



# **THE WAY FORWARD: ACF RESEARCH WITH AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES**

## **Meeting Summary**

April 17-18, 2014

National Museum of the American Indian

Washington, District of Columbia

*Prepared for:*

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Administration for Children and Families  
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**The Way Forward: ACF Research with American Indians and Alaska Natives**  
National Museum of the American Indian | April 17-18, 2014

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## BACKGROUND

Over the years, the Office of Planning Research and Evaluation (OPRE) has invested in several projects to better understand the human service needs in American Indian Alaskan Native (AIAN) populations. OPRE's efforts build upon and collaborate with ongoing initiatives with tribal communities led by other offices in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) such as the Office of Head Start (OHS), Office of Child Care (OCC), Children's Bureau (CB), Office of Family Assistance (OFA), Administration for Native Americans (ANA), Office of Child Support Enforcement, and other HHS agencies, such as the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

OPRE has developed culturally relevant research and evaluation efforts to help inform decision-making on policy and programs serving these communities, with several projects already underway, while also considering the development of new initiatives. These efforts have been broad, with projects intended to inform programs and policies created to benefit and improve the lives of both children and adults in American Indian Alaskan Native communities across the nation. Such investments are part of ACF's goal of improving programs and policies to support underserved and underrepresented populations.

## PURPOSE AND GOALS

OPRE invited experts from the field who collaborate with AIAN communities to discuss the current state of research and evaluation related to ACF programs that serve AIAN communities, and to make recommendations for future research and evaluation.

Thus, the goals of the meeting were to:

- 1. Highlight current research and evaluation work ACF is sponsoring and to share lessons learned in order to:** open the dialogue around ongoing efforts; facilitate collaboration to receive feedback and direction for current projects and those in development; and improve AIAN access to research and services.
- 2. Discuss AIAN community participation and ownership of research processes, such as:** methods; measurement; evidence-based adaptations; and effective implementation approaches.

## ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE MEETING

On April 17-18, OPRE held the meeting *"The Way Forward: ACF Research with American Indians and Alaska Natives"* at the National Museum of the American Indian. Over sixty researchers and federal staff who do research with AIAN communities gathered to learn about the current state of ACF research in tribal communities and to discuss future directions. From Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants to Tribal Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting, participants engaged in a lively discussion regarding how best to build knowledge that can increase understanding and help inform decision-making in tribal communities.

The meeting was structured over two days to highlight important topics through a series of presentations including: principles of engagement when collaborating with AIAN communities in research; supporting research capacity in AIAN communities; community engagement in measurement development; challenges of using existing measures in AIAN communities; and designing and scaling interventions from a cross-cultural perspective and thinking beyond randomized control trials to consider other rigorous designs when collaborating with AIAN

communities. After each presentation, discussants representing the broad range of stakeholders present commented on the topic and presentations, then facilitators invited commentary from all the attendees.

**THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2014**

## **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

During this opening session, senior leadership from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) provided an overview of the current landscape of tribal research and evaluation within ACF.

### ***Naomi Goldstein, PhD, Director, Office of Planning Research and Evaluation***

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) funds tribal programs to provide various services such as cash assistance, child welfare, child support, economic development, child care, Head Start, and Early Head Start. ACF and the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) understand that tribal communities, both collectively and individually, are unique and ACF seeks to better understand these unique populations. OPRE does not seek to impose a research agenda on tribal nations, but rather to understand the research needs of tribal populations.

OPRE is currently engaged in several exploratory studies with tribal populations. One project seeks to understand the social service needs of urban Indians and their interaction with ACF services. Another is looking at the coordination of tribal TANF and Tribal Child Welfare services to see how tribes are creating or adapting programs to be culturally appropriate. Through the evaluation of Tribal Health Professions Opportunity Grant (HPOG), ACF is studying the implementation and outcomes of five tribal grantees that are operating healthcare career pathways programs. Finally, the Head Start Health Managers Descriptive Study is documenting the staffing and approach to health-related services for both tribal and non-tribal Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Additionally, OPRE is sponsoring several projects to increase the research capacity of tribal communities. Two technical assistance centers exist for Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grantees: the Tribal Home Visiting Technical Assistance Center (Tribal Home ViSTA) provides programmatic technical assistance while the Tribal Evaluation Institute (TEI) provides technical assistance on conducting culturally appropriate, rigorous evaluations. The Tribal Early Childhood Research Center (TRC) supports and conducts research in measurement development for tribal communities.

### ***Lillian Sparks-Robinson, Commissioner, Administration for Native Americans***

The Administration for Native Americans (ANA) provides grants that address social and economic development, language (community and school-based), and regulatory advancement. Research and evaluation is very important to ANA as funding is meant to be a one-time investment in a program that is then sustained by the tribe. In particular, ANA wants to be able to show program outcomes, not only during the grant period, but also three years after the ANA funding has stopped.

While this type of research and evaluation can be challenging, it also helps tribal communities make informed decisions about programs and policies at the community level. The research and evaluation activities among tribal communities also have implications across ACF; findings and best practices can be shared and used to inform other agencies and programs.

### ***Linda Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development***

In her role as Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development at ACF, Ms. Smith is committed to raising and elevating the issues of the Native American community. She is also committed to sharing the success of tribes with broader audiences, including promising practices with regards to the Head Start designation renewal processes.

Policy changes require a combination of several pieces of information: human stories; good research; and quality data. Programs that are operating with limited funding—such as Child Care, Head Start, and Home Visiting programs—need to use data to improve their services within this environment. Data also provide an opportunity to share the successes of tribal communities. For example the highest score on the Head Start Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Teacher-Child Observation Instrument was in a tribal community. Tribal communities have promising approaches to designation renewal processes that can be shared with others.

ACF is involved in several initiatives impacting tribal communities including a recently launched initiative for the development of a developmental and behavioral screening instrument. ACF is working on early stages of validating a measure for use in tribal communities. In addition, ACF is involved in The President’s My Brother’s Keeper Initiative<sup>1</sup>, focused on ensuring that boys of color, including Native Americans, are connected to appropriate services and supports early on so they are successful.

## **SETTING THE STAGE: AN OVERVIEW OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH RELEVANT TO ACF PROGRAMS SERVING AIAN CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES<sup>2</sup>**

**Facilitator:** Aleta Meyer, PhD, Senior Social Science Research Analyst, OPRE

***Monica Tsethlikai, PhD, Assistant Professor, Arizona State University***

Dr. Tsethlikai provided an overview of American Indian History and her own research on the impact of culture to set the stage for the two-day meeting. Her overview addressed five key questions.

*1. What is the historical context for today’s American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN)?*

American Indian and Alaskan Native communities have a long and diverse history that requires acknowledgement of its complexity. Events such as the Dawes Allotment which resulted in American Indians losing 80 percent of their land wealth, and the Indian Reorganization Act which required government be separate from spiritual leaders have had long-lasting impacts on American Indian communities.

*2. What does the overall picture of health, well-being, and economic security look like for AIAN communities?*

Today, those who identify as American Indians and Alaska Natives constitute one of the fastest growing populations in the United States having increased by 39 percent since 2000. There is a large disconnect between AIAN individuals living on reservations and the 78 percent of AIAN individuals living off reservations, and very little is known about the current status of urban Indians. Many AIAN grandparents are raising their grandchildren and dealing with multiple barriers without support from social service programs.

*3. What are the possible direct and indirect effects of historical trauma on AIAN?*

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the My Brother’s Keeper Initiative, visit: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/my-brothers-keeper>.

