people are taught to think carefully through something before responding, their answer may come in the next contact.
- Recording and note-taking during interviews is sometimes necessary but always distracting. A historic distrust of things written down may be a factor. If you have to take notes, tell the client why and how they will be used; share them with the client.
- The use of humor is an important part of Indian culture. A good indication of rapport is the client's joking with you. Often humor is useful in other situations.
- Avoid the use of jargon. The Indian client may nod his or her head politely as you speak only to ask, "What was he or she talking about?" when you leave the room.
- Remember that the Indian client's first language may not be English. Words that describe feelings or relationships may be especially difficult to translate.
- Be willing to admit your ignorance about Indian culture but avoid ethnocentric questions and comments (Cross, 1987).

## Conclusion

This chapter outlined how a safety-net service provider can engage AI/AN tribes, organizations, families, and individuals. It provides only a sketch of possibilities and is not intended to be all-inclusive or exhaustive. In developing relationships with AI/AN populations, take a long-range planning approach and implement system changes in a planned, progressive manner. While this discussion provides a glimpse of what might be, the first task is to enter into a process designed to be inclusive of AI/AN voices and make implementation manageable.



## Section 6

### Understanding the Service Systems

Understanding the service systems that should respond to the needs of AI/AN families is a challenging task. Because of historic issues, the service system looks different from State to State, and even from tribe to tribe within the same State. This section will provide information that can help safety-net providers sort out the service system in different locations. Directors and managers of safety-net programs that want to collaborate or partner with tribes will find the information helpful for informing their approach to Tribal leaders or managers. The section includes logical questions a director might ask a local Tribal liaison.

#### *Reaching out to Tribes*

**Those who wish to learn more about how service systems work and how safety-net agencies can collaborate with tribes can learn through dialogue with local Tribal leaders and managers. Taking the initiative to set up a meeting, approaching Tribal leaders and managers with curiosity and informed questions will usually be well received.**

### Federal Trust Responsibility

Tribes that entered treaties with the United States agreed to give up large expanses of land and natural resources in exchange for a promise that the United States would provide for the health, education, and welfare of the Tribal members for time immemorial. In some treaties the language was “as long as the grass shall grow.” Additionally, the Federal government agreed to hold the tribe’s land in trust and provide protection to the tribe and stewardship of the natural resources. This arrangement is referred to as the Federal trust responsibility. Like any trustee, the Federal government is responsible for the competent management of resources on behalf of the party. Under this arrangement, the Federal government is responsible for schools, health care, and the social service safety net for AI/AN people living on reservations or in designated service areas (see definition of Indian Country in the Glossary). There are three Federal agencies designated to meet the trust obligations: Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and Indian Health Service (IHS). The first two are within the Department of the Interior. The latter is within the Department of Health and Human Services. However, these agencies can only fulfill their obligations to the extent that Congress appropriates funds for that purpose. Unfortunately, Congressional appropriations fall far short of need, preventing the Federal government from fulfilling its trust responsibility.

In recent years, more and more legislation has created set-asides or direct funding from tribes under mainstream programs. This trend began with the War on Poverty, during which Indian tribes became eligible for community action funds and housing funds. Later tribes gained access to child care funding, TANF, and child welfare funding, among others. Even with access to these programs the funding formulas fall far short of the known

needs. Funding disparities are well documented and most tribes are actively seeking resources to meet the needs of their citizens (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2003).

When the BIA, BIE, or IHS directly provide services, which is still the case in many locations, the employees are Federal employees who infrequently participate in the Tribal community or economy. If the tribe receives grants, contracts, or fund services through their own resources, the employees are Tribal employees.

Safety-net program directors or managers reaching out to tribes can ask, “What is the relationship between the Tribal government and the Federal government in delivery of services in your tribe?”

## Citizenship and Eligibility

If the trust responsibility were upheld, then the service system would be fairly simple. If most AI/AN people lived in Indian Country, it would be more simple than the reality. However, given layer after layer of Federal policy and programs created over hundreds of years to divest of the “Indian Problem,” it is anything but simple.

