

# Experiences with Incorporating Culture into Tribal Green Reentry Programs

From the Cross-Site Evaluation of OJJDP's Tribal Green Reentry Program

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Since October 2009 three American Indian tribes—the Hualapai Tribe in Arizona, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) in Mississippi, and the Rosebud Sioux Tribe (RST) in South Dakota—have been implementing community-based reentry initiatives through the “Tribal Juvenile Detention and Reentry Green Demonstration (“Green Reentry”) Program” funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). These programs are designed to help tribal youth successfully reintegrate into their communities upon release from confinement and/or to address problems causing tribal youth referral to the program. The programs serve justice-involved youth through innovative approaches that combine traditional reentry interventions, such as individual assessment, education, counseling, and reentry planning, with “green” activities such as gardening, beekeeping, hydroponics, and skill development in green technologies. These three programs are also participating in a cross-site evaluation being conducted by RTI International and American Indian Development Associates, LLC. The evaluation includes a process evaluation that describes the implementation experiences of the demonstration grantees, and an outcome evaluation that will determine the effectiveness of the programs. For detailed information about the Tribal Green Reentry Programs, please see [http://www.rti.org/pubs/topicalbrief1\\_final\\_feb2013.pdf](http://www.rti.org/pubs/topicalbrief1_final_feb2013.pdf).

While the structure of each Green Reentry Program differs, there are some common programmatic aspects regarding the use of tribal culture through activities, education, ceremonies, and other strategies described in this brief. In particular, the programs engage tribal elders in the process as they are considered the most knowledgeable and experienced people in their communities. This brief discusses the cross-site efforts and strategies that each grantee is using to infuse culture into their Green Reentry Programs. Tribal elder perspectives on effective ways to incorporate culture into tribal green reentry programs are also presented.



## Importance of Cultural Aspects in Tribal Reentry Programming

As awareness and concern over the effectiveness and appropriateness of programs serving American Indian populations has grown (BigFoot & Braden, 2007), tribal programs are increasingly incorporating culture into prevention and intervention activities and as a source of healing. Interviews with tribal staff, stakeholders, parents, and participating youth at each Green Reentry site indicate that youth acquiring cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences are becoming more grounded in understanding how they can use their culture to make changes in their lives. Being culturally informed enables youth to become more connected with their tribal culture and to rely on it as a resource during stressful times. Connectedness has been defined as the interrelated well-being of the individual, family, community, and their natural environment (Mohatt, Fok, Henry, Burket, & Allen, 2011).

By including cultural components, each Green Reentry Program is enabling youth to draw upon their culture to redirect their lives. For example, learning tribal songs at an early age helped one Green Reentry participant to later revisit this cultural skill to overcome his use of alcohol and drugs. Instead of hanging out with peers and “partying,” he focused his free time on practicing old and new songs, which eventually replaced the urge for “drinking and drugging.” For some participants, the Green Reentry cultural components present new cultural education and awareness opportunities, and new skills to apply in their lives. For these youth, acquiring cultural knowledge provided insight and connections into the ways their culture can better help them understand themselves and their environment. These changes experienced by the participants support the findings of several studies citing cultural identity as a protective factor for Native youth that promotes personal and community resiliency (Oetting & Beauvais, 1990; Whitbeck, McMorris, Hoyt, Stubben, & Lafromboise, 2002; William, 2005; Lafromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006; Gray et al., 2008).

Despite local successes, most programs incorporating tribal culture have not been evaluated to an extent that would allow them to be considered evidence-based practices (EBP). Consequently, tribal cultural programs are more likely to be evidence-informed or be informed by practice-based evidence (PBE). PBE refers to methods and/or approaches that have long-standing usage, but have not been formally evaluated or researched. Incorporation of tribal or culture-based methods and activities by each Green Reentry Program concurred with this PBE definition.

PBE studies note that learning activities should be centered on the cultural context within which individuals live (Davis, McGrath, Knight, Davis, S., Norval, M., Frelander, & Hudson, 2004). Thus, locally defined PBE builds upon each tribe’s cultural knowledge, beliefs, traditions, and practices and identifies the most appropriate ways to use them in program strategies. The research indicates that culturally infused interventions such as positive tribal community identity and participation are associated with lower depression, lower alcohol use, lower anti-social behavior, and lower levels of dysfunctional behaviors among Native youth (Whitesell, 2008). Strong cultural identity has been associated with lower substance abuse (Moran & Reaman, 2002) and positive effects on suicide prevention and intervention (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008).