<sup>2</sup> PowerPoint presentation available on the Research Connections website: [http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN\\_slides\\_7/Tsethlikai\\_ACFtalk\\_RR\\_14.pdf](http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN_slides_7/Tsethlikai_ACFtalk_RR_14.pdf)

4. Historical Trauma is defined by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, PhD as the “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including the lifespan, which emanates from massive group trauma.” Historical trauma can have both physical and psychological implications and studies have shown correlations between negative behaviors and relocation that have carried over to subsequent generations (including substance abuse). The study of epigenetics, or the heritable change in expression of genetics without a change in DNA sequence, in response to the environment may provide some insight into the high prevalence of substance abuse and suicide in AIAN communities today; however, the majority of studies have used animal models and there is limited evidence that these findings are applicable to humans. For example, experimental animal studies have demonstrated drug induced epigenetic changes are transferred to offspring and influence their susceptibility to drug abuse How might these findings translate to AIAN communities where studies have found paternal rates of lifetime substance and alcohol abuse are high? *What promotes positive development in AIAN adults and children?*

Dr. Tsethlikai’s research focuses on protective factors such as traditional spirituality and engagement in traditional practices, and their impact on child development. Her research underscores a need to look at development across generations and time to account for the impact of the social and historical contexts. A new focus on fluid intelligence over crystalized intelligence indicates that aspects of executive functioning such as self-control are the best predictors of healthy development and well-being. Executive functioning has a protracted span of development from birth into early adulthood with two key periods of growth, from 3 to 5 years of life and in adolescence, with development highly influenced by the activities children engage in such as physical fitness, music, dance, and learning two languages. This new understanding underscores the importance of early interventions such as home visiting programs and Head Start.

5. *Given what we know about the positive role of culture, how might we reclaim traditional ways as evidence-based practice?*

Dr. Tsethlikai seeks to understand if engagement in cultural activities can impact the positive development of a child’s executive functioning. Thus far, Dr. Tsethlikai’s findings indicate some positive effects of participating in traditional practices. One study found that “active cultural engagement was directly related to enhanced social competence after controlling for income and social competence directly predicted enhanced fluid cognitive skills and higher verbal IQ scores.” Another study focused on two ways for children to listen. One was through listening to what is directly said to the child, such as when a book is being read aloud to a child; the other was listening to what is going on around a child, such as when a child listens to what adults are saying during cultural activities, observing without directly participating (e.g., ‘listening without being told’). The study showed that participation in cultural activities, where children listened ‘without being told’ shaped children’s memory and attention skills. This has implications for strategies used with AIAN children in an academic context, where they may be more successful if they are able to listen and observe.

## **CO-CREATING A STRATEGIC ROADMAP FOR COLLABORATIVE AND EFFECTIVE EVALUATION TO IMPROVE CHILD WELFARE PROGRAMS<sup>3</sup>**

**Facilitator:** Melinda Baldwin, LICSW, MSW, Child Welfare Staff Development Specialist, Children’s Bureau

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<sup>3</sup> PowerPoint presentation available on the Research Connections website:  
[http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN\\_slides\\_7/Roadmap\\_AIAN\\_Presentation\\_4\\_14\\_14\\_Final.pdf](http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN_slides_7/Roadmap_AIAN_Presentation_4_14_14_Final.pdf)



***Paulette Running Wolf, PhD (Blackfeet Tribe), Principal, Running Wolf and Associates***

***Malia Villegas, PhD (Alutiiq/Sugpiaq-Alaska Native), Director, Policy Research Center, National Council of American Indians***

***Carol Hafford, PhD, Principal Research Scientist, NORC at the University of Chicago***

This presentation provided a framework for developing culturally and scientifically rigorous evaluations in tribal child welfare communities. In addition to presenting the Strategic Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation to Improve Child Welfare Programs, presenters reflected on the value of this framework for a broader range of programs that serve American Indian and Alaska Native communities, as well as experiences with utilizing such an approach in research institutions that are used to more researcher driven practices.

The Children’s Bureau convened three research and evaluation workgroups in April 2012. One workgroup focused on Child Welfare Evaluation in and with tribal communities. This workgroup represented various cultural communities throughout the United States and included researchers, evaluators, and Federal staff. They sought to develop a framework that was adaptable, transferrable, and relevant across tribal communities. The workgroup came to a consensus that they needed to change the context of the conversation and to develop a new narrative for evaluation in the tribal context. This led to the development of *A Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation to Improve Child Welfare Programs*<sup>4</sup> (Roadmap).

Three members of the workgroup—Dr. Running Wolf, Dr. Villegas, and Dr. Hafford—provided an overview of the Roadmap. The new narrative includes looking at evaluation as a collaborative and culturally responsive process for system improvement, rather than for system critique. It places a strong emphasis on engaging local communities in question development, data gathering (both qualitative and quantitative), and analysis of data within the cultural context. By placing value on indigenous ways of knowing and the capacity of local communities, the Roadmap sets the foundation for bi-directional learning and evaluation capacity building.

Once a new narrative was established, the other key components of the Roadmap emerged for the workgroup. The Roadmap is a circular, value-based model that considers the historical context of tribal communities. It encourages evaluators to collaborate with community stakeholders for productive evaluation, including working with tribal government leaders to help them understand the importance of data in acquiring resources to meet community needs. Ultimately, the Roadmap encourages tribal communities to take ownership of data and evaluation.

The relationship building and knowledge/skill building practices outlined in the Roadmap are key to the success of the model. While relationship building ensures that the community is invested in the process and the evaluation is culturally grounded, knowledge/skill building focuses on building the capacity of the Tribal community to engage in evaluation practices. To this end, the model encourages evaluators to have co-collaborators in the communities where they work. Not only does this contribute to the richness of the work, but also builds community capacity.

#### **DISCUSSION SUMMARY**

Following the presentation, meeting participants engaged in a discussion of the Roadmap and its potential to impact the research and evaluation work that they conduct. During the discussion, the following key points emerged:

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<sup>4</sup> To view “A Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation,” please visit: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/tribal\\_Roadmap.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/tribal_Roadmap.pdf)

- The Roadmap offers a reminder that if research is not conducted properly, it is a continuation of historical trauma. Researchers and evaluators cannot underestimate the power of honoring history and traditions when conducting research. When researchers do not take strengths-based approach to building knowledge it harms relationships. The model documented in the Roadmap provides a clear way forward and opportunity to improve evaluations by engaging in positive practices.
- The Roadmap is changing the nature of science and research in a thoughtful way. It provides an opportunity to change how the University systems think about ethics beyond Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes and how they conduct research training. The workgroup indicated that they are looking for strategies to incorporate the Roadmap in undergraduate and graduate education. One strategy they are considering is connecting with lead authors of research methods textbooks.
- The Roadmap encourages tribal communities to take the “driver’s seat” in evaluation in their community. The idea behind the Roadmap is that through capacity building, communities can begin analyzing their data, writing their papers, and taking ownership of evaluation.
- Dr. Running Wolf piloted the Roadmap during a readiness assessment with the Torres Martinez Tribal TANF program. Through this model, the Tribe established goals of their program, and provided a picture of what they expect for TANF participants prior to conducting readiness assessment.
- The Roadmap addresses a need for applied research evaluation and is less sector-based evaluation.
- Research in Indian country is about listening to the story and the Roadmap makes this a clear component of collaborative and effective evaluation.
- For every researcher, this is a must read. Both native and non-native researchers have found it useful. One participant indicated that the Roadmap opened dialogues that they thought they were having but were not.
- There is interest in translating the Roadmap concept for intervention implementation.