Beginning in 1924, when Indian people were made citizens of the United States by an act of Congress, AI/AN individuals became eligible for services in any off-reservation jurisdiction in the country. As citizens, AI/AN people are covered by Social Security and other government programs and are entitled to equal protection under the law. Theoretically, as residents of States, AI/AN people are eligible for all services for which any other resident of the State, in the same circumstances, is eligible, regardless of where they live. In practice, AI/AN people have been turned down for services in State, county, and local service systems under the mistaken belief that they are the sole responsibility of the Federal government. This pattern of discrimination has created a norm in which AI/AN people believe they are not eligible and may not even try to get local or State safety-net services.

Additionally, under PL 280, 11 States assumed at least partial civil jurisdiction over Indian lands—Alaska, California, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin. In PL 280 States, the Federal government provides services of last resort. Only after State resources are exhausted is the AI/AN person eligible for Federal assistance. In these States the State government is responsible for safety-net services on and off the reservation, unless an individual tribe was exempt from PL 280 (which occurred in some State legislation, such as in Oregon, where the Warm Springs reservation was exempted), or a tribe was restored to Federal recognition after termination. In addition, there is a process by which a tribe can reassert its jurisdiction in a PL 280 State following a Supreme Court decision that found that PL 280 was a wrongful taking of an inherent Tribal right. In partial PL 280 States, the State legislature took jurisdiction over some things and not others. Idaho is an example, where the State



took jurisdiction only over compulsory school attendance; juvenile delinquency and youth rehabilitation; dependent, neglected, and abused children; mental illness; domestic relations; and operation of motor vehicles on public roads. As a result of the complexity created by PL 280, many AI/AN people who need services fall between the cracks.

Many tribes and States in recent years have developed robust and positive relationships through State legislation, Tribal-State agreements, and contractual arrangements. In these States there are usually strong opportunities for collaboration with tribes and good examples of established relationships.

State services are predominantly located away from Tribal communities and employ primarily non-Indians; thus they may not be culturally appropriate and make little contribution to the Tribal economy overall.

Safety-net agency leaders can ask how the Tribal government relates to the State government with regard to service delivery. Asking, “Does the tribe have any inter-governmental agreements with the State regarding service delivery?” may help to open dialogue on these issues.

## Indian Self-Determination and Self-Governance

When official Federal policy shifted from assimilation to self-determination in the 1970s, a new Tribal service system emerged. Under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (PL 93-638), a tribe may contract with the Federal government for any service that would be provided under the Federal trust responsibility. Because these arrangements are authorized under PL 93-638, these are known as 638 contracts. However, under these contracts the Federal government has oversight, determines the deliverables and budget, sometimes provides technical assistance, and monitors performance. If tribes fail to meet performance measures, the Federal government can and does step in and run the program. Tribes can contract to run distinct programs and may take on some programs but not others.

In the 1990s, a shift toward even greater Tribal control occurred with the enactment by Congress of the Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994. Under self-governance a tribe negotiates a compact, which is essentially a block grant. All trust responsibility functions are bundled into a package, and the Tribal government decides how to allocate the resources to meet local need. There is no technical assistance. Tribes have greater autonomy but agree to meet outcome measures instead of contract deliverables. In these scenarios tribes are frequently augmenting the Federal dollars with funding through State contracts or Tribal-State agreements. They are also often allocating Tribal revenue if it is available.

Both self-determination and self-governance tend to support communities more broadly than direct services. Employees are much more likely to be local, know and live in the community, and participate in building a local economy by spending payroll dollars locally.

Safety-net leaders can ask, “Is your tribe one of the self-governance tribes?” This question will likely elicit a response that clarifies if the tribe holds 638 contracts or provides service under a self-governance compact. If the tribe is the primary service provider, either under contracts or under “self-governance” compacts, the flexibility of the tribe to collaborate is much greater.

