

Strategic Collaborations Between CAAs and Tribal Entities

The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) provides federal funds to states, territories, and tribal organizations to support a wide range of community-based activities to reduce poverty. Tribes are not only part of the fabric of the Community Action Network, but are serving some of the most vulnerable low-income communities. By collaborating with tribes, Community Action Agencies (CAAs) can help raise those communities out of poverty. Whether a tribe receives CSBG funding itself or its tribal members are included in a CAA's client population, the flexibility of CSBG funds provides opportunities for creative partnerships between CAAs and tribal entities.

Why Collaborate with Tribal Entities?

Many American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) or “indigenous” individuals live in areas of extreme poverty, both on and off reservations. There are 325 distinct, federally recognized AI reservations and 221 AN village statistical areas across the country.¹ Over 77% of the AN population lives in Alaska and over half of the AI population lives in 5 states: Oklahoma, Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas.² Recent estimates indicate nearly 20% of indigenous households are experiencing poverty.³

The complex structure and history of tribal entities and relations emphasizes further the need for thoughtful and effective partnerships. Tribal entities can include tribes with their own government, nonprofits managed by a tribal community, and for-profit companies owned by a tribe or tribal members. A tribe may or may not have a reservation, which is land held and governed by the tribe.

The acknowledgement and designation of tribes and reservations has a complicated history. Federally recognized tribes have sovereignty, or the authority to self-govern, and are considered to have a government-to-government relationship with the United States. There are 574 federally recognized tribes. The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is responsible for managing the federal government's relationships with those tribes.

The CSBG Act acknowledges the states' ability to recognize tribes and other indigenous entities that are not recognized at the federal level for the purposes of receiving CSBG funds.⁴ Although states may acknowledge tribes and provide some recognition of sovereignty in state-to-tribe relations, tribes with no federal recognition are not afforded the same benefits, services, or protections as those with it.

How Does CSBG Support These Collaborations?

Collaborations with other entities are an integral part of Community Action and are supported by the federal funding statute and CSBG Organizational Standards. One of the goals of the CSBG Act is to encourage the use of “innovative and effective community-based approaches to attacking the causes and effects of poverty.”⁵ By working alongside and with tribes in their service area, CAAs can ensure the most efficient use of CSBG funds, avoid duplication of services already provided by a tribal entity, and create a continuum of care that accounts for the needs of indigenous populations with low incomes. These efforts are explicitly supported by the CSBG Act, as is the creation of “linkages” with other organizations, including tribal entities, in a CAA’s service area.⁶ The tripartite structure of a CAA’s board additionally promotes the importance of coordinating with key groups and interests in a CAA’s locality.⁷

There are many different ways that CAAs can work with tribes using their CSBG funds. The structure of a partnership between a CAA and a state or federally recognized tribe will be informed by how the tribe receives CSBG funding, if at all. Some tribes may receive CSBG funds directly and therefore part of a partnership would involve avoiding excessive duplication of services. Other tribes may not receive CSBG funds independently and instead be included within a CAA’s designated service area and considered in the CAA’s needs assessment. Understanding a tribe’s existing funding and services structure is an important part of being an effective collaborator.

There are two ways in which tribes receive CSBG funds directly from the federal government. Under the first way, the CSBG Act provides that CSBG funds that would typically be allotted to a state can instead be reserved for an “Indian tribe” or “tribal organization.”⁸ The Act defines these terms to mean “a tribe, band, or other organized group” recognized by either the state(s) in which they reside or the federal government. Tribes that directly receive CSBG funds create plans for the use of those funds that are provided to the Office of Community Services (OCS) and agree to the same assurances as states who receive CSBG funds.⁹ Under the second way, some federally recognized tribes directly receive CSBG funds pursuant to a 477 Program, which is named after Public Law 102-477, the Indian Employment, Training and Related Services Demonstration Act.¹⁰ This allows those tribes to consolidate funding streams and reporting requirements for various federal grants and contracts. As of 2025, 68 tribes receive CSBG funds directly from OCS under this framework.¹¹

Certain tribes may choose to receive CSBG funding through the state rather than directly from OCS or via a 477 Program. Under the CSBG Act, block grants are distributed by OCS to states that then pass this funding through to local eligible entities based on local need. States may designate tribes or organizations created and managed by tribes as eligible entities in the same manner as a state designates a nonprofit or public entity as a CAA. In some circumstances, a CAA may also enter into a subgrant relationship with a tribe.



How Do CAAs Collaborate with Tribal Entities?

