



NATIVE HEALTH WORKFORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

2019



The growing demand for Native health care workers prompted the American Indian College Fund (the College Fund) to convene a roundtable of leaders from Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and other education organizations to discuss opportunities and experiences. This resulting report describes key issues in the conversations and offers recommendations for next steps for TCUs and organizations and institutions who wish to partner with them. The roundtable was held September 6, 2019 at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota.





CONTEXT

In 2017-18, the College Fund refined its support of Native students and TCUs to include a focus on careers and employment. The College Fund's philosophy is that providing students with a deeper understanding of how to move into the workforce and supporting TCUs with career programming expands opportunities and encourages entrepreneurship and economic development in Indian Country and Alaska.

In keeping with the College Fund's culture of learning, the College Fund conducted a study of workforce education at several of the Northern Plains and Upper Midwest TCUs ("First Generation Workers in Indian Country," Tribal College Journal, V.29 No. 18, Spring 2018). This study identified areas of concern for these TCUs, such as job placement, student retention, and access to qualified faculty. The study also notes the many strengths that exist at TCUs, including responsiveness to community priorities and needs, efficient use of resources, and student satisfaction. Further, the study identified the need for culturally responsive curriculum that provides students with the skills to navigate work environments such as working in teams, timely and regular attendance, and the ability to address problems when they arise.



The College Fund also conducts studies with students and TCUs using a variety of methods including surveys, focus groups, and interviews. These studies reveal additional information about the students it serves. The majority (74%) of alumni stated they work for their tribes or tribal organizations (Alumni of Tribal Colleges and Universities Better Their Communities, Gallup, Inc. 2019) and the vast majority (90%) agreed with the statement, "I am attending college because a college degree will help me have a better life." (American Indian College Fund Full Circle Coached Scholars Survey, 2019).





The College Fund recognizes that there are successful programs, relationships, and partnerships that foster career opportunities. To learn more about these opportunities, the College Fund decided to hold the Native Health Workforce Roundtable to learn more about best practices and to explore opportunities.

Invitees met for six hours and explored the following questions:

- What are the needs of TCUs including but not limited to infrastructure?
- What are relationships like among the invitees?
- Are there opportunities to grow relationships between the invitees' TCUs and expand engagement?
- How can improved relationships between invitees' organizations and stakeholders be facilitated?

A transcript of the proceedings of the health roundtable along with College Fund team member input was analyzed for common themes, from which the following recommendations were derived.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a guide to health careers targeted for middle and high school students and make it accessible to interested adults, including potential and current students, school counselors, and other relevant informants.

Explanation: Participants affirmed from their professional experience that many young people don't know about the many types of career opportunities available in the health field. They are mostly familiar with visible positions including medical records, phlebotomy, nursing, and physicians. There are hundreds of additional different job opportunities in the health care field. The group agreed that finding strategies to give that information to Native students could have a significant impact.

Support sharing faculty, faculty exchanges, faculty salaries, and professional development.

Explanation: The demand for qualified faculty to teach in healthcare fields and healthcare support fields, especially mathematics and the sciences, poses a significant barrier for TCUs. Direct financial support to train local residents to serve as faculty and to upgrade current faculty skills is welcome, as are strategies such as funding for the creation of televised or distant learning courses, visiting faculty, and courses scheduled for short time periods or weekends, taught by qualified faculty from mainstream institutions.





Establish an advocacy initiative that removes barriers to health program accreditation, such as nursing and/or licensing requirements, that prevent qualified people from entering health careers.

Explanation: TCU professionals who participated in the roundtable indicated that registered nursing programs are successful but are expensive to operate. The expense of programming has led some TCUs to close nursing programs, despite the demand for qualified nurses. One obstacle to managing program costs identified is the requirement that registered nursing program teachers have a master's degree. Finding a qualified instructor and meeting the market-based salary of that level of qualification for rural, geographically isolated TCUs poses a tremendous challenge.

Create opportunities through strategic engagement, consultation, and shared program development for creative, innovative approaches to partnerships among TCUs, reservation-based high schools, state/private colleges and universities, and health care providers.

Explanation: Transportation, child-care, and additional financial resources are all necessary for TCU students to be able to participate in health care education programs. Access to labs, internships, mentorships, and placements all make a health career education possible, but require a financial commitment and attendance. TCUs serve students who live in rural, remote communities with little transportation infrastructure and students who live well below the poverty line, posing steep access barriers to education for many of them.





Facilitate development of articulation agreements between tribal colleges and interested higher education institutions to create pathways from TCUs into healthcare professions.

Explanation: By intentionally examining TCU offerings and aligning them with the pathway requirements to a health career, we can remove institutional barriers related to transfer credits and pre-requisites. This approach also supports the development of career ladders at the TCUs, allowing individuals to obtain certificates or degrees that transfer into higher-level degrees or other institutions.

Encourage relationships among middle and high schools, TCUs, and mainstream institutions to support the recruitment and retention of American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) students in healthcare fields.

Explanation: Participants agreed that connecting with middle and high school students is critical, and that building pathways through educational systems should be deliberate and long-lasting. This approach also supports creating career ladder programs, allowing students to obtain a certificate or degree, and then progress into a higher-level program or another institution by transferring all or a majority of their coursework.

Dual enrollment programs are also a proven best practice. These programs allow high school students to take college-level courses in their junior and/or senior year, enabling them to graduate from high school having completed several college classes or a college certificate or degree – and lowering students' cost of tuition in the process.





Investment in infrastructure such as wellness centers and food sovereignty programs increase access to wellness programming and improves health indicators in tribal communities.

Explanation: Profound health disparities exist amongst American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) populations compared to other groups, with AIAN people suffering from significantly greater rates of chronic and serious diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes than other groups. These high rates of serious illness are exacerbated by the lack of access to health care in remote, isolated Native communities. The group explored ways to create opportunities to give Native people more control over their health through healthcare curriculum to educate the next generation of healthcare providers who are committed to serving as practitioners in rural, remote communities; access to healthier food choices; and providing wellness facilities to make fitness a regular part of people's lives.

Investment in infrastructure supporting health programs that require laboratories and special equipment addresses an opportunity gap that prevents TCUs from adding or expanding educational programs.

Explanation: TCU professionals identified a lack of space, equipment, and supplies as serious barriers to educating more students in healthcare fields. Some programs can only educate six-eight students in a class because of a lack of facilities.

Assess and report upon local, statewide, or regional initiatives practices that successfully support AIAN students in health professions.

Explanation: Scholarship programming; partnerships between Tribes, TCUs, and funders; INMED/UND programs including summer institutes, MCAT preparation, and directed programs such as public health master's degree; partnerships with healthcare providers; and programs for marginalized population (such as previously incarcerated students) all provide opportunities to learn what works and doesn't work for AIAN students. Conducting an environmental scan and delving more deeply into areas of interest could provide strategies to develop into fundable opportunities.





SUMMARY

These recommendations provide a basis for pursuing partnerships and funding. The intention of the participants is also to affirm that these recommendations are reflective of the needs and opportunities of a much broader group of educational institutions (middle/high schools, TCUs, and mainstream), providers, and funders.

We encourage the use of these recommendations by tribal communities, tribal colleges and universities, organizations serving Native people, tribal health programs, and all others who seek stronger partnerships and greater investment in healthcare education in Indian Country.





**American Indian College Fund
Native Health Workforce Roundtable
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