*Pilot of the Roadmap with  
the Torres Martinez Tribal  
TANF Program*

In a pilot of the Roadmap with the Torres Martinez Tribal TANF Program as part of a readiness assessment, relationship building emerged as a key component of the model. To help build relationships, the researchers visited all service centers to explain the Roadmap model, interviewed key individuals that ranged from frontline staff to tribal elders, and engaged the community in the development of research questions.

## **SUPPORTING CAPACITY FOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION IN AIAN COMMUNITIES**

**Facilitator:** Hilary Forster, Social Science Research Analyst, OPRE

ACF has sponsored research, evaluation and descriptive studies with AIAN communities as partners. In this session, the presenters highlighted the Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Evaluation and the Tribal Home Visiting Evaluation Institute (TEI), and discussed the specific steps towards engagement and ownership that researchers must take part in when collaborating with AIAN communities. They also discussed engagement with Tribal Colleges and Native investigators to support research capacity.

## TRIBAL HEALTH PROFESSION OPPORTUNITY GRANTS (HPOG) EVALUATION<sup>5</sup>

***Carol Hafford, PhD, Principal Research Scientist, Economics, Labor, and Population Studies, NORC at the University of Chicago***

***Alana Knudson, PhD, Principal Research Scientist, NORC at the University of Chicago***

Dr. Hafford and Dr. Knudson provided an overview of the work they have conducted as part of the Tribal HPOG evaluation. The five tribal HPOG grantees work with public and private sector partners to create healthcare career pathways opportunities for program participants. HPOG training is viewed as a community asset that helps to address workforce shortages, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, tribal healthcare professionals understand the cultural concepts of health, wellness, and community values that are important to their communities. HPOG programs are also helping to address the shortages of culturally-competent Native American healthcare workers.

The Tribal HPOG evaluation focuses on three key areas: program structure, process, and outcomes. Throughout this evaluation project, the same researchers have worked with the five Tribal HPOG grantees to build solid relationships. Dr. Hafford and Dr. Knudson's presentation highlighted how their work has aligned with the seven values outlined in the Children's Bureau Roadmap, and where they have learned lessons about working with tribal communities in the development and implementation of an evaluation. Some strategies identified as necessary for successful evaluation collaboration with tribal communities included:

- Developing a tribal advisory group;
- Executing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with the grantees that covered issues such as data ownership;
- Ensuring instruments are culturally relevant and appropriate;
- Taking into account cultural and contextual factors when interpreting findings;
- Making the benefit of evaluation clear to the tribe and the community;
- Measuring both short and longer term outcomes to document incremental change; and
- Working with tribes to identify and share promising practices with similar programs, both tribal and non-tribal.

## TRIBAL HOME VISITING EVALUATION INSTITUTE<sup>6</sup>

***Kate Lyon, MA, Senior Research Associate, James Bell Associates, Inc.***

***Julie Morales, PhD, Senior Research Associate, James Bell Associates, Inc.***

***Erin Geary, MSW, Senior Research Associate, James Bell Associates, Inc.***

Ms. Lyon, Dr. Morales, and Mr. Geary provided an overview of the technical assistance provided to Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood (MIECHV) grantees through the Tribal Home Visiting Evaluation Institute (TEI).

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<sup>5</sup> PowerPoint presentation available on the Research Connections website:

[http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN\\_slides\\_7/Hafford\\_Tribal\\_HPOG\\_and\\_Roadmap\\_NORC\\_at\\_UC\\_042114.pdf](http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN_slides_7/Hafford_Tribal_HPOG_and_Roadmap_NORC_at_UC_042114.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> PowerPoint presentation available on the Research Connections website:

[http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN\\_slides\\_7/TEI\\_OPRE\\_Way\\_Forward\\_TEI\\_April2014\\_REVI\\_SED\\_041414\\_508.pdf](http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN_slides_7/TEI_OPRE_Way_Forward_TEI_April2014_REVI_SED_041414_508.pdf)

Twenty-five Tribal MIECHV five-year cooperative agreements were awarded to tribes, tribal consortia, tribal organizations, and urban Indian organizations. There are three data requirements for Tribal MIECHV grantees: development of performance measures and data collection around 36 legislatively-mandated constructs to demonstrate performance improvement; a rigorous evaluation that answers a community-informed research question; and engagement in continuous quality improvement activities using the Plan-Do-Study-Act framework. Because each grantee develops their own performance measures and research questions, data are used to tell the story of the individual grantees and not the programs as an aggregate.

In assisting the Tribal MIECHV grantees with their data requirements, the TEI team engages in a relational technical assistance process in which they work closely with the entire home visiting team, not just the evaluator. Much like the Tribal HPOG Evaluation team, the TEI team works with the same grantees throughout the grant period to ensure continuity and effective relationship building. They have found that a phased approach to technical assistance is most efficient and the TEI team is thoughtful about when individual or global TA delivery strategies are most effective. Some hot topics of technical assistance include:

- Preparing the home visitors to collect data in small, isolated, close-knit communities; and
- Addressing the lack of parenting measures that have been validated for tribal communities.

TEI uses the Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcomes (PICO) approach to generate conversations around possible research designs that reflect what was uncovered in the community needs assessments conducted during the first year of the grant. Throughout the research process the TEI team seeks to make evaluation a learning and improvement process, rather than a judgment tool. Through evaluation capacity building and integration of data in decision making in tribal communities, the TEI team has witnessed improved services and program outcomes.

***Discussant: Cindy O’Dell, Education Department Chair, Salish Kootenai College***

Following the overview provided by the Tribal HPOG Evaluation team and the TEI team, Dr. O’Dell summarized the key themes from her perspective as a Tribal College and University (TCU) leader. TCUs are typically community colleges that maintain a 50 percent or greater Native American population and receive funding through the Bureau of Indian Education. Dr. O’Dell stressed eight key themes from the presentation and provided connections to the work and culture of TCUs.

1. Research should be based on practical applications and used to inform the work. The focus of this research should be on improvement.
2. Partners are essential. Tribal colleges are good partners in doing research because they are a focal point for gathering and a community “go to” for resources. They are also aware of community needs, connected to partners, can easily gain trust, and have an appreciation of the culture and language.
3. There should be a focus on indigenous ways of knowing and respect, particularly for tribal sovereignty. Evaluations should involve both cultural rigor and cultural protocol.
4. There is a need for capacity building in tribal communities, but evaluators should be cautious not to undervalue the capacity of tribal colleges. Many TCUs are engaged in research and evaluation capacity building, both for students and faculty. At the Salish Kootenai College, they are incorporating a research project into education degree programs to provide an understanding of the process and the importance of doing research in the moment. They also have students participating in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) research projects including identifying new strains of tuberculosis in soil samples and designing robotics features for the Mars rover.

5. Research can be used as a retention tool in TCUs. Studies show that postsecondary students who are engaged in research often persist through their programs.
6. Research should inform further research.
7. Research should have a focus on community interests and priorities and findings should be understandable and presented in a meaningful way. This may involve ceremony.
8. Research should be strengths based. Data should be used to highlight outcomes and should include qualitative data.

### DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Following the presentation, meeting participants engaged in a discussion of the presentations and the key themes reflected upon by Dr. O'Dell.