This resource includes case studies that showcase some of the ways that CAAs are working with tribes and serving tribal communities with CSBG funds. There are many viewpoints on the best way to approach this work and different ways to measure success in this area. When considering how your CAA might work with tribal entities, the most important principle to remember is that collaboration is a two-way street. The process of forming relationships with tribal communities and tribes should be done with a focus on building trust and mutual understanding.

END NOTES

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Facts for Features: National Native American Heritage Month Press Release CB24-FF10* (November 2024)

² U.S. Census Bureau, *A Look at the Largest American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes and Villages in the Nation, Tribal Areas and States* (October 2023)

³ U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Office of Minority Health, *American Indian/Alaska Native Health* (August 2025); National Indian Child Welfare Association, *State of American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Families Report, Part 2* (May 2023)

⁴ 45 CFR 96.44(b); 42 U.S.C. § 9911

⁵ 42 U.S.C. § 9901

⁶ 42 U.S.C. § 9908; OCS CSBG Information Memorandum #37

⁷ 42 U.S.C. § 9910; OCS CSBG Information Memorandum #82

⁸ 42 U.S.C. § 9911; OCS CSBG Information Memorandum #130

⁹ 45 CFR 96.42(a); OCS CSBG Tribal Plan Toolkit

¹⁰ 25 U.S.C. § 3401

¹¹ OCS CSBG Third Continuing Resolution Funding Release FY25, *Allocations Table* (May 2025); Administration for Children and Families, *Public Law 102-477: Indian Employment, Training and Related Services*

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CASE STUDY 1

RurAL CAP

**Name:**

Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.

Location:

Anchorage, Alaska

CSBG Grant Size:

~\$2.5M

CSBG Service Area:

110+ communities; 665,000+ miles

Other Significant Federal Grants:

Head Start; LIHEAP; Weatherization

Leadership:

L. Tiel Smith (Chief Executive Officer)

Joe Williams (Board Chair)

Jasmine Boyle (Chief Operating Officer)

Board Size:

24 seats

Staff Size:

~500 employees

For all 60+ years of its existence, Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. (RurAL CAP) has served the entirety of Alaska as its only Community Action Agency (CAA). Due to Alaska's unique cultural landscape shaped by hundreds of federally recognized tribes, the history of RurAL CAP is intrinsically linked with the history of tribal recognition in the state, and the governance structure and priorities of the CAA reflect that. Multiple factors, including geographic isolation and limited access to services, have constrained economic opportunity, resulting in many Alaska Native villages being classified as low income today. Notably, Alaska Native villages make up well over half of all communities in the state, underscoring the widespread impact of these challenges across Alaska. While RurAL CAP is not a tribally affiliated organization, it has, since its inception, maintained collaborative relationships with tribal entities as core members of Alaska's statewide community. These partnerships have advanced shared goals across low-income communities, made possible through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program.



For a statewide organization like RurAL CAP, it is important that the various forms of identification, connection, and community be represented in their CAA governance. Unlike in the lower 48 states, most tribes in Alaska do not have reservations.¹ In 1971, Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) which divided the state into twelve regions and created

¹ The one exception is the Annette Island Reserve of the Metlakatla community.

the system of regional and village corporations that exists today.² These regional and village corporations are owned by enrolled Alaska Native shareholders and hold title to either the land or subsurface rights. The regions created by ANCSA each encompass distinct Alaska Native subcultures, which includes all 229 federally recognized tribes in the state. In addition to the for-profit structure created by ANCSA, twelve Alaska Native regional nonprofit organizations also serve the people with the support of the state Department of Commerce.³ Within the timeline of indigenous history in Alaska, this system is fairly new, and RurAL CAP is sensitive to acknowledging the existing approaches to tribal involvement in Alaskan government in its governance structure.

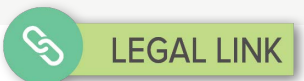


RurAL CAP currently has a 24-member board of directors with the tripartite structure required by the CSBG Act: 1/3 public representatives, at least 1/3 “target area representatives”, and the remainder private sector representatives.⁴ Target area directors are democratically selected from the community they represent. There are several balancing acts that the CAA manages when filling its board with directors who can best steer the agency. The first is size: RurAL CAP’s 24-member board is already substantial. Expanding it to equally represent all low-income communities

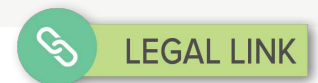
statewide across the tripartite sectors would require a significantly larger board. Instead, RurAL CAP ensures that each of the ANCSA regions is represented in at least one of the tripartite sectors. These regions collectively encompass the entire state and serve as a widely accepted framework for representation.