Green Reentry participants, their parents, and staff cite cultural programming as one of the most powerful aspects supporting positive changes with youth (Lindquist, Melton, McKay, & Martinez, 2013). Youth participants report feeling better about who they are as a Choctaw, Hualapai, or Lakota person because they have learned—through hands-on experience, teachings, or other oral traditions—something about their culture or those of other tribes that instills a sense of pride for being who they are.

For each of the Green Reentry grantees, cultural components have been prominent features highlighting the importance of culture for tribal programs strengthening culture, and facilitating the passage of knowledge to the next generation. At all three sites, interviews with staff, stakeholders, parents, and youth indicate the importance of using culture to help young people feel good about themselves and their identities as Indian people. By incorporating cultural components into the Green Reentry Program, staff and stakeholders feel that they are helping their tribes fulfill the tribal responsibility to bring up culturally informed and capable youth. Through cultural programming the Green Reentry Programs are demonstrating the use of culture as a resource to help justice-involved youth.

### **Acquiring Cultural Information**

Each Green Reentry Program uses different strategies to acquire the cultural knowledge and information needed to make decisions about what to include in their programs. All three programs use enculturation methods relevant to their tribe to increase youth cultural knowledge, understanding, and capabilities. All these approaches support research-identified enculturation strategies that help people learn and understand their tribal culture (Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, Washienko, Walter, 1996; Winderowd, Montgomery, Stumblingbear, Harless, & Hicks, 2008). Described below are the methods in use at each tribal site to acquire or access cultural information.

**Cultural Experts:** Each program relies on cultural experts to design some of the cultural aspects being applied in various activities. Experts have included degreed professionals with specific knowledge in cultural anthropology, botany, law, and other areas; tribal employees such as museum staffs, judges, and peacekeepers; and younger Native people with specific skills in cultural arts, crafts, ceremonies, and other cultural areas. Activities include indigenous farming techniques, spirituality and healing ceremonies, history lessons, and teaching each tribe's core values.

**Oral Traditions:** Oral tradition is most applicable with spirituality and healing ceremonies, teaching tribal arts and crafts, drumming, singing, and language instruction. The Programs use several forms of oral tradition—language, song, dance, storytelling, and hands-on experience—to help youth learn. Each Green Reentry Program employs tribal members and other staff that are culturally knowledgeable and informed in tribal traditions. These staff members are able to apply what they know to the program context and also identify other tribal citizens who can help fill gaps in knowledge or capabilities.





**Written History:** All the Green Reentry Programs make use of documented history and knowledge for instructional purposes. This includes the use of tribal-based resources, such as tribal museums and archives, cultural-specific programs, natural resource programs, and local university programs. Using these sources has expanded each program's efforts to provide a wider range of topics and more in-depth cultural knowledge to include in programming.

**Borrowing from Other Tribes:** In some instances, the cultural methods and approaches used by other, nearby tribes or those in other parts of Indian country have been applied. For example, some of the indigenous farming techniques, conflict resolution, peacemaking using talking circles, and healing ceremonies have been borrowed from other tribes. All three programs acknowledge that the shared history and experience among tribes enhances their programs' ability to include other tribal traditions and practices. The programs also practice this through the cultural exchanges that take place during the OJJDP-funded peer-to-peer training and technical assistance events hosted by each Green Reentry Program.

**Elder Wisdom:** More than any other resource employed, each Green Reentry Program seeks access to cultural knowledge and experience from tribal elders. Program staff often refer to elders as "living and talking libraries" full of cultural knowledge that can only be taught or explained using tribal languages or choosing English words, tones, and insights that are most effective in conveying the cultural instruction or meaning. Programs also seek elder involvement in general and cultural-specific program activities and events.

### **Incorporation of Culture**

Four common cultural elements were included in programmatic efforts by the three Green Reentry Programs: 1) Tribal life ways, 2) Tribal history, 3) Core values, and 4) World views including spirituality or religion. These elements helped to identify the cultural components for each community along with the values, beliefs, practices, and approaches for each element. All three Green Reentry programs incorporate cultural programming for various purposes using the different strategies and methods discussed below.

