

## **Tribal Sovereignty & Self-Determination through Evaluation**

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There is a gap between intended public policy goals and the present condition of American Indian people. In the present or past, public policies have had a long-term negative impact on American Indians for the last century. One need only look at health, economic, educational, or other statistical data sets or reports to see that American Indian people have the highest infant death rates, highest levels of poverty, lowest adult life expectancy rates, and lowest academic achievement rates (per capita) among other minority and majority groups (National Center on Educational Statistics, 2005 and U.S. Census 2000). The damage will continue unless Tribal Governments use their Indigenous powers of sovereignty and self-determination to develop Tribal policies and tools to evaluate the effectiveness of Tribal and public policy. Tribes must be able to Indigenize the evaluation and policy process so they are able to assert themselves politically and legally to change these negative long-term trends. Tribes will be given real life policy and evaluation examples, strategies, tools, and resources created by American Indian people that have been successfully used in Indigenous communities.

Evaluation is the key and completes the circle of research, development, and practice. But often Tribes are not equipped with the policies, people, or capacity to carry out their own evaluation activities and have to rely on an outsider and/or a non-Indian person or organization to conduct this work. Often this leads to studies, approaches, and findings that are inconsistent, incongruent, and invalid with the Indian people that these very policies or programs are supposed to serve. This results in long-term trends of educational, economic, health, and other disparities that Indian people have endured for centuries. Tribes will learn about basic evaluation terms and how evaluation is a powerful tool for transformative and lasting change in Tribal and non-Tribal settings where Indian people reside. Tribes will see how other Indigenous organizations are creating evaluation policies, using Indigenous evaluation tools, and Indigenized evaluation practices to promote sovereignty and self-determination. These practices are being used to protect and sustain their community well into the next seven generations.

Using evaluation as a tool for critical policy analysis, the author will use education as a concrete example for Tribes to learn about the impact of policy development, implementation, and evaluation. The author will use historical research to evaluate public educational policy impacts on American Indian students since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Education is critical for survival and significantly decreases death, divorce, poverty, delinquent behaviors, and other at risk factors (Schweinhart and Weikert, 2004). Within an educational context, tribes will learn about the three step policy process of policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy accountability (Denzin

and Lincoln, 2000). Tribes will be equipped to be more self-determined so they can make stronger Tribal policies and in turn use their policies to assert Tribal sovereignty for leveraging improvements for the education of American Indian students on and off the reservation.

Through this concrete educational example, Tribes will also learn about strategies to work with other government policy makers and hold them accountable for the standard of living across all arenas for American Indian people. Tribes will leave with a real life understanding of how the policy process works within the context of education and through the evaluation of public education policy. Tribes will have a stronger sense of how this three step process can be transferred to the economic, social, health, environmental or other policy arenas that Tribes may be interested in. Implications for other areas of policy development, implementation, and evaluation will be discussed during the afternoon session.