The second balancing act is working within the system of tribal organization established by ANCSA. To ensure its board fulfills the spirit of the CSBG Act to represent the community served, RurAL CAP reconciles the formal structure of ANCSA with on-the-ground realities of low-income Alaskans, including by partnering with coalitions and gathering places where many voices are brought together. RurAL CAP recently added a seat to its board to represent

A CAA’s bylaws (or other governing document in the case of a public CAA) provide structure and consistency to the board’s operations. Bylaws also act as internal controls and help clarify the role of officers, committees, and non-director staff in organizational management. [CSBG Organizational Standard 5.4](#) requires that each member of a CAA’s board has received a copy of the bylaws or governing documents within the past 2 years.



The federal CSBG Act, [42 U.S.C. § 9910](#), requires the boards of both public and private CAAs follow the tripartite structure. Guidance from the Office of Community Services, [Information Memorandum \(IM\) #82](#), further explains the particular importance of the low-income sector of the board in ensuring a “strong voice” of the community in agency governance. Across all sectors, IM #82 emphasizes that the tripartite board should be “truly representative” of the community being served and board selection procedures should help maintain this.



² ANCSA Regional Association, [About the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act](#)

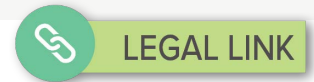
³ ANCSA Regional Association, [Overview of Entities Operating in the Twelve Regions](#)

⁴ Appendix 1 to this case study is an excerpt of RurAL CAP’s bylaws provisions related to the tripartite board.

the Alaska Federation of Natives, the largest statewide native conglomerate, because it would be untenable to have all 229 tribes individually represented as directors. The chairperson of the “bush caucus”—a group of elected officials in the state legislature that represent the Alaskan off-road areas that are physically disconnected from other communities—also serves on the board.

RurAL CAP’s board embodies the close connection the CAA has with the indigenous community. Every board member usually wears multiple hats; for example, the board chair is also the tribal chief of his village and sits in the public sector of the board. The CAA’s CEO is a tribal member, shareholder of his village corporation, and on the board of his regional corporation. RurAL CAP actively recruits directors who play multiple roles in the community because those individuals bring knowledge about their community’s needs to the board.

The board of a CAA is responsible for organizational governance, strategy, and oversight. For nonprofit CAAs, these responsibilities generally derive from the state nonprofit corporation act, which imposes legal rights and duties on directors. For public CAAs, the same obligations often arise from delegation agreements or memoranda of understanding with the local governing body. Although CAA leadership and staff manage the day-to-day operations of the organization, the board is ultimately answerable to the laws that apply to the CAA.

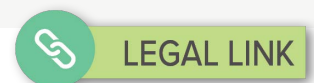


The selection of directors on RurAL CAP’s board is conducted in the spirit of self-determination on a local basis. Self-determination is an important value to RurAL CAP and derives from Alaska Native culture. Having clarity of roles between directors, staff, and CAA leadership and trusting that the board can self-police both ensures that oversight is maintained by the board and allows the board to be more engaged and attuned because they are given true control.

Every 3 years, at the end of director terms, the board reevaluates its distribution of board seats to ensure that representation aligns with target areas of need. For example, although Anchorage has ~50% of the state population, it also has more jobs, housing, and resources than any other area, so it does not have a specific area representative. The board then engages its partners, including nonprofits and community organizations to nominate representatives to serve in the private sector and ANCSA entities, comprised of individuals in the target areas, to choose target area representatives on the RurAL CAP board. While the CAA works diligently to explain to these partners what the board does and ensure potential directors understand their role, RurAL CAP is dedicated to maintaining local control and self-determination throughout the process of director selection.

The results of this governance framework provide a basis for RurAL CAP’s relationship with tribal entities in providing services and programming. By involving tribal organizations so deeply in its tripartite governance, RurAL CAP is able to leverage these established relationships and use its CSBG funds to provide

CSBG Organizational Standard 3.3 requires public and private CAAs to collect and analyze data on its geographic service areas in its community needs assessment. The board, per *Organizational Standard 3.5*, must formally accept each completed community needs assessment.



⁵ Appendix 2 to this case study is a copy of RurAL CAP’s strategic priorities through 2028.

services alongside its tribal partners in high-need communities, while also ensuring efforts are complementary and not duplicative. This is supported by the CAA's community needs assessment: the data indicates that the areas of greatest poverty in Alaska, and also the areas of greatest need and economic opportunity, are rural and tribal communities.

As a result of its unique governance structure, RurAL CAP has become a central hub for understanding statewide needs and providing avenues for connection that boosts local capacity.⁵

RurAL CAP can bring together tribal partners, local governments, schools, nonprofits, and other organizations to execute projects benefitting the low-income community because those groups are already connected to each other via the CAA. Increased access to broadband internet across Alaska has also allowed RurAL CAP to establish a technical advisory role with individual tribes. A village looking to improve childcare options in its area, for example, might reach out to the CAA for help understanding potential funding sources and identifying other local partners. RurAL CAP now supports locally based efforts to establish technical assistance structures among tribes in the state rather than RurAL CAP providing that technical assistance directly. In this way, RurAL CAP is using its tripartite governance structure and CSBG funds to uplift community development and encourage communities to become more self-sufficient.

