



## Overview of Tribal Programming

### Leveraging America's Social and Economic Resilience TANF Learning Community (LASER TLC)

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#### Background on Tribal Sovereignty and Self-Governance

Tribal sovereignty is the inherent authority of the original Indigenous peoples of North America to govern themselves, to honor and preserve their cultures and ways of life. Tribal sovereignty is also a political status based on treaties, protected by the U.S. Constitution and upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court, the President, and Congress have repeatedly affirmed that tribal nations retain inherent powers of self-government.

Based on information from the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), “Currently, 574 sovereign tribal nations (variously called *tribes*, *nations*, *bands*, *pueblos*, *communities*, and *Native villages*) have a formal nation-to-nation relationship with the US government. These tribal governments are legally defined as “federally recognized tribes.” Two-hundred-and-twenty-nine of these tribal nations are located in Alaska; the remaining tribes are located in 35 other states. In total, tribal governments exercise jurisdiction over lands that would make Indian Country the fourth largest state in the nation.”<sup>1</sup>

On January 26, 2021, the Biden administration issued a Memorandum to all executive departments and agencies reaffirming the commitment to meaningful consultation and strengthening nation-to-nation relationships with Tribes.<sup>2</sup>

#### Tribal Temporary Assistance for Native Families

Under federal law, federally recognized Indian tribes can apply for funding to administer and operate their own TANF programs. Tribes must submit a three-year plan to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) for review and approval. The ACF Office of Family Assistance (OFA) administers the Tribal TANF program. OFA also coordinates with the U.S. Department of Interior on the transfer and administration of the Tribal TANF programs that tribes have included under their Public Law 102-477 programs. Eligible American Indians and Alaskan Natives, residing in a state or region without a Tribal TANF program, receive TANF services under the state TANF program.

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<sup>1</sup> National Congress of American Indians (2020, February 1). *Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction*. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://ncai.org/about-tribes>

<sup>2</sup> The White House (2021, January 26). *Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships*. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/26/memorandum-on-tribal-consultation-and-strengthening-nation-to-nation-relationships/>

## Leveraging America's Social & Economic Resilience (LASER)

Like states, tribes must design and operate programs that accomplish one of the four purposes of the TANF program, but tribes have flexibility in defining the service area, service population, time limits, benefits and services, family composition, eligibility criteria, and work activities. Also, tribes can establish benefits, services, and strategies for achieving program goals that reflect the needs and culture of the tribal service population.<sup>3</sup>

### LASER TLC Approach to Working with Tribes

Consistent with HHS and ACF policy, the LASER TLC is committed to building relationships with tribal communities through active listening and respectful engagement. Three federally recognized tribes participated in the LASER TLC, the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation, the Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians, and the Yurok Tribe. At the request of the tribes, and to maximize tribal engagement, a Tribal Affinity Group was created to support inter-tribal peer learning. Three Tribal Affinity Group sessions were held between June and November of 2022.



At the initial session, tribal team leaders, coaches, and liaisons identified several key topics for future Affinity Group discussions. The top priority topics that emerged from this initial session were Tribal TANF Program Best Practices and Overcoming Stigma. These topics were addressed in two subsequent sessions. Each session consisted of a brief presentation by an experienced Tribal TANF manager recruited from the field, followed by a facilitated discussion. The presenters offered field-tested examples of Tribal best practices. The discussions provided an opportunity for a rich exchange of ideas and networking between the participating Tribal TANF programs. A summary of each Tribal Affinity Group session is included in the LASER TLC Tribal TANF Resource Portfolio.

In addition to participating in the Tribal Affinity Group sessions, tribes also received site-specific coaching, training, and technical assistance from the LASER TLC project. Each site identified priorities for its local change management plan. The specific innovations and change processes associated with these local Tribal initiatives will be highlighted in individual site profiles and key topical briefs that will be available later this year and shared on the OFA PeerTA repository.

**This brief was developed and written by Eva Petoskey, BLH Technologies, Inc., for the Leveraging America's Social and Economic Resilience TANF Learning Community (LASER TLC).**

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<sup>3</sup> Office of Family Assistance (2022, June 16). *Tribal TANF*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Families and Children, Office of Financial Assistance. Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/tribal/tribal-tanf>