- In response to a question about how the federally required home visiting benchmarks fit in with the Children's Bureau's Roadmap, Ms. Lyon explained that while the constructs are determined, there is flexibility in how to define them. For example, one of the mandated constructs is breastfeeding. MIECHV programs can choose what they want to measure, such as: initiation of breastfeeding; duration of breastfeeding; or education around breastfeeding. Additionally, there is the opportunity to develop additional benchmarks if the grantee felt that they were needed to capture data on community priorities. In the future, however, they would like to see opportunities to engage tribal communities early on in the development of benchmarks. MIECHV grantees have been able to be more creative in looking at other issues through their rigorous evaluation.
- This type of evaluation development provides the opportunity for the transmission of culture.
- In response to a question about the number of grantees who plan to publish their evaluation findings and serve as lead authors, Ms. Lyon indicated that the TEI team is working with grantees to build their capacity to publish. At a previously held MIECHV grantee meeting, the grantees presented poster sessions as part of this capacity building.
- The PICO process helped Tribal MIECHV grantees identify if a home visiting program is going to get them the outcomes they desire, and if they want to continue this program five years down the road. This aligns with the theme that research should be relevant to the tribal community.
- In response to a question about future longitudinal data collection from this first five-year cohort, Ms. Moushumi Beltangady, Senior Advisor, Early Childhood Development at ACF noted that the program is currently authorized only through March of 2015.
- The MIECHV grant was enough to get process and infrastructure in place to collect data, but one grantee noted that they need continued support to keep this program in place to implement change.
- Partner researchers should be local and tribes should own the data.

### COMMUNITY-ENGAGED MEASUREMENT DEVELOPMENT FOR FRAMING QUESTIONS ABOUT CULTURE IN INTERVENTIONS

**Facilitator:** Anne Bergan, Social Science Research Analyst, ACF/OPRE

We often struggle with exactly how to articulate what we mean by culture, how to incorporate culture into interventions in authentic ways, and how to measure outcomes that are meaningful within American Indian and Alaska Native cultural contexts. This session focused on framing questions about culture and providing models for engaging tribal communities in defining and measuring culturally-relevant interventions and outcomes. It explored how we can create measures that are culturally resonant and responsive to change, especially the types of changes

communities envision associated with their culturally grounded interventions. Using brief case examples, the session provided descriptions of why culture matters in measuring outcomes, along with a more general model for developing measures to address specific cultural processes.

***Nancy Rumbaugh-Whitesell, PhD, Associate Professor, Colorado School of Public Health<sup>7</sup>***

Dr. Rumbaugh-Whitesell began the session by asking meeting participants to reflect on the concept of culture. Participants shared many different ways culture can be defined, including:

- Cultural is a foreign concept and an external phrase to describe a way of being or way of living.
- Engagement in the cultural practices of a community.
- Culture is a lot like normality. Culture can depend on the environment you are working in—are you looking at the average, the best, or the most frequent?
- Culture is psychological, social, and behavioral
- Culture is spiritual.
- There are challenges around culture being dynamic— e.g. can both men and women participate in sweat lodges that were traditionally male-only?
- Culture is the value that is shared by the people, and the norms that drive behavior.
- The “whats” of culture (such as food and dance) are easier to explain, the “hows” and “whys” of culture are more difficult and require a deeper understanding.
- An elder described culture like this: culture is language and language is culture.
- Parenting practices and family relationships are cultural operating systems.

As demonstrated by this list, when discussing culture in interventions the meaning can be very different depending on the focus. Many models of cultural identity exist and culture is constantly changing both at the community and individual level, adding to the complexity. When adding culture to interventions, it is important to consider several questions including:

- What “culture” do we include?
- Why do we think culture will matter in interventions?
- How do we measure what we are doing when incorporating culture?

The general theory of incorporating cultures into interventions is that if culture is included, the intervention will work better. This can have multiple meanings: adding culture can enhance outcomes of the intervention or adding culture can activate intervention outcomes. These theories become more specific based on the definition of culture used.

When measuring the impact of culture the focus needs to be on measuring the right outcome in a culturally appropriate way. To ensure this, communities should engage in identifying the outcomes to measure and design measures that assess outcomes in culturally valid ways.

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<sup>7</sup> PowerPoint presentation available on the Research Connections website:  
[http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN\\_slides\\_7/Whitesell\\_Framing\\_Questions\\_about\\_Culture\\_in\\_Interventions.pdf](http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN_slides_7/Whitesell_Framing_Questions_about_Culture_in_Interventions.pdf)

**Jim Allen, PhD, Professor, Department of Biobehavioral Health and Population Sciences, University of Minnesota Medical College-Duluth Campus<sup>8</sup>**

In a review of his work with the Center for Alaska Native Health Research (CANHR) to prevent youth suicide and alcohol abuse risk in Alaska Native communities, Dr. Allen discussed their approach to creating outcome measures that are locally relevant and culturally embedded. In response to community concerns regarding deficit-based, risk reduction models of prevention, this intervention adopted a positive assets and strengths-based approach, focused on promoting reasons for life and reflective processes about alcohol consequences. Existing measures did not exist for these types of prevention outcomes, so there was a need to create new outcome measures that were responsive to the changes associated with the intervention.

Community members wanted to know if reengagement in traditional cultural practices is an effective prevention intervention. This resulted in the development of several new measures, two examples of these included communal mastery defined as problem solving through joining with others in an interwoven social network) and Umyuangcaryaraq, which can be translated as “reflecting, and tapped reflective processes about the consequences of alcohol use for oneself and to others). A key element of reflective processes is Ellangneq, which can be literally translated as “to wake up,” and refers to awareness of and sense of connection to others in family and community, the natural world of plants animals, and landscape, and the spirit world as it is affected by their drinking activities.

The measure development process was guided by cultural experts, focus group participants, and individual pilot administration with cognitive interviewing of the measures to Yup’ik Alaska Native college students prior to use with middle and high school age students. Elders recommended the reduction of a five member scale to a three member scale (not at all, somewhat, a lot). Using Item Response Theory (IRT) approaches to scale developed, scales were made briefer and constructed into measures of change through a number of procedures, including retention of items with high information functions such as discriminability and removal of items at the same level of item difficulty through two rounds of pilot testing. Dr. Allen noted that many candidate items and a number of entire measures proved unworkable and were dropped through this intensive process, but the end products were culturally appropriate measures that addressed outcomes local communities were interested in promoting, which at the same time also functioned with strong psychometric operating characteristics, allowing for rigorous scientific testing of prevention outcomes.

**Discussant: Amy West, PhD, Assistant Professor of Psychology in Psychiatry, University of Illinois at Chicago**

Dr. West began her remarks by reflecting on the significance of the space for conducting “*The Way Forward: ACF Research with American Indians and Alaska Natives*” meeting. Her father, W. Richard West Jr., was the founding director of the National Museum of the American Indian and the space reflects a positive example of what can happen when the federal government and sovereign nations come together.

The presentations captured the importance of measuring culture in a way that captures the relevance and impact on the intervention. In Dr. West’s work with native youth and families in an urban setting there are additional complexities to defining culture as a construct including being off-reservation or multi-racial. Scientists want to dilute things down to their most basic components, but culture is not amenable to that. While culture is often thought of as something that occurs at a family and community level, it is also an incredibly individual experience.

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<sup>8</sup> PowerPoint presentation available on the Research Connections website:  
[http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN\\_slides\\_7/Allen\\_Framing\\_Culture.pdf](http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN_slides_7/Allen_Framing_Culture.pdf)

When culture is integrated into an intervention there is an assumption that it will make it better, but new intervention study criteria require the identification of a clear mechanism of action. It is no longer sufficient to say that interventions work because they are culturally informed, researchers must show that is the case. Thus, when operationalizing culture, it is helpful to develop a theory of change about how an intervention is going to work.

The presentations also underscored the importance of culturally resonant measures that are developed in collaboration with community partners at a local level, on a project-by-project basis. The good news is that the Children’s Bureau Roadmap provides guidance on how to carefully and systematically develop measures that are applicable to local culture and interventions. While this is a long and involved process, it is important to build the knowledge base of the AIAN research community.