One of the assurances provided by states receiving funds under the federal CSBG Act, [42 U.S.C. § 9908](#), is that CAAs will provide information about how they will “fill identified gaps in [] services” via referrals, case management, coordination with other resources, and innovative neighborhood-based initiatives.



LEGAL LINK

RurAL CAP



Bylaws

As Amended and Restated by the RurAL CAP

Board of Directors

June 7, 2016

Revised December 15, 2022

Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.

RurAL CAP Bylaws

ARTICLE III. - BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Section 3.1 - General Powers

The business and affairs of the Corporation shall be managed by the Board.

Section 3.2 – Number

The Board shall be composed of not less than three (3) or more than twenty-four (24) Directors (the “*Directors*”), the specific number to be set by resolution of the Board.

Section 3.3 – Tripartite Board

The qualifications, terms of office, manner of election, manner of removal, place, and notice of meetings, and the powers and duties of the Directors shall at all times (i) conform to the tripartite board requirements enumerated in 42 U.S.C. § 9910, or any successor statute, for purposes of administration of the Corporation’s Community Services Block Grant program thereunder, and (ii) meet the requirements of, and otherwise maintain the Corporation’s status as, a Community Action Agency governed by the rules and regulations of the federal government for such agencies. For the purposes of meeting such requirements, the Board shall be divided into three classes of Directors as follows:

- A. Public Directors.** Exactly 1/3 of the Directors shall be elected public officials, holding office on the date of selection, or their designated representatives, except that if the number of such elected officials or representatives reasonably available and willing to serve on the Board is less than 1/3 of the Directors, appointed public officials or their designated representatives may be counted in meeting such 1/3

requirement (the “***Public Directors***”).

1. ***Elected Public Officials.*** For the purposes of these Bylaws, and unless otherwise prohibited by law, “elected public officials” shall include, but not be limited to, the following officials or their designated representatives:

- i. The Governor of the State of Alaska; or the Lieutenant Governor of the State of Alaska;
- ii. The Chairperson of the “Bush Caucus” of the Alaska State Legislature;
- iii. The Mayor of the North Slope Borough;
- iv. The Mayor of the Municipality of Anchorage;
- v. The Mayor of the Northwest Arctic Borough;
- vi. The Mayor of the Lake & Peninsula Borough; and
- vii. Any elected public official of a federally-recognized Tribe in Alaska.

2. ***Appointed Public Officials.*** For the purposes of these Bylaws, and unless otherwise prohibited by law, “appointed public officials” shall include, but not be limited to, the following officials or their designated representatives:

- i. The President of the University of Alaska;
- ii. The Commissioner of the State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development;
- iii. The Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development; or
- iv. The Director of the University of Alaska’s Cooperative Extension Service.

B. Target Area Directors. At least 1/3 of the Directors shall be persons that are both (i)

chosen in accordance with democratic selection procedures adequate to assure that each such Director is representative of low-income individuals and families in the neighborhood served; and (ii) residing in the neighborhood represented by each such Director (the “**Target Area Directors**”). For the purposes of these Bylaws, and unless otherwise prohibited by law, Target Area Directors shall include, but not be limited to, persons so elected to represent the following recognized organizations of Alaska residents living in poverty in the geographic areas indicated below (each, a “**Target Organization**”):

1. Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association - Aleutian/Pribilof Islands;
2. Bristol Bay Native Association - Bristol Bay Area;
3. Copper River Native Association - Copper Valley Area;
4. Kawerak, Inc. - Bering Straits Area;
5. Kodiak Area Native Association - Kodiak Island Area;
6. Tanana Chiefs Conference, Inc. - Interior Area;
7. Maniilaq Association - Northwest Area;
8. Chugachmiut - Prince William Sound/Lower Cook Inlet Area;
9. Association of Village Council Presidents, Inc. - Yukon/Kuskokwim Delta Area;
10. Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indians of Alaska - Southeast Area;
11. State Child Development Policy Council - Statewide Area; and
12. Alaska Native Brotherhood and Alaska Native Sisterhood Grand Camp.

