



## **Overview of the NCAI Policy Research Center: *Gathering Our Stories, Setting a Roadmap for the Future***

In recent decades, contemporary American Indian and Alaska Native tribes have evolved as increasingly sophisticated self-determining governments. At the same time, new pressures and challenges have amplified the need for innovative approaches to education of policymakers and the public at large, and to the development of proactive strategies for moving forward. Devolution is shifting the nature of tribes relationships with federal and state governments. Supreme Court decisions demonstrating a void in understanding of tribal governments have brought federal Indian law to an uncertain crossroads. Federal appropriations central to fulfillment of the U.S. trust responsibility to tribes have been on a consistent downward trend, threatening the progress of tribes in building healthy communities. In this complex political landscape, sound data on tribal communities and coordinated tribally-driven policy analysis have become increasingly important.

Recognizing this need, the NCAI Education Fund has taken on the challenge of launching a broad and comprehensive research and policy analysis consortium. The NCAI Policy Research Center, launched in 2004, is a think tank focused solely on issues facing tribal communities. Developed under an advisory group of tribal leaders, this tribally-driven consortium of existing research bodies and primary researchers will be equipped to gather and assess data on conditions and trends in Indian Country, and will serve to support and inform the policy development efforts of tribal leaders, tribal organizations, Congress, and the Administration with objective data and analysis. In so doing, the Policy Center can help to provide the tools necessary to inform public policy debates with meaningful information and assist in shifting the discourse in Native policy from a problem-focused approach to truly proactive, future-thinking strategy development.

Under the direction of an advisory council convened to guide the Center's initial implementation, the NCAI Policy Research Center will serve to:

- Connect leading thinkers and institutions in a cohesive, shared network that builds on existing strengths within Native communities;
- Identify priorities for research and policy analysis and commission objective, independent research on selected issues relating to tribal governance, federal Indian policy, and the socioeconomic status of Native peoples;
- Assemble groups of experts to develop proactive models and strategies for data collection and analysis;
- Inventory current data collection within federal, state, and local governments and institutions to determine what is being collected and what additional information is needed, particularly in the area of reporting on impacts of federal appropriations for tribal programs;
- Provide access from the Policy Center's website to information and useful data pools that would be helpful to tribes, other agencies, etc.;

- Organize data into useful and manageable formats to improve its accessibility to the public, tribal leadership, public officials, and academics;
- Serve as an information clearinghouse to provide public information and connect existing Native institutions and projects through a comprehensive website;
- Support fellowships and internships to support scholarship and provide practical experience for young Native academics and scholars;
- Convene working groups to share research and undertake policy analysis.