## Tribal Funding

In the last 30 years, many tribes have developed successful economic enterprises. While gaming has been central to many of these, tribes have worked hard to build diversified economies. For many, self-governance is central to an economic development strategy. Today many tribes are providing health services under self-governance compacts with IHS. These tribes are collecting revenue from third-party payers such as private insurance, Medicaid, and Medicare; some are serving individuals beyond the Tribal population on a fee-for-service basis. Increasingly, Tribal health services are the only or best source of health care for rural Americans living near Indian Country.

Tribes are producing revenue from their own enterprises and are funneling that revenue back into capacity building, augmenting Federal and State funding to enhance services and to heal and empower their citizens. They are creating not only jobs but also entire economies.

While these situations are still emerging, these tribes are still in a process of recovery from historical trauma and continue to need safety-net services for many of their members.

Safety-net providers can ask, “What economic development activities is the tribe engaged in?” This question may reveal several opportunities for collaboration on employment, training, and other safety-net services.

## Access to Federal Programs

As discussed in the history section, the War on Poverty and then the self-determination era started a new chapter in the way that Tribal governments funded various services. Starting with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), tribes gained access to programs that all other local and State governments could access. Many tribes now operate housing authorities and build and manage HUD housing. Head Start followed, and many tribes or Tribal consortia operate their own Head Start programs. Nearly every tribe in the nation has a child care program since gaining access to the child care and development block grants. Increasingly, tribes are running their own TANF, child support enforcement, employment, and child welfare programs using Federal dollars that have become available to tribes through legislation. Most tribes have active planning departments that seek out discretionary funding from Federal programs, States, and private funders.

While this is a growing trend, access does not mean entitlement. Tribes have to build infrastructure, apply for, and be accountable for the resources that they receive. Often the amount of funding available is minimal, and running a program is only feasible if other funding sources can be secured.

These resources, however, tend to contribute to the local economy because they foster self-sufficiency, employment, local housing, and job training. In addition, they usually hire local people to do the work. In tribes taking advantage of these funding sources, an emerging service sector has become an important part of the local economy.

Additionally, AI/AN specific programs have emerged in other Federal departments outside the Federal trust responsibility. The Administration for Native Americans, under the Department of Health and Human Services, supports Tribal social and economic

development and governance infrastructure through discretionary grants.

Safety-net agencies seeking to collaborate with tribes will need to research the local circumstances. Each tribe is different in its degree of development, its philosophy about development, and its capacity to apply for and operate various programs. Access can be daunting. One of the main roles that a safety-net partner can play is giving the tribe an opportunity to build capacity through experience in a collaborative venture.



## Private Sector (Charities and the Safety Net)

One little known gap in Tribal safety-net services is the non-profit sector. While churches fill much of this gap, there are few relationships with major providers of safety-net services such as the Red Cross, food banks, emergency shelters, or transportation services. Less than one-tenth of 1 percent of foundation-given money goes to Tribal programs (Hicks & Jorgensen, 2005). Few non-profits exist or work in Indian Country (Middleton & Kusel, 2007). Even though there are some very large national direct mail solicitation organizations, only a fraction of the money donated to them makes it to actual services (Capozza, 2000).

One strong opportunity for safety-net agencies and stakeholders is to support the development of locally controlled non-profit organizations to help fill the emergency assistance gaps and to further strengthen the safety net.

## What Does the Service System Look Like?

Thus, the answer to the question, “What does the service system in Indian Country look like?” is, “It depends.” Understanding the history and the possibilities can help the safety-net agency understand the potential configurations so that it can sort out strategies for effective collaborative efforts.



## Section 7

# Integration of Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education into Safety-Net Services

This toolkit has been prepared by the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families in recognition that all children fare better when their parents are in healthy relationships and are able to fulfill their parental roles. AI/AN families face special challenges, as discussed earlier. Despite these challenges, resilience is a cultural strength. Resilience is augmented when families have the tools to relate in healthy ways. Safety-net agencies are in a key position to help AI/AN communities in this regard. This toolkit is designed to promote and help support healthy relationships among AI/AN people served throughout safety-net agencies.

## Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education

Healthy marriage and relationship education teaches core relationship skills to individuals, couples, and families on a voluntary basis to help them achieve, maintain, and strengthen relationships. Healthy relationship education often occurs in a group setting and is not meant to be therapy or clinical treatment for couples experiencing serious issues.

A couple's relationship health can change over time. Research shows that an unhealthy marriage can negatively impact the couple's physical and mental health, job functioning, and parenting, as well as their child's social and cognitive skills and educational achievement (Moore et al., 2004).

Healthy marriage and relationship education builds the core skills of healthy *communication* and conflict resolution, and enhances critical skills like *parenting* and *financial education*. Enhancing these skills can reduce stress and improve coping skills for families navigating the normal issues related to parenting, everyday life, and finances.

Based on an extensive literature review, Child Trends identified the following as core constructs of a healthy marriage (Moore et al., 2004):

- Commitment to each other and any children;
- Satisfaction;
- Communication;
- Conflict resolution;
- Lack of domestic violence;
- Fidelity;
- Quality interaction/time together;
- Intimacy/emotional support; and
- Duration/legal marital status.

## Strengthening Relationships

What is a healthy relationship? Who gets to decide what it is? These are questions that have been at the heart of AI/AN programs meant to strengthen couples and families. Among the strategies that have not worked with AI/AN individuals are training curricula that fail to address the cultural norms, values, behaviors, and role expectations that are unique to AI/AN couples. In addition, programs that ignore intergenerational trauma, the loss of male and female cultural roles, or the negative impact of boarding schools often fail to be relevant to AI/AN



couples. Finally, programs that address the issue as a problem of joblessness, without also addressing the issues of economic opportunity or subsistence living on reservations or in rural Alaska risk being seen as irrelevant as well.

In 2005, the Native Wellness Institute (NWI), in partnership with the National Indian Child Welfare Association, conducted a series of focus groups with AI/AN couples from States across the nation, including Alaska, California, Rhode Island, and Montana. The purpose of these focus groups was to come up with a common definition of a healthy AI/AN relationship. The results were incorporated into an evaluation framework for NWI's Healthy Relationships curriculum. The results of that research revealed that AI/AN couples think of a healthy relationship in the same way as they do a healthy person. A couple needs to come into a balance of mind, body, spirit, and context—the relational worldview (see Cultural Considerations for a full discussion).

Following are the characteristics participants identified for a healthy AI/AN relationship according to cultural teachings and values.

### **Mind:**

- Effective communication (negotiation, problem solving, conflict resolution)
- Relationship knowledge (impact of historic trauma, gender differences, future oriented)
- Positive core attitudes (caring, supportive, joyful, humor, considerate, encouraging)

### **Body:**

- Holistic intimacy (play, laugh, share stories, mutuality, comfort, sensuous)
- Safety and security (freedom from abuse or violence)
- Wellness (freedom from addiction, living in moderation, sleep, nutrition, humor)

**Spirit:**

- Positive virtues and values (acceptance, hope, faith, commitment, forgiveness)
- Spiritual practice (connected with higher power, involved, shared beliefs, shared practices, ethical conduct, family rituals, and connected culturally)
- Balance (complimentary skills, virtues, and strengths; interdependent)

**Context:**

- Positive social relationships (with other people and extended family, unity in recreation)
- Community involvement (community service, role models, service to relatives, cultural participation)
- Responsibility (industrious, honest, working together, problem solving, and impulse control) (Cross, 2007)

Most mainstream healthy marriage programs touch on some of these items but fall short of being relevant to these cultural teachings and values. Tribes and Indian organizations are using several approaches to address the cultural gaps. One way is to use culturally specific curricula such as the NWI Healthy Relationships curricula. Training in the curriculum is available through the NWI ([www.nativewellness.com](http://www.nativewellness.com)). Another is to establish couples support groups for young couples led by older and successful couples. Usually these are led by people in leadership positions, service providers, or natural helpers. Relationship teachings are handed down generation to generation, as is the historic and cultural norm.