C. Private Directors. The remainder of the Directors are officials or members of business, industry, labor, religious, welfare, education, law enforcement, or other

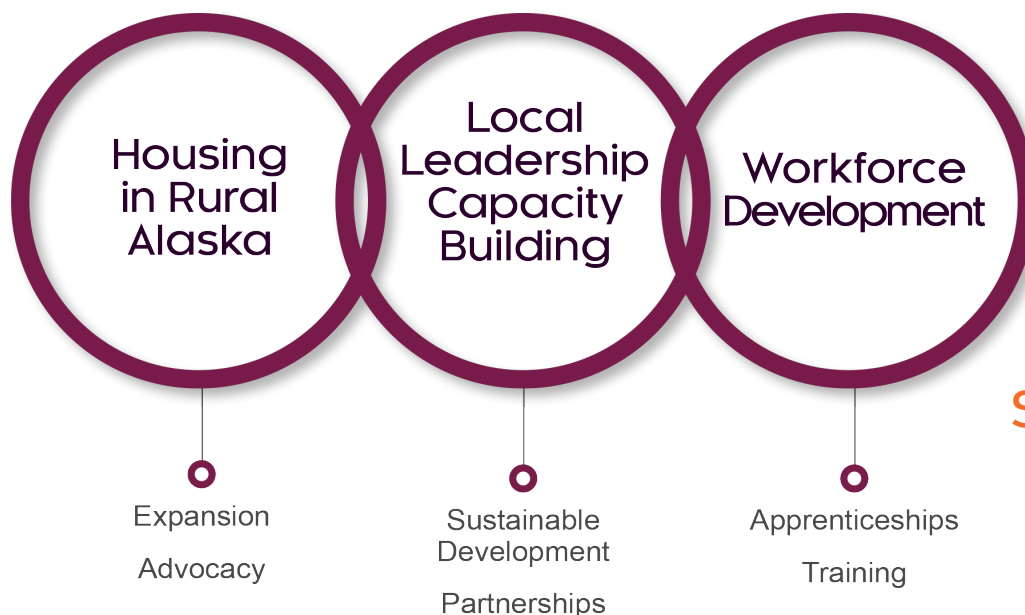
major groups and interests in the community served including child development, legal, banking, and youth interests, and including, but not limited to, officers or members of the following organizations (the “*Private Directors*”):¹¹

- 1. Alaska Federation of Natives;
- 2. Alaska Congress of Parents and Teachers;
- 3. Alaska Legal Services Corporation
- 4. Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO;
- 5. Alaska Village Initiatives; and
- 6. Alaska Municipal League.

[REDACTED]



Strategic Priorities 2023-2028



As Alaska's only Community Action Agency, we've focused our efforts to deliver services in all aspects of the fight against poverty and strive to instill individual empowerment. We rally behind the core of our mission – **to empower low-income Alaskans through advocacy, education, affordable housing, and direct services that respect our unique values and cultures** – we align our service areas to uphold our agency pillars of respect for people and continuous improvement through Rural Housing, Family Services, and Community Development.



Alaska is at a pivotal moment in time with substantial economic and infrastructure opportunities within reach for our rural communities. Intentional capacity building and partnerships will enhance rural Alaskans' equitable access to the opportunities at hand to bolster self-determination and create a sustainable economic future across Alaska. In response, RurAL CAP's Board of Directors has identified Strategic Priorities through 2028 to provide the framework to integrate our existing statewide collaborations and direct our new initiatives. This unified approach will bring our vision of **Healthy People, Sustainable Communities, and Vibrant Cultures** to life.

Service Portfolio



CASE STUDY 2

MAHUBE-OTWA

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Name:

MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership, Inc.

Location:

Detroit Lakes, Minnesota

CSBG Grant Size:

~\$220,000

CSBG Service Area:

5 counties; ~5,000 square miles;
1 reservation

Other Significant Federal Grants:

Head Start; LIHEAP

Leadership:

Liz Kuoppala (Executive Director);
Theora Goodrich (Board Chair);
Jay Syverson (Tribal Liaison)

Board Size:

18 seats

Staff Size:

~200 employees

In the Ojibwe language spoken in Minnesota, the word *mashkiki* means “medicine.”¹ By partnering with tribal entities and the indigenous community in the CAA’s CSBG service area, MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership, Inc. (MAHUBE-OTWA) has learned that *mashkiki* is more than medicine for the body: it’s medicine for relationships. Supported by federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds, MAHUBE-OTWA has taken significant steps to build links across its community and form a more interconnected and understanding environment within which to provide Community Action Agency (CAA) services. In particular, MAHUBE-OTWA used its CSBG funds to create a staff position that promotes linkages with tribal organizations in its service area.

