FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

As explained in "Institutions" (pages 12-13), establishing sound *rules* (and governance structures to administer those rules) is vital to a nation's ability to design, implement, and sustain an effective workforce development approach. But equally important is establishing clearly understood *roles* for those who are leading and driving that approach, namely the nation's **political leaders** and **programmatic leaders** (chief administrative officers, department heads, program coordinators, etc.). What responsibilities do each have in driving the nation's workforce development activities, and how do they work in concert to advance its strategic objectives for human capacity building? Who should exercise what leadership roles, and how should they complement one another?

While defining these roles would seem a simple proposition, for decades many tribal nations have suffered from "role confusion" due in part to federal policies that defined these roles *for* them and the organic, often rapid growth that many tribal governments have experienced since the 1960s.[1] This dynamic is often evident among political leaders, whose roles are "unclear, ill-defined, or simply unlimited."[2] In such situations, political leaders (typically chairs and/or councils) decide and do everything because there is nothing preventing them from doing so; they have done it that way for so long; and the nation's programmatic leaders, employees, and citizens expect them to. Consequently, political leaders' time and energy is spent putting out the day's fires, solving everyone's problems, juggling too many issues, micromanaging tribal programs and businesses, and fixating on every possible detail. Meanwhile, programmatic leaders and their staff wait around for political leaders to act, knowing that any efforts to design and implement better solutions to the nation's challenges likely will be overridden by the political leaders. Overall, no one is forging a "strategic vision" for the nation, leaving it "uncertain of where it wants to go or how to get there."[3]

As the research shows, this is an unworkable formula for Native nation rebuilding generally, and is incapable of fostering the visionary, transformative leadership (from political leaders on down) necessary to craft innovative workforce development approaches that can stand the test of time. Fortunately, through constitutional reform, organizational change, and new policies and procedures, tribal nations are reconsidering and clarifying the respective roles of political and programmatic leaders.[4] As one tribal leader put it, "[Political] leadership needs to understand the tools that we have in our organization and figure out how we can effectively leverage those tools and then help other leadership grow."[5] But the task of growing leadership is not confined to those *currently* serving and working *in government*; it must also include *cultivating community and business leaders* as well as the nation's *future leaders* (its youth).

Students and faculty of the Santa Fe Indian School Leadership Institute's Summer Policy Academy, an award-winning youth leadership development program, meet with NCAI staff, June 2017. (Photo: NCAI)

"An effective leader has to be humble... Surround yourself with people smarter than you. You hire these people to do a job — let them do their job."

– Brian Cladoosby, Chairman, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community

INNOVATION SNAPSHOTS

California Indian Manpower Consortium (CIMC)

Seeking to foster a private sector-based workforce and leadership class among the tribal nations it serves, in 2001 CIMC launched its "Native Entrepreneurs: Creating Opportunities in Our Communities" program. Aimed at cultivating "the skills of Native entrepreneurs to be profitable and sustainable in the larger context of Native culture and sovereignty,"[1] the program trains would-be and existing Native small business owners to start or grow their own businesses, thus expanding the number of job opportunities available to other Native people. Its rigorous curriculum – featuring 200 total hours of coursework and homework – teaches marketing, day-to-day operations, financial management, and human resource management. To be eligible for the program, applicants must be formally endorsed by their tribal government or CIMC staff; those selected emerge with carefully designed and thoroughly vetted business plans to launch or expand their businesses. More than 450 people have completed the program to date, with many returning to take leadership roles as program faculty members. As CIMC explains, "the majority of graduates contribute to economic growth of their respective tribal communities in their business choices."[2]

LEARNING LINK: http://www.ncai.org/ptg/workforce-development-cimc
CONNECT: Teresa Marie Willson, Native Entrepreneur Training Program, CIMC, teresaw@cimcinc.com

Ysleta del Sur Pueblo (YDSP)

Dedicated to fostering "wholly educated citizens, able to learn and adapt as economic climates and industries change in order to create a self-sufficient people,"[1] the YDSP Tribal Council consolidated all YDSP programs for education, workforce development, and cultural preservation under one roof in its newly created Empowerment Department in 2007. In addition, the Council relinquished direct control of the Pueblo's businesses to the newly formed Tigua Inc. board of directors and senior executives, insulating those businesses from political influence and enabling them to focus on profitability and growth, which in turn has produced more and different career opportunities for YDSP citizens. This decision also freed up the Council to focus its attention on working with the community to forge YDSP's long-term vision for its future, and then achieve that vision through the implementation of long-range strategic plans across Pueblo government. The Council also demonstrates its commitment to education and workforce development by prioritizing them in YDSP's annual budget process *every* year, and by establishing financial reserves to buffer its scholarship funds in the event of economic downturns to ensure continuity in higher education support for Tigua youth.[2]

LEARNING LINK: http://www.ncai.org/ptg/workforce-development-ydsp
CONNECT: Anna Silvas, Director, Empowerment Department, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, asilvas@ydsp-nsn.gov

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What is the extent of the involvement of your nation's political leaders in the day-to-day provision of its workforce development services? Do they micromanage/interfere?
- If so, how is that impacting the efficiency/effectiveness of your workforce development activities and your nation's ability to develop more effective solutions?
- Are your nation's political leaders dedicating adequate time — and do they have adequate information and data — to make informed decisions about how best to develop its workforce?
- How is your nation holding its programmatic leaders accountable for good performance?
- Are/how are programmatic leaders role modeling the behavior/performance that your nation needs to see in its staff if it is to advance its workforce development priorities?
- Do/how do your political and programmatic leaders work in concert to set and advance your nation's workforce development priorities? What principles and mechanisms can it put in place to make that relationship more beneficial to the nation?

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Political leaders:** Make informed, strategic decisions about the nation's overarching priorities for workforce development and delegate the authority to programmatic leaders to implement them.
- **Political leaders:** Encourage programmatic leaders to take calculated risks to develop innovative programmatic solutions, and ensure their continuity to build institutional know-how and experience.
- **Programmatic leaders:** Hire top-notch staff and delegate them the authority to do their jobs.
- **Together:** Depoliticize tribal workplaces and the provision of workforce development services.
- **Together:** Establish a formal process for regular communication and reporting that sets clear roles and fosters mutual accountability between political leaders and programmatic leaders.
- **Both:** Establish formal policies for succession planning for programmatic leaders and leadership transition for political leaders so the nation can grow its workforce development successes.
- **Nation:** Develop a comprehensive youth leadership training program that incorporates tribal civics and cultural teachings (also consider establishing a youth council if you don't yet have one).