## Parenting

Like healthy relationship approaches that fail to examine historic trauma and grief and loss of cultural gender roles and teachings, parenting approaches that fail to consider the impact of generations of forced removal to boarding schools, and transracial adoption, forced sterilization, and over use of foster care will fail to be relevant to Indian parents. Most mainstream parenting approaches are deficit based. That is, parents are thought to have a lack of knowledge or capacity to parent effectively, and the curricula are designed to correct the deficit. This message has been toxic for AI/AN parents in the past. Blaming a victim of family destruction for not having parenting skills is demeaning and tends to sustain powerlessness.

Evidence-based models are frequently required for use in federally funded programs. Currently, there are no evidence-based approaches designed for AI/AN families. One curriculum, Positive Indian Parenting (PIP), is recognized as a Cultural Best Practice by the National Alliance of Minority Behavioral Health Associations. PIP is a curriculum based in traditional AI/AN teachings that were gathered over a period of two years across the United States and Canada. It is a values-based curriculum that has been successfully implemented in Tribal communities since 1987. It is available from the National Indian Child Welfare Association ([www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org)). PIP is frequently used to engage AI/AN parents in parenting education and other skill-building curricula.

## Fatherhood

It is probably a consensus of opinion among tribes throughout Indian Country that a key to bringing greater strength to families is the degree of success we can achieve in our efforts to promote positive father involvement. More specifically, we must put in place strategies that are developed and carried out by AI/AN people if we are to be successful in lowering the incidence of father absence, especially among men who have young children, and increasing the number who stay involved and who pay their child support obligations. To effectively promote positive fatherhood in our communities AI/AN tribes are examining cultural adaptations of recent approaches for their efficacy. Several tribes and organizations are now practicing alternatives that are uniquely “Native” approaches.



Over the last 15 years, fatherhood and positive fathering practices have gained national attention. There are many efforts currently in place, with new programs being initiated in various parts of the country. Many of these programs, however, have been developed in such a fashion as to not reach the fathers who approach their roles and responsibilities from a cultural perspective. In many American Indian traditions, fatherhood is seen as a function of self-actualization that fosters an achievement of Tribal identity and the male role. Fatherhood is also seen as a shared kinship obligation (e.g., uncles, grandfathers, brothers, and fictive kin); lack of involvement affects an entire family unit. To a larger degree, the culture itself is impacted when fathers do not fulfill their roles. Fatherhood is a source of healing (of intergenerational trauma, wounds of the spirit, and loss and grief). Fatherhood serves as a medium for cultural preservation and as a conduit for the transmission of values and traditions. In addition, we can assume that the known benefits of having a father involved in a child’s life are experienced by Indian children as well. There is an obvious need for programmatic approaches that speak to the cultural needs of Indian fathers and the practical needs of children. However, programs that do not have a cultural base run the risk of being seen as irrelevant in Tribal communities.

Many people inside and outside of low-income communities want to help solve problems associated with father absence. For a variety of reasons, most professionals who gain access to Native communities have only limited knowledge about Native culture and thus, limited awareness of how to make productive contributions to family strengthening efforts sanctioned by Tribal leaders. A great deal of work needs to be done by both national and local AI/AN organizations to ensure that advocates and practitioners are able to access the best information and resources available on the subject.

With a clear understanding of the cultural implications and circumstance of using healthy marriage and relationship education, these approaches can be integrated into existing service delivery systems in different ways based on an agency’s strengths, needs, and capacity.

## Strategies for Integration

### Levels of Integration

Healthy marriage and relationship education skills can be integrated in different ways based on local strengths, needs, and capacity. The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families has created a Levels of Integration concept to visualize levels along a continuum of integration efforts.