## CHALLENGES OF USING EXISTING MEASURES IN AIAN COMMUNITIES<sup>9</sup>

**Facilitator:** Lauren Supplee, PhD, Director, Division of Family Strengthening, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families.

It is not always possible to do the kind of measurement development work necessary to get the right measures before starting research. As Donald Rumsfeld once said, “you go to war with the army you have, not the army you want.” This session focused on the challenges of selecting, adapting, and using measures that have not been tested with American Indian and Alaskan Native populations.

**Jessica Barnes-Najor, PhD, Developmental Psychologist, Michigan State University**

Dr. Barnes-Najor provided an overview of the conceptual framework for understanding early child development measures and solutions. Child development refers to the biological, physical, cognitive, and social-emotional that occur in human beings between birth and the end of adolescence, as the individual progresses from dependence to increasing independence. The environment in which a child is developing also shapes this development. For all children, including AIAN children, this occurs within the environmental context in which they are developing.

Researchers seek to measure child development to have a better understanding of what normative development looks like and to understand what contributes to healthy development as children move toward the goal of being adults in their community. The statistical norm, however, varies by communities and by construct.

### *Challenges to using existing child development measures in AIAN communities:*

- Some constructs are missing entirely or underemphasized.
- Some constructs exist, but the definition does not match or means something different in the culture.
- There is a lack of understanding of how the local context shapes child development.
- There is a lack of understanding around how the data gathering process can change the data you receive (interview versus self-report, etc.).
- There are no norms for AIAN children on these instruments.

<sup>9</sup> PowerPoint presentation available on the Research Connections website: [http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN\\_slides\\_7/Barnes\\_Belleau\\_Fitzgerald\\_Sarche\\_ACF\\_Conference\\_Measure%20Adaptation\\_20140417.pdf](http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN_slides_7/Barnes_Belleau_Fitzgerald_Sarche_ACF_Conference_Measure%20Adaptation_20140417.pdf)



The challenge with existing measures is that they are based on the assumption that development manifests similarly in all children. While the core aspects (domains) of development tend to be important across contexts, constructs and items tend to have more cultural variation. For example, an item regarding sleep in the Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment asks if the child wants to sleep in bed with others. In many communities, however, co-sleeping is the norm.

Adaptation of measures is necessary when existing measures do not include key questions and are no longer valid or reliable for a community. In addition to adapting measures, data collection processes may need to be changed as well. In some small communities, an outside assessor is preferred for confidentiality reasons. In other communities, it is important to have tribal assessors. Interpretation of scores on measures must be interpreted within a cultural context. Not all measures, however, can be adapted. For example, standardized and norm-referenced measures may be difficult to adapt. If these types of measures must be used, the results should be tempered based on the cultural context, and supplemented with qualitative data.

***Hiram Fitzgerald, PhD, Professor, Michigan State University***

Dr. Fitzgerald described the Wiba Anung (Early Star) partnership between Michigan State University, the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan, and Bay Mills Community College. Wiba Anung seeks to collectively examine the educational and health issues facing the American Indian population of Michigan.

There was a true partnership and focus on co-creation throughout this research project. In the first year, large and small group meetings were conducted to determine the focus of the research, and storytellers were videotaped so the research team would have greater knowledge of the culture. In the second year, focus groups were conducted to gather community perspectives and to develop a research plan. Every item on every instrument was reviewed for appropriateness. The next three years were spent conducting research together and co-publishing findings.

The project exemplified the need for cultural interpretation of results. Data showed that only 20-40 percent of tribal children were meeting the readiness criteria on numeracy and literacy constructs, rates much lower than other children. Upon further review of data, there were differences in parent, non-AIAN teacher, and AIAN teacher perceptions of child behavior. AIAN teachers are “tougher” in their evaluation of AIAN girls than non-AIAN teachers and parents. Using this data, professional development was conducted for teachers.

The process of co-creation was valuable because it promoted learning and transparency, enhancing the ability to collect meaningful data. The Wiba Anung project has been sustained because research and data collection processes were transferred to the community through capacity building activities.

***Michelle Sarche, PhD, Associate Professor, University of Colorado***

Dr. Sarche spoke of the efforts to bring the Survey of Well-being of Young Children (SWYC) to a national scale. The SWYC is a parent report screener for development, social-emotional, and family risks in young children. It is a surveillance tool that is used repeatedly over time between birth and twelve years of age, and is available for free at: <https://sites.google.com/site/swycscreen/>. In an effort to determine if the SWYC could be adapted for use within tribal communities, the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center (TRC) Community of Learning carried out an assessment in seven communities.

Out of the interviews and focus groups in these seven communities, promising information about using the SWYC in tribal contexts emerged. The SWYC is brief compared to the Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). Although the family risk questions are difficult, participants also indicated that they are important. Because the SWYC is

administered repeatedly, participants thought this would make parents more comfortable with the difficult questions. Further, completing the SWYC can be educational, as many parents did not understand the implications of child behaviors and developmental stages. Finally, although typically administered at a doctor's office, the SWYC could be implemented in other contexts if children were not coming in for well-visits.

Despite the benefits of using the SWYC, there were also concerns among the focus group participants. Many felt the family risk questions were too sensitive and parents feared losing their children to Child Welfare. There were also concerns over the administration of the SWYC, noting that it may work better as an interview to provide the opportunity for education. Others worried that community referral resources would be inadequate if issues are detected. Despite this concern, participants indicated that they needed the type of data that the SWYC could provide to advocate for resources with tribal leaders. Because of the focus on symptoms, rather than positive developmental milestones, some focus group participants were concerned that parents would feel inadequate and wonder what was wrong with their child.

Concerns about the cultural competency of the constructs also emerged. Important constructs such as self-control, learning through observation, and self-sufficiency were missing. Others were operationalized in a way that does not have meaning within the local context, such as the construct for gross motor skills that involves the use of stairs when not all communities have stairs available. There were also concerns about measurement constructs that were at odds with the local context and that did not incorporate important contextual factors such as living in multigenerational homes and rural communities.

Adaptations of the process, content, norms, and interpretation of the SWYC in tribal communities are all possible next steps. It was clear from the interviews and focus groups that more training is needed in the appropriate use of the SWYC in tribal contexts, particularly on how to communicate results to parents.

***Discussant: Cathy Ayoub, RN, EdD, Brazelton Center, Boston Children's Hospital***

Dr. Ayoub reflected on the two perspectives she brings to measurement development; in her role at the Brazelton Center she partners with communities to decide on measures to evaluate interventions, while in her role as a clinical psychologist she testifies in courts around the difficulty of using normed measures with non-English speakers.

These two projects—Wiba Anung and the community assessment of the SWYC in tribal contexts—can be used as examples of ways in which to engage responsibly with tribal communities. Tribal communities will want to know if measures are relevant, necessary, fitting, worth the effort, and adaptable. They will want to build capacity and see how the measurement development will be a nation building exercise. They want to know how the measures will help build capacity and tell their stories.

With measure development, Dr. Ayoub reflected, "the devil is in the details." Researchers need to look at the item level and see how all of the items fit together. There should be consideration of both how individuals view a single item and the instrument as a whole.

## WELCOME AND SUMMARY OF DAY ONE

Aleta Meyer opened the meeting on Day Two by asking participants to reflect on the presentations and discussions from the previous day. Participants noted that there is much excitement around the new narrative outlined in the Children's Bureau Roadmap that reflects the work of AIAN researchers over the past 30 years. It will be the job of researchers to continue to market this approach, to avoid falling back into the old pattern of science without consideration for community. Communities are now responsible for conducting evaluations and making evaluation-informed changes in their communities. With this shift in ownership, technical assistance providers have a new role as capacity builders. The participants indicated a desire to share the vision of the Roadmap broadly and strategically.