### **Teaching Tribal Life Ways**

Teaching the core cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities that one needs to feel connected to one's tribe has helped youth experience a greater sense of belonging. Each Green Reentry Program uses "oral tradition" or hands-on learning methods through the green activities—gardening, and raising bees, chickens, and other farm animals—that support cultural elements related to socioeconomic and tribal life ways. Youth have learned about traditional subsistence and indigenous gardening methods. Gardening has enabled youth to sow gourd seeds that they cared for, picked, dried, decorated, and used as rattles to accompany their singing of the bird songs they were taught by cultural experts or elders. Some of the herbs grown are picked and used in meals or used to make ointments, and honey is harvested from the bees.



#### **Focus group purposes:**

1. Secure input on culturally respectful ways that the Green Reentry Programs can obtain elder wisdom, cultural knowledge, and expertise.
2. Identify respectful and appropriate ways to involve elders in Green Reentry activities with youth.
3. Obtain input on elders' views about the needs and issues affecting youth in the Program.
4. Facilitate discussions on problems and concerns, strengths, barriers, and solutions.



Several programs include language, arts and crafts, literature, drumming, and singing classes or activities aimed at increasing a youth's knowledge, skills, and abilities in using these elements in their daily lives. Providing these cultural resources helps youth to become more culturally informed and capable. Even youth that are not fluent in their language have an opportunity to learn about their culture, for example, by making their own regalia and being taught what the different colors, symbols, or patterns represent. Teaching cultural etiquette for sacred ceremonies, i.e., burials, healings, or preparation for dances, helps youth to know how to conduct themselves in different situations.

### Teaching Tribal History

Being culturally informed includes having knowledge of the tribe's history. Each Green Reentry Program includes oral and written history lessons through classroom and off-site activities. Intergenerational cultural excursions have been filled with oral traditional methods that have included storytelling, hands-on cooking, rafting skills, horsemanship, and lectures on tribal history and relations with the state and federal governments. Each tribe has used its cultural centers and/or museum programs to teach tribal history through lectures, videos and documentaries, plays, and storytelling, among other methods.

Tribal history also educates youth about the heroism of their own people, tribal leaders—men and women—and each tribe's own tribal sovereignty narratives. Through this education, youth gain better understanding about the contemporary socioeconomic factors their own communities face in comparison to all tribes and to mainstream America. This helps youth have a better appreciation for the adult pressure to obtain a good education that will promote their ability to obtain employment, housing, and other essential basics in life.

### Teaching Core Values

The oral tradition and hands-on activities described above also help to teach cultural values. These include work ethics learned through gardening and construction projects. These projects are teaching about tribal life ways for working together to plant and cultivate a garden and promote communal sharing of harvests. Some green reentry activities have taught youth about respect for nature and the environment through recycling and service-learning projects focused on community beautification. Drumming, singing, and storytelling are oral traditional methods that have been used to teach youth to meditate, pray, and learn indigenous parables and teachings. These oral tradition methods help youth to listen, be calm, show respect, and have patience. Through songs and storytelling, youth learn about the culturally specific ways to give thanks and appreciation for what they have; show praise, love, and caring for others; apologize and forgive; and ask for and give help, in addition to many other core values important to each community.



### **Worldviews, Spirituality, and Healing**

A great number of cultural beliefs and values, customs, and traditions are learned through ceremonies and practices. The Green Reentry Program teaches youth to pray, through oral prayers, chants, songs, and dance, and traditional healing practices, such as sweats.

Collectively, these cultural aspects teach youth about tribal life ways from the past and as they have evolved to the present. Green Reentry participants are learning about their culture by being surrounded with cultural imagery and symbols, music, arts, foods, spirituality, and other everyday ways of living to become informed and proficient in their—Choctaw, Hualapai, or Lakota—culture.

### **Challenges to Incorporating Culture**

Staff, stakeholder, parent, and youth interviews revealed the capacity and capability challenges programs encounter in their effort to incorporate culture and involve cultural experts, adults, and elders in their Green Reentry Programs.

