
OMAHA NATION COMMUNITY RESPONSE TEAM



Project Title:	Social Capacity Building
Award Amount:	\$295,546
Type of Grant:	Social and Economic Development Strategies
Project Period:	Sept. 2010 – Sept. 2012
Grantee Type:	Native Nonprofit

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 2 full-time equivalent jobs created
- 111 Elders involved
- 331 youth involved
- \$273,605 in resources leveraged
- 6 individuals trained
- 36 partnerships formed

BACKGROUND

Omaha Nation Community Response Team (ONCRT) was established in 2001 and is located in Walthill, Nebraska. The mission of ONCRT is to “lead our community toward wellness by supporting our youth through traditional and contemporary teachings and modeling, utilizing the highest quality resources available to the Omaha Nation.” ONCRT sustains partnerships with schools, Tribal programs, and community stakeholders in a very rural setting.

ONCRT worked to provide services to meet the unique needs of the Omaha Nation, but infrastructure weaknesses hindered the team’s progress and effectiveness. These challenges included staffing shortages, lack of board member professional development, and a need for formal policies and procedures.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the project was to improve organizational capacity to ensure ONCRT growth and the community’s capability to access professional, culturally appropriate services.

The first objective was to increase ONCRT’s organizational leadership and capacity to achieve the organization’s vision of a healthier environment among residents of the Omaha Reservation. To accomplish this, ONCRT staff engaged in a rigorous series of sequenced trainings designed to increase skills of the board members, staff, and stakeholders. Each session’s materials were archived for future board member and human resource orientation and trainings.

ONCRT utilized contracted professional facilitators and trainers to implement the training. Workshop topics included: a strategic planning framework, board leadership training, organizational management, and team building. Board members, ONCRT staff, and interested community stakeholders attended the strategic planning framework workshop.

The second objective was to increase organizational structure by completing a 5-year comprehensive strategic plan, a sustainability plan, and four organizational

policy and procedure manuals incorporating community stakeholders in the planning process. Through the strategic planning workshop, ONCRT produced a complete 5-year strategic and sustainability plan with community input. Project staff also developed four policy and procedure manuals: personnel, financial, partnership development, and community involvement. The manuals, which were approved by the board and implemented by the end of the project period, provide day-to-day operational guidance and ensure proper oversight of the organizational assets.

ONCRT staff also worked to establish, maintain, and strengthen partnerships to assist the team in accomplishing its mission. The partnership development phase identified available partners, and resulted in face-to-face meetings to discuss common goals and community improvement strategies; this effort established 36 new partnerships. The team also hosted several successful activities with youth, Elders, and the Omaha Reservation community as a whole, including youth dances, Omaha Nation Youth Council meetings, and sports banquets at local schools.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The organization endured several challenges from the start of the project, including turnover in the project director position, as the first two directors experienced health problems and had to resign. Additionally, significant delays occurred due to massive flooding of the Omaha Valley area during the project period; the flooding displaced 187 people, shut down tribal offices, and involved the whole reservation and surrounding area in emergency management efforts. Despite numerous setbacks, the project resumed in earnest and ONCRT successfully met project objectives.

The ONCRT board and staff received over 40 hours of training; completed a

comprehensive sustainability and strategic plan; developed, passed, and implemented key policies and procedures to ensure proper organizational instructions; and put into place steps to accomplish day-to-day business tasks. Furthermore, the community activities not only provided healthy, alternative activities for reservation youth, but also afforded ONCRT the opportunity to strengthen its relationship with the community and build upon partnerships.

Project staff also collected community readiness data as part of the project. The data indicated community mobilization efforts are in need of improvement in some areas, but other areas have solid and ongoing support. The most recent data showed growth in 10 out of 16 categories measured, such as membership involvement, partnership interaction with the community, vision and mission, and cultural competency. The overall average from the first to the second year increased from 3.65 to 3.73, on a scale of one to five where one represents low readiness and five represents high readiness.

The data informed community initiatives and discussions regarding the need to consistently address community disorganization. Strengths also were recognized, such as a shared vision for change and a growing awareness that the Omaha culture can be a powerful protective factor. The capacity building efforts of this project are continually integrated into ongoing community-based discussions to sustain the work and mission of ONCRT.