## DESIGNING AND SCALING INTERVENTIONS ACROSS CULTURES

**Facilitator:** Aleta Meyer, PhD, Senior Social Science Research Analyst, OPRE

Federally sponsored programs that involve the scaling up of evidence-based practices, such as the Tribal Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program, face challenges related to the tension between maintaining fidelity to the program model and adapting to local priorities and practices. One example of adaptation is programs like Head Start that encourage the inclusion of native language enhancements in their core curriculum. In this session, presenters shared the benefits and challenges of various approaches for designing and scaling interventions that effectively serve tribal communities, from adapting existing programs to developing culturally grounded work. Implications for future collaborative research and evaluation that improves the health and well-being of tribal communities were discussed.

***Rico Catalano, PhD, Director, Social Development Research Group, University of Washington School of Social Work<sup>10</sup>***

There has been a global shift in the causes of mortality to non-communicable diseases and behavioral issues following successes in addressing infectious disease. Behaviorally-related deaths account for over 70 percent of adolescent deaths, and this increases to 82 percent in AIAN communities. Prevention is critical for health and well-being, and research shows that behavioral problems in adolescence continue into adult life. Thus, preventing risk behaviors and promoting protective factors during adolescence can help decrease morbidity and mortality in adult life.

The lack of evaluation of prevention strategies has led to the development of the Communities of Care (CTC). Over the past 30 years, CTC has sought to build a prevention infrastructure to increase the use of tested interventions and ensure that they are implemented with fidelity. CTC uses a public health framework within each community to define the problem, identify risk and protective factors, engage in interventions, and implement and evaluate the interventions. CTC has evolved from its initial concept through community input and technical assistance.

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<sup>10</sup> PowerPoint presentation available on the Research Connections website:  
[http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN\\_slides\\_7/Catalano\\_acf\\_aian\\_41814\\_fin1.pdf](http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN_slides_7/Catalano_acf_aian_41814_fin1.pdf)

The concepts of the Children’s Bureau Roadmap are reflected in the CTC community capacity building strategy. The components of this strategy include:

- Assessing and building readiness factors;
- Identifying stakeholders;
- Training and building capacity to implement the intervention; and
- Developing knowledge of the risk and protective factors of youth within the community using the CTC Youth Survey.

The CTC model has been tested in 24 communities and the children were followed from fifth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Interventions were shown to have impacts on delinquency and alcohol-related behaviors, and effects were sustained at three years after the conclusion of the intervention.

Currently, CTC is exploring the feasibility of adapting this model for AIAN communities. Through a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the CTC team engaged two AIAN communities to assess their interest and discuss culturally relevant changes to the CTC survey. While the CTC survey has been shown to be reliable and valid for AIAN youth, the group identified AIAN specific risk and protective factors to be considered, including: micro aggressions, bullying, historical trauma, American Indian ethnic identity, and engagement in traditional practices. With the exception of historical trauma which needs to be accounted for, all other factors worked well with the CTC survey.

The next steps will be to adapt the measures, develop logic models specific to cultural practices, and test the adaptations in two tribal communities through a wait-list control design. To help build the capacity of the tribal communities to engage in the prevention work, each community will have a full-time coordinator. This coordinator will ensure the new eCTC Implementation Support System of web-based workshops are utilized in the community. Because the coordinator leads these workshops, CTC hopes to ensure knowledge acquisition and capacity building within the communities.

***Allison Barlow, MA, MPH, PhD, Associate Director, Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health<sup>11</sup>***

Dr. Barlow described the development, implementation and ongoing dissemination of the Family Spirit Project, a long-standing behavioral health home visiting program that is used (at the time of the conference) in 19 tribal communities, and growing. In 1995, with funding from Share our Strength, the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health began engaging in a community-based participatory research (CBPR) process with three tribal communities. Through this process, a focus on addressing the needs of young, unprepared parents emerged, with goals of impacting parent training, problem solving and conflict resolution skills, and other needs (such as domestic violence and substance abuse) through a home-based intervention taught by locally trained and employed paraprofessional Native American home visitors. This approach tapped into cultural assets within the communities, such as support for family-based approach, a non-stigmatized teen parent population, and an untapped workforce that could supply the home visitors.

When determining the study design, the communities chose a randomized control trial (RCT), a choice that Dr. Barlow attributed to the trust that was built through the CBPR. In this RCT, the control group received optimized standard care, which accounted for culture concerns about withholding an intervention. In a study of 322 mothers,

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<sup>11</sup> PowerPoint presentation available on the Research Connections website:  
[http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN\\_slides\\_7/ACFTheWayForwardBarlow\\_508.pdf](http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN_slides_7/ACFTheWayForwardBarlow_508.pdf)

the baseline data indicated high levels of lifetime drug use and resulted in the addition of supplemental substance abuse prevention lessons to the Family Spirit home-visiting curriculum to address this issue. The findings indicated that those who participated in Family Spirit had increased parenting skills, decreased substance abuse, depression and behavioral problems, and their children exhibited fewer emotional and behavior problems. While the Family Spirit approach is culturally grounded, it continues to be culturally adapted as it moves into new communities, who blend their own cultural assets to enhance core components of the curriculum. Dr. Barlow closed by noting that she hopes the concept of the Roadmap can shift in the future from being grounded in historical trauma to being grounded in historical resilience.

***Scott Okamoto, MSW, PhD, Associate Professor of Social Work, Hawai'i Pacific University<sup>12</sup>***

Dr. Okamoto described the development and implementation of a culturally grounded substance abuse prevention program for rural Hawaiian youth. The prevention program, Ho'ouna, developed out of a strategic plan aimed at reducing juvenile crime and delinquency. Dr. Okamoto took advantage of the small community to develop relationships with the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, State of Hawaii Department of Education, and two universities.

To examine the social and cultural context for substance use for rural Hawaiian youth, Dr. Okamoto used a four-phased approach:

- In Phase One, focus groups were conducted to understand the social and cultural context of drug offers.
- In Phase Two, a survey of drug-related problem situations was developed and validated.
- In Phases Three and Four, an understanding of the culturally competent responses to drug offers was developed.

This led to the development of a seven lesson school-based intervention called "Keeping it Real," in which a video vignette was central to each lesson. The lessons were implemented by teachers who utilized an online discussion board and virtual classroom which provided them with the support they needed to implement the program with fidelity in the schools. Because drug and alcohol content is a required part of the curriculum in Hawaii, the control group was formed by classrooms in which the content was delivered as it had been in the past.

The research design looks at data from pre- and post-tests, as well as data six and 12 months after completion. Thus far data analysis has been conducted on pre- and post-tests and the six month data. Preliminary findings indicate significant decreases in fighting for intervention girls, significant decreases in use of non-confrontational resistance skills in comparison group, and accelerated thinking around consequences of accepting alcohol and drug offers.

Dr. Okamoto concluded his presentation by reflecting on the continuum of culturally adapted to culturally grounded prevention. A culturally grounded approach should be considered when adaptation requires so many changes that it essentially results in a new approach.

***Discussant: Josh Sparrow, MD, Director of Strategy, Planning, & Program Development, Brazelton Touchpoints Center, Boston Children's Hospital***

Dr. Sparrow reflected on some of the key questions that emerged from the three presentations:

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<sup>12</sup> PowerPoint presentation available on the Research Connections website:

[http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN\\_slides\\_7/Okamoto\\_ACF\\_Conference\\_2014\\_508.pdf](http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN_slides_7/Okamoto_ACF_Conference_2014_508.pdf)

- Is there an opportunity to move from historical trauma to historical resilience?
- When considering culturally adaptive versus culturally grounded approaches, does it have to be an “either/or” approach?
- Where are the opportunities for translation science?