**Challenges in Using Culturally Informed Adult Experts and Elders:** An ongoing challenge is recruitment of culturally informed and experienced elders and other adults to serve as educators, mentors, and cultural advisors. Retention strategies were also mentioned to address volunteer burnout and to increase elder skills for interacting with young people, for example, learning how to talk with, not at, young people. Some respondents noted conflicts with the appropriate compensation—traditional payment or cash incentives—especially for those with low or fixed incomes. All acknowledged the need to “honor” elders and other volunteers in respectful and appropriate ways and to show appreciation for their involvement.

**Bridging Generation Gaps:** The lack of opportunities for personal interaction across age groups was highlighted, which contributed to the quality and frequency of communication with one another at individual and program levels. Some felt that both youth and elders needed training on effective communication and listening skills, which would increase their comfort levels in one another’s company.

**Program Capacity:** The ability of programs to include cultural programming with competing costs for other resources such as transportation, incentives, strategies for background checks, and intra- and interagency relationships were also identified among the challenges to overcome. Some stakeholders, while supporting the Green Reentry Program, were limited by overextended staff and financial resources to cover requests for involvement or contributions. Agreements with internal tribal and external agencies were considered essential to tap into the available governmental and community resources to support coordinated effort and collaboration among tribal programs.



## Elder Perspectives on Involvement in Green Reentry Programs

To better understand the challenges for involving elders, the RTI-AIDA evaluation team conducted three elder focus groups to provide an opportunity for elders to express their views on issues tribal youth face and their perspectives on what the elder role can or should be with youth in general and in the Green Reentry Programs.

The focus group employed protocols found in oral tradition, which included local methods for conducting discussions. In one setting, a talking circle process was used, which allowed every person to speak without interruption before open discussion occurred. At two sites, interpreters were provided to encourage elders to express their views in their tribal language. Elders were invited by program staff to attend a meeting with approximately 9 to 12 elders participating at each site (n=32). The elders self-selected to attend and participate in the focus group meetings that were facilitated by the two Native American evaluation team members. One session was conducted at the tribe's museum and cultural center, and two occurred at the tribes' local senior centers. Informed consent was provided through verbal and written notice.

## Elder Views on Tribal Youth Issues and Cultural Strengths

Elders were asked about the problems most prevalent in their communities involving youth, the main worries or concerns they have for youth, and the strengths that could be applied to address concerns. The table below lists their concerns and strengths in the following categories: community, intergenerational, tribal government, and cultural.

### Elder Views on Tribal Youth Issues and Strengths

Community Concerns	Community Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of positive role models for living a "good life" of kindness, generosity, honesty, appreciation, and caring.</li><li>• Social and behavioral problems: underage drinking and drug use, property crimes, gang involvement, youth violence and exposure to childhood violence, including violent video games and movies.</li><li>• Few positive youth activities or recreation.</li><li>• Communities not asserting discipline and community or cultural standards of behavior, which lowers youth expectations, aspirations, and decreased self-worth.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communal strengths include focus on people over money and things.</li><li>• Community sharing of resources, such as harvests and hunts.</li><li>• Communities being helpful during calm periods and times of crisis.</li></ul>





### Intergenerational Concerns

- Parents not assuming disciplinary roles and guidance contribute to irresponsible youth behavior, delinquency, and teen parents.
- Parents defend wrongful behavior, and over-indulge youth with material things.
- Parents unaware of their children's education, social, health, or wellness needs.
- Traveling long distances for employment is contributing to diminished parental involvement.
- Single-parent households in overcrowded living conditions contribute to stress.
- Stressed-out parents tolerate more from their children and are more lenient with chores, curfews, and homework; overlook underage drinking or drug use; and put up with disrespectful behavior.
- Ill-equipped grandparents raising grandchildren hinders effective care and rearing of teenagers.
- Elders not taking responsibility to provide the positive role models needed to narrow the generation gap and model respect and care for, rather than fear of, each other.

### Intergenerational Strengths

- Family members and relatives are helping to raise and rear children.
- Uncles still provide advice through “a talking to” or dispense corrective disciplinary action to nieces and nephews.
- Aunties still teach shawl making and beading to nieces—passing on a cultural skill while keeping girls occupied under the care of an adult female.
- Family gatherings to plan and celebrate life events, such as births, burials, community events, and ceremonies, still occur.
- Family gatherings are held to solve family problems and conflicts.
- Elders have healthy relationships with their adult children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.
- Grandparents in the home or nearby engage the whole family to provide love, care, and support.
- Grandparents engage in storytelling about life in the “olden days” or tell cultural parables, legends, or other teachings.