Today, ONCRT has a well-trained board, capable staff, policies and procedures, and a talented, dedicated community."

Shane Thin Elk, Program Director

PONCA TRIBE OF NEBRASKA



Project Title:	Ponca Job Empowerment Project
Award Amount:	\$876,373
Type of Grant:	Social and Economic Development Strategies
Project Period:	Sept. 2009 – Sept. 2012
Grantee Type:	Tribe

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 28 full-time equivalent jobs created
- \$308,692 in resources leveraged
- 145 individuals trained
- 21 partnerships formed

BACKGROUND

The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska has 1,171 enrolled members, and consists of a 15-county service delivery area in Nebraska, South Dakota, and Iowa. The Tribe serves all Native Americans within its service area, with priority given to Ponca Tribal members. Sixty-five percent of the Native American households residing in the Tribe's service area live at or below the state median income.

In 2009, the Tribe held community focus groups and strategic planning sessions; the Tribe's Northern Ponca Housing Authority reported its tenants needed financial literacy education, as many experienced personal budgeting issues that hinder payments or pursuit of homeownership. Reflecting on the needs of tenants and the larger Native community, the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska identified job training and financial literacy as priorities, and developed the Ponca Job Empowerment Project.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the project was to establish a job training center to empower Ponca members and other Native Americans with the skills and confidence necessary to become successful and self-sustaining individuals.

The first objective of the project was to establish five Job Empowerment Centers, with locations in Lincoln, Omaha, Norfolk, and Niobrara, Nebraska, and Sioux City, Iowa. Through Internet cloud technology, the established centers developed, housed, and maintained an updated job-listing database. The database provides up to date information about job availability in Indian Country and locally. The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska's Human Resource Department also uses the database to recruit community members for open positions.

The second objective was to assist 133 Tribal members achieve employment and job-readiness skills by developing and implementing training during the day and evenings. Project staff implemented the training program in four units, and offered the series of units six times throughout the project period. Staff adapted stringent guidelines to determine completion; 103 participants received certificates of

completion, and 32 secured employment as a result of the program.

The first unit, entitled “Yellow—Self Awareness,” focused on leadership development, bicultural survival, self-knowledge, healthy living, and addressing the isolation of unemployment. The second unit, entitled “Black—Career Building,” covered how to build interview skills, choose a career, search job listings, write a resume, obtain education relevant to one’s career choice, and attend job fairs. The third unit, entitled “Red—Financial Literacy,” provided lessons on money management, banking basics, establishing good credit, identity theft, online safety, and bankruptcy. The final unit, “White—Computer training”, included training on computer programs such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, and on using the Internet to locate employment opportunities.

In addition, program coordinators met weekly with individual participants to review progress and provide specific, focused training such as mock interviews, typing proficiency, communication assistance (oral and/or written), data entry training, and individual job searches.

Three partners were instrumental to the program by providing in-kind and monetary support. Wells Fargo Bank provided financial counseling and worked with each participant to review credit history, take steps to repair credit, and explain the link between credit scores, and employment and homeownership potential. The Ponca Economic Development Corporation provided laptops, on-the-job training, assistance with writing resumes, and temporary jobs to participants. In addition, the nonprofit Community Action Agency provided professional trainers for the computer skills courses and developed pre- and post-unit assessment tools.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The job empowerment program utilized culturally significant signs, symbols, and colors to nurture the participant through the units, leading to a high retention rate of over 80 percent. The program also included peer support, which proved to be highly successful. Peers reviewed one another’s goals and provided feedback and on-going encouragement. The support provided by program coordinators, tailored to each individual, was greatly appreciated by the participants. Bolstered by this support network, one participant, a single mother challenged with financial instability, shared: “Now, I know I can do it.”

Project staff attribute the program’s success to the creation of a supportive environment where a culturally appropriate service delivery model incorporated the Native American custom of “relationship.” In addition, by offering the same classes in six different cycles, participants were able to complete all training modules.

Two-thirds of participants who completed the program secured employment, while others received promotions due to enhanced job skills. Most participants secured employment in the fields of clerical, customer service, and retail.

“Having confidence and skills...now I am a better father too.”

Project Participant