MAHUBE-OTWA is named for the first two letters of five of the counties in which the CAA provides services. MAHUBE-OTWA’s CSBG service area includes one federally recognized reservation, White Earth Nation, but its other services extend to areas that include Red Lake Nation and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. Each of these reservations has its own system of tribal government and is home to members of the Anishinaabe people and other indigenous groups.² In 2018, MAHUBE-OTWA began dedicating time and funds to developing and strengthening relationships with these tribal entities. Much like the sweetgrass MAHUBE-OTWA would eventually plant in its turtle garden, growing a relationship from the ground up takes time, attention, and true collaboration between those involved. Leadership began with the basics: learning about the community they were looking to better serve.

¹ Ojibwe People’s Dictionary, *mashkiki* (singular inanimate noun)

² Anishinaabe is the name for a broad group of culturally linked indigenous people, which includes the Ojibwe as well as other tribes. Some tribal members of Ojibwe prefer to be called Chippewa.

The tribal liaison position that MAHUBE-OTWA created using its CSBG is multi-faceted and focused on community outreach to the reservations.³ The decision to add this position arose from the CAA board's strategic planning sessions. The tribal liaison serves as an intermediary between the CAA and tribal entities, as a resource for MAHUBE-OTWA staff and clients on Ojibwe culture, and as a link with the greater indigenous community on and off the reservations. The position is responsible for understanding how the tribal governments within the individual reservations function and is involved in those communities: visiting tribal government and community council offices, sitting in on talks at the tribal college, bringing outreach flyers and information to gas stations and stores on tribal land, and having everyday conversations with tribal members. Individual tribal members then become familiar with the tribal liaison as a person and a representative of the CAA, which builds trust and willingness to engage with MAHUBE-OTWA services.

CSBG Organizational Standard 6.2 requires both private and public CAAs to have a strategic plan (or similar document, for public CAAs) that “addresses reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and/or empowerment of people with low incomes to become more self-sufficient.” A CAA’s strategic plan is informed by its community needs assessment, which is required by *Organizational Standard 3.1*.



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The tribal liaison’s efforts foster open communication, allowing not only for MAHUBE-OTWA to get the word out in tribal communities about their services but also provide a way for the tribes to share their needs and events with the CAA. The tribal liaison builds relationships with major tribal organizations by determining key contacts, offering opportunities for partnership, and creating benchmarks to measure the development of the connection. Having a direct, tangible, and welcome presence in the community improves communication about what services tribal entities are providing to the population the CAA also assists. This allows the CAA and the tribal entities to more efficiently use their resources and respond to gaps in existing services.

Within the CAA, the tribal liaison answers questions on how programs can provide services in a more understanding, competent, and culturally sensitive way. Since the tribal liaison understands the dynamics of the locality and the CAA’s inner workings, both MAHUBE-OTWA staff and tribal government officials are comfortable asking them for input. The position has created sustainable linkages between MAHUBE-OTWA’s services and tribal entities.⁴

CSBG Organizational Standards 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 focus on a CAA’s community engagement practices. Standard 2.1 requires that CAA have “demonstrated partnerships across the community”. Standard 2.2 requires CAAs to use information learned from the community in its needs assessment and other evaluations. Standard 2.3 requires CAA to communicate both its activities and its results to its community.



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³ Appendix 1 to this case study is an excerpt from a recent job description for the tribal liaison position.

⁴ Appendix 2 to this case study is an excerpt from a third-party evaluation of the impact of the tribal liaison.



The tribal liaison position provides educational opportunities at MAHUBE-OTWA to help bridge different cultures in the community. The tribal liaison hosts a regular beginner Ojibwe language and culture table, which is open to CAA staff and volunteers. The syllabus includes topics ranging from Anishinaabe artwork to sacred medicines to tribal enrollment and includes learning traditional songs and ceremonies. These tables encourage conversations within the MAHUBE-OTWA community about the aspects of history that still impact the Ojibwe today. Knowing some everyday words in

Ojibwe has also helped CAA staff looking to decrease fear and build trust when working in tribal areas. They have found that greeting or thanking someone in their native language helps show an investment and interest in connecting with them as an individual and member of their tribe, and creates an avenue for deeper communication across existing barriers. In this way, knowledge and education are also *mashkiki*.

The tribal liaison role oversees MAHUBE-OTWA's community garden. The idea for the garden was initially brought to the CAA by a board member's sister, a member of Red Lake Nation, who received a local grant to purchase fruiting trees and shrubs and needed a place to plant them. CAA staff members, including the tribal liaison, and other members of the community then planted the garden on an empty lot surrounded by a MAHUBE-OTWA building, an assisted living center, and veterinary clinic. A gazebo sits at the center of the garden, and plants grow around the turtle-shaped perimeter that provides the garden with its name: *mikinaak gitigaan* (turtle garden).⁵ The garden's construction provides community members with a space to just be present and experience the spirit of the garden—there's picnic tables so people can come, rest, and take it all in. In the future, MAHUBE-OTWA intends to expand the turtle garden to other unused areas where the CAA has buildings.