### Governmental Concerns

- Inadequate local education systems prevent youth success while in school; hinder future opportunities with college, getting a good job, and other pursuits; and keeping youth out of trouble.
- Ineffective justice, behavioral health, and victim services to respond to youth needs.
- Incarceration should only be used for serious crimes, not for underage drinking and minor crimes.
- Lack of incarceration alternatives is harmful to positive youth development, especially if treatment, education, and rehabilitation are not included.
- Need strong, positive tribal leadership.
- Overemphasis on what can be done with money instead of policy and procedures, consequences for non-compliance, and high work ethics and standards.

### Governmental Strengths

- Tribes provide services and resources for youth, such as schools, Boys & Girls clubs, and other recreational outlets and activities.
- Outreach by tribal leaders and tribal program staffs ensure that people are aware of what is available in the community and educate elders about ways they could become involved.
- Tribal citizens on school boards have increased cultural education in school curricula.
- Tribal cultural programs are strengthening cultural knowledge, information, and preserving artifacts, etc.
- School- and tribal-based cultural programs can be expanded for youth in the Green Reentry Programs and would be helpful to prevent youth recidivism.





### Cultural Concerns

- Need for passage of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities to youth.
- Youth over-influenced by mainstream culture or gang culture instead of their tribal culture.
- Still dealing with historical trauma that caused the loss of land, language, tribal economies, cultural institutions, cultural arts, and ways of life.
- Elders' experiences with relocation and boarding schools caused loss of language, learning of parenting skills, and other cultural skills and abilities because they were not living in their tribal community.
- Community accountability for not instilling cultural values and beliefs and not helping youth to overcome any shame for speaking their language.

### Cultural Strengths

- Culture is alive and well with the speaking of languages; continuing songs and dances; making and wearing tribal regalia; praying and giving thanks in own tribal ways; expressing culture through paintings, sculptures, arts, crafts, and writing; practicing healing ceremonies using indigenous medicine and methods; and having oral and written tribal histories.
- Teaching tribal culture to youth through the schools, cultural centers, and other settings is available in each community.
- Culture-based spirituality is helping many tribal people with hardships or those who need help to heal from substance abuse or violence in their lives.
- Tribal healers are still called upon to address physical, mental, and spiritual healing needs.

### Barriers to Using Cultural Strengths Identified by Elders

The barriers identified by elders for involvement in the Green Reentry Programs and other programs included outreach efforts, time and resource constraints, cultural competence and cultural differences.

**Elder Outreach Efforts:** Most elders indicated that they were generally uninformed about the cultural programming initiatives of the Green Reentry Programs. Personal interaction with program staff was considered minimal; most did not know program staff, or had simply never been asked or invited to participate in tribal programs. Most indicated that they would participate if they were asked to help. The personal interaction was considered important when asking an elder to share their cultural knowledge with others. Elders that were involved in programs expressed burnout and feeling that they are the only ones being called upon by programs.

**Time and Resources Constraints:** Elders indicated that while they may appear to have time on their hands, they often need more time to get things started and completed. Most noted their availability to participate in programs depends on the amount of time (about 4 hours daily) they allocate to sharing meals at the senior centers located in each tribal community. This further depends on their ability to access transportation from public or family sources. Some elders noted the need to keep working to make ends meet financially. Others noted that helping to raise grandchildren hindered their ability to participate in tribal programs for youth.



**Cultural Competence and Cultural Differences:** Historical experience with contact and ongoing American Indian policy has impacted some of the cultural strengths in the three tribal communities. The table below summarizes the perspectives of elders regarding the weakening of specific cultural elements and their subsequent impact.