#### *Level 1 - Basic Engagement*

Sharing facts about the importance of healthy marriage and relationship skills is a good starting point for basic engagement of AI/AN individuals, couples, and families. Basic engagement strategies can include distributing tip sheets throughout the community, such as at Head Start centers or Women, Infants, and Children program offices.

#### **RESOURCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families has a virtual library with more than 800 free materials in a variety of formats, including factsheets, research-to-practice briefs, brochures, pamphlets, training resources, program reports or evaluations, and research materials. Visit [www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org](http://www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org) to learn more.

## ***Level 2 - Partnerships***

Engaging community members and other stakeholders also helps agencies reach the next level of integration—partnerships. Developing partnerships with other agencies within the community is a great way to pool resources and expertise for the benefit of AI/AN families. All partners should share a common vision of promoting healthy marriage and relationships, which may require educating other stakeholders about the positive impacts of a healthy marriage on family safety and stability, employment, and self-sufficiency.

Through partnerships, agencies can identify resources and experts on various components of healthy relationship skills—communication, conflict resolution, parenting, and financial capability—and collectively integrate the components into a group workshop or class for AI/AN couples and families.

### **RESOURCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

For more tips and tools on developing partnerships to promote healthy marriage and relationship education, including a collaboration assessment and partnership agreement template, visit the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website about partnerships at [www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org/partnerships](http://www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org/partnerships).

## ***Level 3 - Full Integration***

Stakeholders can help strengthen couples' and families' health and well-being by fully integrating healthy marriage and relationship education into existing social service delivery systems that serve AI/AN individuals, couples, and families. To achieve full integration, all service providers should be trained or cross-trained so they are prepared to discuss and teach core skills (e.g., healthy communication, conflict resolution, parenting, and financial management) as an interwoven part of service delivery. Well-established partners can help effectively integrate healthy marriage and relationship education into service delivery systems by providing training, tips, and other resources.

### **RESOURCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

There are many considerations involved in program planning, development, and implementation. The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website contains helpful tips and tools on full integration and program development for State, local, and Tribal stakeholders. Visit [www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org/program-development](http://www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org/program-development) to learn more.

Given the unique cultural issues involved, most safety-net agencies will want to partner with an AI/AN organization to provide specialized services and curricula. These efforts will be enhanced with the use of the Engaging AI/AN Families in Services section of this toolkit.

## Conclusion

Providing a comprehensive picture of AI/AN cultures, tribes, families, couples, and individuals, and the key service structures that serve them, is a challenge. The diversity of Tribal cultures, and the experience of being AI/AN is so broad that to draw generalities is to risk creating stereotypes. However, the challenges that AI/AN people face are similar across the nation. Service systems and Federal Indian policy are complex but providers can, with careful consideration, understand them. Cultural experiences are different, but the implications of culture and cultural values and beliefs on behavior are important variables for safety-net agencies and workers to be able to navigate. This toolkit was developed to help service providers understand the cultural, historical, political, and policy context in which they will encounter and engage AI/AN families in services. Service providers can be sensitive enough to reserve judgment about behavior without knowledge of the person's experience with, for example, historic trauma.

The toolkit also provides an overview of the service systems and policy issues to help increase and improve the likelihood that safety-net agencies can and will collaborate with tribes and AI/AN organizations on services. Such collaboration is the most likely path to success with AI/AN families, but few know where to start.

Content on family issues and cultural considerations should help safety-net agencies and their staff maximize their potential recruitment and retention of AI/AN families as well as enhance the impact of the services provided to AI/AN families. The capacity to serve AI/AN families depends on the ability to form relationships across cultural boundaries; a grasp of potential cultural barriers will help providers be effective in outreach.

Finally, integrating healthy marriage and relationship skills into existing service delivery systems as part of a comprehensive, culturally appropriate, family-centered approach to promote self-sufficiency will help safety-net agencies add value to Tribal communities. As providers build trust with AI/AN families and communities, they become an important resource for enhancing resilience and strengthening families.



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