All three presentations highlighted the critical importance of conducting culturally grounded work. Dr. Catalano’s presentation highlighted the challenge of systemizing and reporting on external validity. The presentations also addressed the need for capacity building, and the need for future research efforts to incentivize capacity building beyond individual interventions. There is tremendous value in the specifics of the collaborative process, and the science community as a whole could value from the dissemination of information around this rich experience.

### DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Following the presentation, meeting participants engaged in a discussion of the presentations and the questions raised by Dr. Sparrow.

- There is a need to pay attention to the common elements of therapeutic change and include those in approaches to ensure they meet local needs and can be translatable. Additionally, by quantifying the amount of an element in an intervention, there is an opportunity to combine data sets to more robustly impact the field.
- There is a need to distinguish between the form of treatment and its function. While the form can vary, the way the intervention functions provides the opportunity to look at commonalities across different approaches.
- To help tribal communities take ownership of interventions, researchers need to be intentional about how the interventions impact the different levels of the community (individual, family, and community).
- Tribal leaders are necessary partners in efforts to move translation science forward. Elected officials have the power to help ensure science is integrated across the programs. External convenings, such as this, have the power to increase the trust of external groups in tribal related research.
- Recent research shows that meaningful employment opportunities could be a preventative strategy and protective strategy.
- The work around collective impact could not exist had the researchers not laid the groundwork in individual communities, and we should be cautious not to oversimplify this work.

### THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX OF RCT’S: WHAT ADDITIONAL RIGOROUS OPTIONS ARE THERE?<sup>13</sup>

**Facilitator:** Maria Woolverton, Child Welfare Research Team Leader/Senior Social Science Research Analyst, OPRE

This session covered research designs for addressing methodological challenges often encountered when working with AIAN communities, i.e. small sample sizes, heterogeneity of native populations, site selection, urban vs. suburban vs. rural, quantitative and Qualitative approaches.

**David Henry, PHD, Professor of Health Policy and Administration, University of Illinois at Chicago**

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<sup>13</sup> PowerPoint presentation available on the Research Connections website:  
[http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN\\_slides\\_7/Henry\\_ACF\\_Slides\\_041814.pdf](http://www.researchconnections.org/files/meetings/AIAN_slides_7/Henry_ACF_Slides_041814.pdf)

Dr. Henry provided an overview of methods beyond the randomized control trial (RCT) that can produce rigorous results. In research today, the RCT is a gold standard for approximating the counterfactual. It provides a random sampling of a defined population and the participants and investigators are blind to the conditions. RCTs, however, can be challenging if conditions cannot be hidden, people move, people do not cooperate with the treatment, or if the treatment does not occur in isolation.

In light of these challenges, Dr. Henry provided an overview of three alternative designs that provide both flexibility and rigor:

- Roll-out designs;
- Interrupted time series designs; and
- Regression point displacement designs.

Roll-out designs, such as dynamic waitlisted designs and stepped wedge designs, are effective when logistics prohibit all communities from starting an intervention at the same time. The power can be increased by randomizing start time and setting. In a dynamic waitlisted design, the intervention is rolled out over time until each program has the opportunity to be included in the intervention group. In the stepped wedge design, the intervention is rolled out over time until all groups are part of the intervention. Stepped wedge designs are an effective strategy if the intervention is expected to continue in the community and can be used with small samples if it is assessed. While there are several challenges, including attrition, associated with roll out designs, they compare favorably to RCTs.

Interrupted time series designs involve a sequence of observations that are interrupted by an intervention and can be used with or without a control group. It provides flexibility to think about time in three ways: intervention time; participant time in intervention; and cohort time in intervention. While this type of design compares favorably to the RCT, it can have history, maturation, and interactive effect challenges, particularly if there is no control group.

Regression Point Displacement Design works well in a community that received an intervention and archival data exist that allows for comparison of estimated expected values to actual values. This design compares favorably to RCTs and works best with single communities, or small numbers of communities. Additionally, it requires a high pre/post-test correlation.

***Discussant: John Walkup, MD, Professor of Psychiatry, Weill Cornell Medical College***

Dr. Walkup reflected on the exemplary models of effective collaboration that have occurred with AIAN populations. He noted that there is a need for new methods of intervention delivery and opportunities for scaling to expand the reach beyond individual communities and typical areas of intervention. These include innovations that have already occurred in AIAN research, including:

- Task shifting of the intervention to paraprofessionals;
- Utilizing disruptive interventions;
- Bringing interventions into a unconventional setting, such as the home;
- Making interventions affordable; and
- Using social media to enhance outcomes.

The Family Spirit Project is an example of the evolution of research. This project was initially funded by a foundation and relied on volunteers in the community. Through initial parent trainings with women leaders in the

communities, the project was able to develop credibility that over time led to the ability to conduct large-scale RCT trials and expand the studies to gather information on fathers and babies.

There are many small interventions with limited data and mechanisms that are not clearly defined. There are opportunities to take this past research, develop language around common core elements, and conduct a meta-analysis to better understand the mechanisms of interventions.

There are also opportunities to look at historical trauma in a new way; as a pathway from victim to survivor to heroic living. Intervention approaches can consider how to incorporate negative experiences into a positive sense of self.

There is much to learn about the biology of development for young children and their families. While pathways that lead to problem behaviors are becoming clearer, there is little understanding about the pathways to resilience.

When considering measurement, there is no such thing as a “perfect” measure. Good measures often have problem items, but they tend to fall out over time as additional research is conducted. Although they may not be statistically relevant, however, it is important to reflect on the degree to which problem items are disruptive to participants.

Dr. Walkup concluded his remarks by reflecting on notable comments from the two-day meeting, including:

- Trust is a byproduct of adding value.
- Hierarchies are everywhere.
- Knowledge begets knowledge.
- Research can be used as a retention tool.
- Universals do exist,--as exemplified through examples of robotics, tuberculosis, enhancing executive function, item response theory, and measurement development. While it is complicated, there is a science behind it.
- The deeper you go, the clearer it all gets.
- We are proving what wise people already know.

#### DISCUSSION SUMMARY

- When using the interrupted time series (single case design) standards exist and it must be done very carefully. There is a need to be cautious as these designs depend on a large effect, which is not often seen in research on social services.
- The emphasis of pretesting in randomized design neglects the elegance of after-only design. Pretests and selection criteria tend to give us extremes.
- Historical trauma framework needs to be included in the research that is conducted in AIAN communities. The loss of traditional values has created a vacuum of culture. Need to reach children where they are but with the understanding that they are hungry for culture.



## ACF PRIORITIES

**Facilitator:** Naomi Goldstein, PhD, Director, Office of Planning Research and Evaluation

Naomi Goldstein facilitated a discussion among Mark Greenberg, Acting Assistant Secretary for ACF, Lillian Sparks and Linda K. Smith that focused on work currently underway in OPRE and ACF. They also considered future research and evaluation for ACF.

### ***Mark Greenberg, Acting Assistant Secretary, Administration for Children and Families***

Acting Assistant Secretary Greenberg provided an overview of the broad range of programs and policies that ACF oversees that address the needs of low-income children and communities. ACF does not directly deliver the services, but provides the funding to states, tribes, community-based organizations and community action agencies to implement the work in their communities. Given the overlap of services and target populations served by these funding agencies there is a need to proactively consider how programs can work together to address common concerns and common concerns.