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The federal CSBG Act, [42 U.S.C. § 9910](#), requires that a CAA's governing board fully participate in the “development, planning, implementation, and evaluation” of the organization's programming. Office of Community Services [Information Memorandum #82](#) expands on this by encouraging board members to help the CAA “establish and maintain working relationships, or partnerships, with other public and private agencies and programs in the community”. Having directors that represent the community served by a CAA helps connect the organization to that community and better understand its needs.

⁵ Ojibwe People's Dictionary, [mikinaak](#) (singular animate noun) & [gitigaan](#) (singular inanimate noun)

In addition to literally tending to the garden, the tribal liaison also tends to the numerous connections between the CAA and the wider community that continue to grow out of the turtle garden. Similarly to building a relationship, the garden required strong roots. Activities like getting the dirt healthy, adding fertilizer that is safe for growing food, and inviting natural pollinators to help the plants grow were all informed by traditional indigenous gardening practices. The selection of plants also focuses on Ojibwe medicine and produce, including the “three sisters” of corn, beans, and squash that have a symbiotic relationship with the land and each other. Turtle garden is truly a community garden: anyone can grab a pepper if they need one and it’s ready to be picked, without any cost or requirements.



Of course, establishing the garden came with hurdles that MAHUBE-OTWA had to overcome in partnership with the indigenous community. For example, members of the Head Start staff at the CAA raised concerns with the tribal liaison about growing “medicine” close to a childcare facility, which was addressed with the help of the tribal liaison through education around the more expansive understanding of medicine by the Ojibwe. Head Start children now receive vegetable plants started in the spring and harvest food in the garden in the fall. The community continues to grapple with balancing indigenous and non-indigenous styles of gardening, but focuses on fostering communication, education, and championing treating each other and the plants with respect.

Now, the tribal liaison helps the community grow food and other plants in the garden and encourages individuals to connect with each other and the CAA while gardening together. Conversations that start around gardening often turn to CAA programming or services. The garden brings the community literally together and provides opportunities for people to meet and start forming a relationship centered around caring for one another and their community. This mutual connection transforms community members from strangers to collaborators. The garden, then, is also *mashkiki*; medicine is in the act of growing and getting your hands in the dirt, as well as in the act of feeding others and sharing these experiences together as partners.



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Job Title:	Community Outreach Specialist – Tribal Liaison	Grade Level:	14, Non-Exempt
Revised By:		Date Revised	March 2022
Department:	Agency	Budget	NA
Supervises	None	Reports to:	Executive Director
Programs:	All Agency Programs		
Clientele	Potential and existing clients, service providers, staff, and external partners		

Job Summary:

Cultivates new and existing relationships with Indigenous communities with a demonstrated commitment to Ojibwe culture and alignment to MAHUBE-OTWA's mission. This position creates linkages between MAHUBE-OTWA's programming and tribal governments and Native-led nonprofits. Creates opportunities that reduce disparities among MAHUBE-OTWA clients and connects Indigenous community members with opportunities to engage in culture as an asset-building strategy. Collaborates across all MAHUBE-OTWA's programs, and involves both direct contact with clients, and active engagement of service providers, MAHUBE-OTWA staff, and Tribal Government staff.

Strictly adheres to our Agency Values of client-focused, community-minded, and resourceful, along with the Employee Standards of Conduct & Behavioral Expectations, and the Community Action Code of Ethics.

Must have the ability to recognize and maintain confidentiality of client and agency information and work materials.

Essential Duties and Responsibilities:

1. Develop and maintain connections with tribal government and tribal non-profit services at White Earth, Leech Lake, and Red Lake.
2. Coordinate communications between MAHUBE-OTWA and tribal newspapers, radio, social media, community bulletin boards, and other methods of communication.
3. Prepare, coordinate and deliver Indigenous culture training to MAHUBE-OTWA staff.
4. Assist in designing, delivering, and evaluating MAHUBE-OTWA policies and procedures.
5. Assist with evaluating program outcomes.
6. Convene focus groups and listening sessions with Indigenous community members for Community Needs Assessment and strategic planning.
7. Evaluate MAHUBE-OTWA communications for inclusive language and representation of Indigenous cultures.
8. Convene and coordinate community teams around special projects (eg Medicine Garden, Mural, Arts, traveling Treaties Matter exhibit, etc).
9. Keep MAHUBE-OTWA staff updated about changes in Tribal and Indigenous programs, services, program eligibility.
10. Serve as liaison to tribal, regional, state Native American Advisory Committees.
11. Assist in problem resolution on sensitive issues that may arise in the execution of the position's duties.