Cultural Elements	Impact of Historical Experience on Culture
Language	Decreased fluency with language at all age levels has strained the ability to share cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities.
Spirituality	Religious censorship and/or exposure to other religions decreased knowledge and use of cultural-based ceremonies, songs, dances, prayers, medicines, and healing ways, and the use of tribal healers.
Economies	Increased reliance on a cash economy has strained traditional subsistence through farming, hunting, and tribal arts and crafts. Parents often work in off-reservation settings, which further strains culture-based childcare and child rearing.
Cultural Education	Relocation and boarding schools disrupted continuous connection to tribal culture, language, and ways of life during important developmental periods for youth, which has decreased oral passage of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities. Minimal effort to teach culturally relevant topics in public schools persists.
Intertribal & Interracial Relationships	Intertribal and interracial relationships have increased the number of people from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds. This has increased conflicts on which cultural systems to teach or follow and where to enroll children, and raised questions about the rights and privileges of multi-tribe—race or ethnic—children and youth.

### Suggestions for Strengthening Cultural Programming Efforts

The elder focus groups and interviews indicate strong support for incorporating culture into the Green Reentry Programs. The programs are using several methods described earlier to access cultural knowledge and information. Some overlapping suggestions include the following:

- Build upon cultural activities, such as drumming, singing, and dancing, to develop a cultural immersion program that becomes a permanent part of the Green Reentry Programs.
- Create varied, multiple, and continuous education, awareness, and outreach activities that encourage adult and elder participation in the Green Reentry Program.
- Include age-appropriate orientation sessions that focus on communication and interaction skills, including effective and respectful listening skills, and ways to help each other work and play together.
- Provide education for adult and elder volunteers about the needs of justice-involved youth, including protocols for working in youth detention facilities.
- Use cultural centers as “safe” places to hold intergenerational activities.
- Create specific programs such as *Adopt a Grandparent* program, where elders come and just spend time with youth one-on-one or in paired group activities.



- Sponsor more intergenerational, cultural excursions planned by youth and elders.
- Increase service-learning activities that are reciprocal, such as chores for elders or providing garden harvest in exchange for storytelling nights, teaching a beading class or regalia-making class, and so on.

### **Evaluation Perspectives: Considerations for Cultural Planning**

The Green Reentry Programs all use partners in program components to implement cultural activities— healing ceremonies, cultural arts and crafts, indigenous gardening, cultural excursions, and cultural education, among others. Partnerships are essential due to the rural and often isolated location of many tribes, resulting in fewer organizational resources available to tribal communities. Geographic isolation further challenges programs to find the resources needed to provide comprehensive recovery support, education success, mental health, employment, and other resources to nurture positive youth development. Having fewer conventional resources accentuates the need to enlist community-based programs to support reentry initiatives. This means expanding the reach to programs beyond governmental agencies to private or nonprofit organizations, businesses, and culture-based groups such as spiritual leaders and faith-based organizations or churches. The Green Reentry Programs reached out to many community-based groups to implement the cultural programming aspects of their programs. The process evaluation identified some considerations for implementing tribal or culture-based programming that are discussed below.

### **Cultural Programming Plan**

The focus group discussions and interviews revealed the need for guidance that a written cultural program plan can provide to solidify ongoing efforts. A written plan can be used to document the cultural aspects in place at each Green Reentry site and provide guidance to staff, volunteers, and program partners. Some essential components ascertained as needed by Green Reentry practitioners to include in a plan are described below:

### ***Consultation and Input Strategies on Cultural Programming***

Green Reentry staff consulted with their program partners, tribal officials, cultural experts, and elders to determine which cultural activities to include in their programs. Written consultation policies and/or protocols could be helpful to document and describe the levels of consultation with different or overlapping groups that may be necessary. Protocols could include consultations with the following:

- Tribal government officials
- Tribal-specific cultural programs and resources
- Community leaders
- Male and female spiritual leaders, medicine men and women, other natural healers
- Elders, cultural groups, and other cultural experts.



An important consultation purpose is to gain input and guidance about what cultural elements are appropriate for use in programs and how they should be applied. Programs are accountable to ensure that cultural programming or activities selected are relevant, appropriate, and correctly implemented. These consultations could be used to gain concurrence on selected cultural elements. They can also be helpful to gain support, sponsorship, volunteers, resources, and endorsements, and to open doors to more opportunities.

### *Ongoing Cultural Guidance*

Programs need to develop ongoing strategies to guide program design, development, and implementation. Often individuals who are not from the tribe operate tribal programs; as a result, they need guidance from culturally informed tribal experts. Even when tribal staff and volunteers operate programs, it is helpful to have concurrence from recognized tribal experts to ensure cultural appropriateness or validity in programs. Green Reentry Programs regularly encountered these types of situations. This could be addressed by having a protocol for setting up short-term work groups put in place just long enough to design a component or complete a task, for example, identifying the components of an intergenerational excursion program or cultural immersion component.