ACF helps implementing organizations improve their effectiveness through policy guidance, technical assistance, research, and sharing the key issues with stakeholders. As a result of an administration focus on evidence-based practices, research has gotten stronger. This is particularly relevant in a context where evidence is often necessary to obtain new funding or prevent funding from being cut. Despite the importance of research to attain funding, Mr. Greenberg noted that it should be viewed as an opportunity to improve practice.

In developing their research agenda, OPRE considers the trade-offs of what would be useful knowledge now versus five to ten years in the future. They are also considering the necessity and appropriateness of rigorous evaluation. The ongoing program specific and cross-cutting tribal research initiatives are helping OPRE understand what is important to fight for in a limited resource environment.

### ***Linda Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development***

Ms. Smith reflected on the Early Learning Initiative which is a priority for the current administration. When considering early learning, it is important to consider the preparation of the early education workforce. A National Academy of Sciences study is looking at the skills that adults need to help children develop. Attention needs to be paid to how higher education is preparing the workforce, considering that no commensurate change was seen in the quality of early education programs following the emphasis around attaining a bachelor's degree. ACF is investing money in Head Start University which provides coursework for a bachelor's degree and will be piloted in a tribal college system.

ACF would like to better understand the impact of native language programs on child development. They would also like to review curriculums and assess the degree to which they are aligned with tribal culture and producing the intended outcomes. Ms. Smith also spoke of the interest in validating behavioral and developmental instruments within native communities to increase universal screenings to detect and prevent developmental delays. There are opportunities to extend research to understand the programs that keep boys of color in school and on track. In conducting this research, there are opportunities to engage tribal colleges and build their capacity at the local level.

Ms. Smith concluded her remarks by noting that to sustain programs you need good research, good stories, and good data. While conducting cross-site evaluations can be challenging, she charged researchers to consider cross-site evaluations that look for commonalities among tribal communities.

***Lillian Sparks-Robinson, Commissioner, Administration for Native Americans***

The Administration for Native Americans (ANA) provides funding for many different types of grants, but without research they do not understand the impact of their investments. While native language has a positive impact on communities, there is limited research to show this is true beyond anecdotes and individual community successes. There is a Memorandum of Agreement in place with the Department of Education and Department of the Interior to focus on native language programs that promote the acquisition of language and positive cultural engagement. They hope to understand the impact of native languages on early child development, as well as their lasting impacts.

ANA also focuses on creating sustainable employment and economic development opportunities. They are releasing a competition for grants aimed at creating models that create jobs. ANA is interested in understanding the models, the degree to which jobs are developed and sustained, and the other supports that are necessary for sustaining employment. They are also interested in learning how tribes prepare to proactively respond to fluctuations in the economy.

## **MOVING FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACF**

Following the overview of ACF priorities, participants discussed the highlights of the meeting and provided recommendations for ACF research with AIAN communities. Meeting participants provided their remarks in the context of the resources ACF can offer which include research funding and the tools to carry out and share research projects such as data collection tools, measurement tools, technical assistance, and convenings such as “*The Way Forward*” meeting. The main themes from the participants’ remarks are outlined below:

- It is important to consider the children who are not touched by the tribal Head Start and tribal child care systems, and tribal child care more broadly. Child Care Development Funding has allowed tribal nations to ramp up child care within communities, but there is no funding for mental health, behavioral health, and curriculum specialists that are necessary in these programs. Additionally, child care can provide economic development opportunities to communities.
- The idea of “just getting going” and then funding running out was a common theme over the two days. This underscores a need for capacity building in communities with regards to implementation and evaluation. Tribal communities would benefit from flexible funding opportunities, such as longer periods that provide more time for planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- For programs that are created under Federal grants, sustainability has to be discussed. While programs have had successes, there is the question of what will happen to the participants who are using critical support services provided through programs to move toward self-sufficiency.
- There is a need to empower tribal communities to continue data collection and longitudinal research.
- Research with native people comes with a responsibility for capacity building, both in research and technical assistance. Capacity building in Indian country means nation building. It is critically important to use the untapped resources within tribal communities such as indigenous knowledge of tribal experts, the untapped workforce of tribal paraprofessionals, and tribal colleges.
- There is emerging research on the role of biology and the impact of exposure to stress on child brain development. This information needs to be shared with tribal elected officials to keep the issue of stressors on child development in the forefront.

- There are opportunities to look for alternatives to random control trials to validate traditional treatment approaches in the context of standardized treatment. These alternative methods are important because they do not necessarily require a control group, which in many cultural contexts is an unethical practice.
- The Children’s Bureau roadmap needs to be institutionalized through a social marketing plan that gets it into the right hands, including those in university settings.
- There needs to be an increased focus on resilience and protective factors. There is an understanding of what is not working; research projects need to collect information on what approaches are successful.
- Technical assistance should focus on integrating both indigenous and scientific knowledge that aids in service improvement on an ongoing basis.
- Tribes engage with ACF in a program capacity, not in a research capacity. There is a need to discuss research with stakeholders in the tribal context to understand what is feasible, realistic, and acceptable for these communities.
- There is not much information on the urban Indian population. From a research perspective, “we don’t know what we don’t know about urban Indians.” It would be helpful to have an understanding of where ACF programs intersect with Department of Labor programs in serving urban Indians. As the presentations have indicated, healthy early child development is critical and there needs to be greater knowledge of the impacts of Head Start on urban Indian children.
- There is a need for research in every aspect of nation building, including effective family models and family engagement.
- While tribal colleges have had entrepreneur programs for years, they have not been effectively sustained in Indian country. Research on sustaining these strategies would be helpful.
- Tribal colleges and universities collect large amounts of data and need support in building their capacity to use this data effectively.
- The National Science Foundation published the Indigenous Evaluation Framework in 2009 outlining a process for holistic and community based research. They are currently conducting research on the impact that the strategies outlined in the framework have had over time.
- The idea of a cross-site evaluation should not be immediately thrown out. While it can be challenging, there are benefits to shared information and knowledge that can come from this type of evaluation.
- It will be important to consider the OMB directive for the use of administrative data and its implications for Indian Country. While this could be an opportunity in some cases, it is also important that it does not do harm to smaller populations.
- In addition to building the capacity for research, there must be capacity building for program and policy implementation. There are high-quality, culturally-grounded programs that do not have the capacity to take advantage of research opportunities. Mentorship opportunities can be one strategy used to help tribes seize opportunities to develop and implement programs.
- Programs of interest for further research include language programs, early education programs, and child welfare programs. With all of these programs the challenges of experimental design can surface in small communities and communities where control groups do not align with cultural norms.
- The discussion of AIAN male identity and male participation in cultural activities was missing from this conversation.
- Certain critical partners for establishing culturally competent research in Indian Country were missing from this discussion, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Services, and the Department of Education.
- There is a great need for measurement development, adaptation, and validation in AIAN communities.

## CLOSING

***Mark Greenberg, Acting Assistant Secretary, Administration for Children and Families***

The discussion over the past two days helps to outline the range of research projects within AIAN communities that would be useful to communities. The good news is that ACF has been working on many of these issues and coordination and engagement is strong. When considering existing programs, ACF is in favor of reauthorizing promising approaches such as home visiting and the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG). The political environment, however, provides challenges to reauthorization. There are also challenges associated with building infrastructure, implementing, and evaluating a program within a short-term funding timeline. Yet, long-term projects pose their own issues in sharing information and promising approaches.

While there are challenges to using experimental designs, particularly when considering the sample sizes and cultures associated with social service programs, they help ACF make a persuasive case to Congress. The important task for AIAN communities and researchers moving forward is to share the lessons learned about successes and challenges broadly so they can be built upon by other communities.