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12. Gain certification as an Intercultural Development Inventory Qualified Administrator and participate in the internal IDI team.

The above list reflects the general details necessary to describe the primary and essential functions of the position and shall not be construed as the only duties that may be assigned for the position.

Secondary Responsibilities & Skills:

1. Represent MAHUBE-OTWA in the communities we serve.
2. Seek out additional training to enhance personal/professional development.
3. Assist in cross-training of other staff.
4. Other duties as assigned / requested.
5. Provide information, referral and advocacy as needed; promote the full array of MAHUBE-OTWA services.
6. Attend and participate in applicable agency, community and state meetings to promote and support agency efforts.

Job Qualifications & Requirements:

1. Lived experience preferred as well as at least two years of experience working with Indigenous youth, families and/or community organizations. 4-year degree in related field preferred.
2. Knowledge of and experience with Indigenous traditions and culture with ability to identify commonalities and differences in meanings, teachings and activities among the different Indigenous communities required.
3. Knowledge of the history of Indigenous peoples and tribal sovereignty in Minnesota.
4. Experience with community organizing, community engagement, and outreach. Must be familiar with community resources to support a wide range of goals and work effectively and cooperatively with partners to carry out job activities.
5. Understanding of principles of holistic wellness and harm reduction.
6. Broad knowledge of current issues and trends in support services, youth engagement, group facilitation, early childhood education, housing, energy, and senior services.
7. Experience in developing partnerships with community agencies, staff, and clients.
8. Experience and creativity in the planning, development, and implementation of programs and services, including the ability to identify and resource new programs based on needs.
9. Strong organizational, time management and project management skills required. Ability to effectively prioritize work activities and meet deadlines.
10. Excellent professionalism required with staff, clients, and all stakeholders. Ability to establish and maintain working relationships. Ability to work within and contribute to a positive team environment.
11. Demonstrated ability to engage various audiences through different training methods and tools.
12. Must be able to communicate effectively both orally and in writing. Ojibwe language fluency is an asset.
13. Must be able to honor private/confidential information.
14. A valid driver's license is required.
15. DHS NetStudy clearance required.

MAHUBE-OTWA Targeted Outreach Program

A Program Effectiveness
Evaluation Report

**Author:**

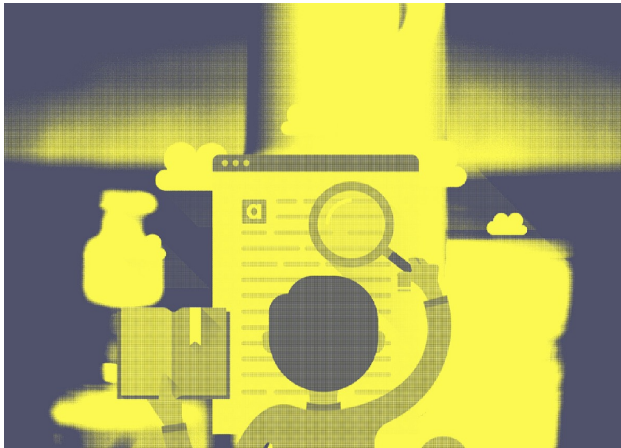
Victoria McWane-Creek

Date:

February 2024



METHODOLOGY



Research Design

This evaluation employs a mixed methods approach to gather and analyze data.

Organization 4 Full Participation engaged with Mahube-Otwa to understand the intended outcomes, unintended impacts, and promising practices of the program

Sample

The study involves a purposive sample of 23 key partners selected to represent diverse experiences with the work of the tribal liaison program and coordinator role.



Data Collection

Data was collected on the effectiveness of the tribal outreach program and coordinator role through surveys and interviews.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to interpret gathered data, and to identify recurring themes and patterns.

Promising Practices

- Using weekly one to one meetings with different members within the targeted community. Through this work, Mahube-Otwa is seen as a regular and dependable partner in the targeted community in a way that complements the community's own programming and is invited to partner in different ways.
- Recognizing that targeted outreach is depends on relationship development and that means there is a need to move at the pace of trust - slow and intentional.
- Communicating in culturally responsive ways using the targeted community's language.
- Listening to targeted community members and partners to understand their specific needs and concerns and then experimenting with how to meet those needs and address concerns.
- Leveraging agency wide initiatives to increase knowledge about the target culture such as learning the basic language skills.
- Educating agency staff about the culture of the target population and educating targeted community partners about agency programming.
- Designing the program and role with freedom and flexibility and allowing risk-taking and experimentation to achieve desired outcomes.