### *Program Guidelines*

Focus group participants indicated not knowing what they would do if they became a volunteer. Similarly, staff and stakeholders stated that they sometimes did not know how to determine cultural qualifications, hold a consultation session, or deliver services to incarcerated youth. Written program policies and procedures would be helpful for consistency and for guiding staff and volunteers. It is often a program's responsibility to accurately implement culture-based practices and approaches. Minimally, guidelines could include the following:

- Protocols should be developed for consultation with tribal governmental and community-level groups.
- Cultural guidance protocols should be established to maintain ongoing input and advice.
- Policies and procedures should be developed to guide staff with
  - a. determining cultural qualifications or requirements;
  - b. recruitment and retention of cultural experts;
  - c. appropriate recording, usage, and documentation of cultural resources; and
  - d. the cultural protocols for obtaining permissions to access and/or use cultural knowledge, practices, and other resources.
- Specific program components would outline the cultural features, target population to be served, activities to be accomplished, and the dosage and frequency of services or activities. This should also describe program costs, partnerships and participatory agreements, and cost and resource sharing.





- Adaptations of another tribe's or ethnic group's culture-based program or practice should begin with validating their relevance and appropriateness for use in the local program. To the extent possible, consultation with the tribe would be helpful for establishing cultural fidelity elements.
- Sustainability strategies should be included in the plan to ensure continuance of ongoing and new culture-based programming, including
  - a. community involvement and integration;
  - b. program visibility through appropriate messaging, marketing, and community education and awareness;
  - c. strategies to institutionalize culture-based features and elements into program policies and requirements; and
  - d. resource development that includes financial support and culturally competent training and technical assistance.

### Cultural Programming Expectations

Access to culturally relevant services and resources is both a right and an obligation that tribal governments share with other state and federal agencies and is supported by laws such as the New Mexico Children's Code (2011) and others. The three Green Reentry Programs are incorporating cultural programming, which is helping each of their tribal governments provide culturally relevant and appropriate services and resources to their young tribal citizens and their families. The cultural expectations emerging from these programs' use of culture include the following:

- Increased collaborative planning for culturally germane services and programs
- Increased service collaboration among tribal and community-based cultural resources, such as spiritual leaders and other cultural experts
- Increased youth knowledge and use of tribal culture to reduce behavioral problems during and after confinement
- Institutionalization of culturally relevant and appropriate programs in the Green Reentry Programs
- Increase in human capital to provide cultural programming
- Increase in youth using cultural strengths and drawing on them to minimize their engagement in high-risk behaviors.

While incorporating cultural elements into the Green Reentry Programs is an ongoing endeavor, several expectations noted above indicate that cultural programming promotes positive self-identity, tribal pride, and increases youth resiliency (Lindquist, Melton, McKay, & Martinez, 2013). These programs are showing that tribes strengthen culture merely by using it in all aspects of life—personal, family, community, and government.



## Conclusions and Next Steps

The Green Reentry Programs noted the importance of providing culturally relevant programs in their proposals. All three programs have included a number of cultural activities delivered using cultural methods, approaches, and practices.

A key challenge, albeit not insurmountable, is engaging the community, especially elders, who are considered the “keepers of tribal wisdom and knowledge,” to become more involved in the Green Reentry Program. The elder focus group indicated a strong willingness to become engaged and a sense of responsibility for teaching youth what they know. Youth and parents also expressed a desire to learn from elders. What seemed to be missing most was the opportunity for engagement—an issue that staff could address with help from program partners.

Another program challenge at all three sites was the lack of program plans and guidelines for incorporating cultural components. As a demonstration project, this is an important lesson learned. Clear descriptions of program features and expectations will help the programs identify the cultural elements most responsible for changes in a youth’s life. With help from local cultural experts, each program can identify the cultural performance measures and types of program data to collect.

The evaluation will continue to gather information about program efforts toward cultural program planning, the cultural activities, the methods and practices being used, the lessons learned, and the impact of cultural programming with youth in the Green Reentry Program at each site.



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