

TRIBAL  
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VISITING



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Photo: Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe

## Strong Staff and Family Relationships: **The Heart of Tribal Home Visiting Programs**

# Introduction

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A growing body of research emphasizes the importance of engaging families in supporting children’s early development. (Powell et al., 2010; Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010; Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Edwards, & Marvin, 2011; Starkey & Klein, 2000). Authentic family engagement is dependent on strong relationships between families and staff of early childhood programs. This is especially the case for Native communities, where trust and personal connection that honors cultural values are paramount.

Leaders from the Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (Tribal MIECHV) program underscore that **the relationship between the family and home visitor provides the heartbeat of family engagement** in their programs. When American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) families feel safe, understood, and supported, they will more likely engage in the full offerings of a home visiting program and, therefore, experience the full benefit.

This brief—based on interviews with Tribal MIECHV families and grantees—focuses on the importance of engagement and the innovative approaches that grantees are using to help families fully commit to participation in the program. It provides definitions of family engagement as articulated by grantees and parents themselves, as well as a research-informed definition that is being used in early childhood and parenting programs. It summarizes approaches to family engagement that Tribal MIECHV grantees are taking to increase the likelihood that both staff and families respectfully partner with one another and make the most of the home visiting opportunity. These approaches include, but are not limited to, building staff capacity to successfully engage families; ensuring that home visiting is a beneficial fit for the families; and engaging families in ways that are most meaningful to them. The brief concludes with stories from grantees and families that illustrate the power of strong staff and family relationships for supporting child and family well-being.



## Family Engagement in Tribal MIECHV

When asked what family engagement means to them, grantees had similar explanations, most often focusing on the relationship that is needed for authentic engagement to occur:

**“Family engagement is all about the relationship you have with the family. You can’t engage without a relationship. Learning the family culture and traditions are important. That is where it starts.”—Katherine Chavez, Taos Pueblo**

**“Family engagement is about the quality of the relationship between the home visitor and the caregiver.”—Rebecca Riley, Native American Professional Parent Resources, Inc. (NAPPR)**

**“Family engagement means that families get the full impact and benefits of the program. The relationship they build with the home visitor is crucial. Sometimes it takes time for our families to get engaged, to be more open. But once they build trust with the home visitor, they can engage more.”—Amy Gourneau, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians (Turtle Mountain)**

Parents also emphasized the importance of relationships:

**“Anna has become like family. She has developed a strong relationship with my daughter and me. My daughter looks forward to her every visit.”—Ashley Young, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (Choctaw)**

**“Gail started with me when I was pregnant. It was just like talking to an old friend. She came across as friendly and open and was so easy to talk to. When Caleb was born, she was one of the first people we notified. She has become part of our circle of family, friends, and community.”  
—Misti Dickens, Native American Professional Parent Resources (NAPPR)**

A few grantees tied their definition of family engagement directly to participation in the program:

**“We define family engagement as continued participation of the whole family in our program.”—Shamika Dokes-Brown, Native American Health Center (NAHC)**

**“Family engagement is finding the best way to get families to be a part of the program, whether it is the weekly home visits or group connections and quarterly events. We try to get families in the mode of thinking this is a great thing.”  
—Rhea Pierre, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)**

**“Family engagement means that the advocates are seeing their clients two times a month at a minimum, and families are working on their goals. It means completing the Circle of Security parenting class either with your advocate or in a group setting and completing paperwork at intake and annually to update your status.”—Daphne Colacion, Lake County Tribal Health Consortium, Inc. (Lake County)**

Over the past 50 years, due in large part to the influence of the federal Head Start program, family engagement has expanded from simple parent participation in activities that support children’s development to a more intentional and authentic partnership between families and staff. Today, when family engagement is discussed in the early childhood space, it is about how staff and families engage with each other in the mutual service of children’s well-being.

In 2018, the federal Office of Head Start issued an updated research-informed definition of family engagement:

Family engagement is an interactive process through which program staff and families, family members, and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. It is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. Family engagement means doing with—not doing to or for—families. At the program level, family engagement involves parents’ engagement with their children and with staff as they work together toward the goals that families choose for themselves and their children. It also involves families and



staff working toward goals to improve the program. (Office of Head Start, 2018)

This definition helps us to understand that authentic family engagement:

- Needs to be owned by program leadership and manifest in all that programs do, from program policies to the hiring, training, and supervision of staff to ensure that they have the competencies to effectively build relationships with families that create trust and inspire engagement;
- May look different for each family and therefore needs to build on where families are and ensure that family voices are guiding the decisions at the individual and program levels; and
- Is ongoing from the beginning to the end of service.

The importance of family in children’s early development has always been central for AIAN communities. “In traditional communities, the care and education of the young is a responsibility shared not just by parents, but by the extended family and the entire community. In these settings, no child is ever lost or alone” (Boyer, 1992). Tribes cherish their children. Many have ceremonies to celebrate the birth of a child. Cradleboards, baskets, or hoods are sometimes used to keep the baby close to the mother for practical reasons as well as for bonding. Grandparents and other elders play important roles in teaching and raising children.



For Tribal communities, therefore, engagement reaches an even deeper dimension that is grounded in culture. It is about standing with someone, building solidarity, and generosity. The “North Star” of family engagement is where power is shared among families and staff as they work together to co-create goals that will result in strong outcomes. The stronger the engagement, the more likely the family will participate fully in the program and reach desired outcomes.

**“Family engagement is different for every family. We really hope that families feel connected to the program and to the organization. We are a cultural center and for some, this has been their home for a few generations. We work to cultivate a welcoming atmosphere for all families. We do this through group connections and other community events that we encourage the families to attend. Our entire team makes a huge effort to welcome all of our families by name so they feel embraced, expanding their relationship from one-on-one with their home visitor to the Ina Maka team and our organization. This helps them to feel welcomed and connected to the program.”—Katie Hess, United Indians of All Tribes Foundation (UIATF)**



## Approaches to Engagement

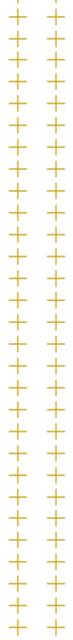


All of the evidence-based home visiting models recognize and address family engagement as an important part of their program. As such, Tribal MIECHV grantees have been implementing innovative approaches to boost family engagement. Recognizing that engagement is dependent on strong relationships and that relationships are bi-directional, grantees are making investments to ensure that both home visiting staff and families show up for one another and are ready to fully engage to make the most of the home visiting opportunity.

**“The earlier we get them—ideally prenatally—the more value they see in the program, and the more likely they are to engage.”—Jody Coffman, Taos Pueblo**

### SUPPORTING STAFF CAPACITY

Grantees are focusing on hiring the right people as home visitors, offering ongoing professional development and on-the-job training, providing reflective supervision and case conferences, and attending to the needs of their staff.



**“When they are known in the community, it allows them to have a better opportunity to establish rapport with the family. Families know the home visitor, they know they are trustworthy, they know they care, and that they will honor confidentiality. It also helps if they live close by as they have less distance to travel, which can be a safer option for the program staff,”—Judy McDaniel, Evaluator, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**

**Hiring the right people as home visitors.** Grantees carefully consider the competencies that home visitors need to be most effective in working with families. They seek staff who have an open mind and heart, model respect, are nonjudgmental, are eager to learn, and know how to build rapport with families. They find that staff who have backgrounds in early childhood are a natural fit for the role of home visitor. Some also find that hiring from within the community is valued, so that staff have a firsthand understanding of the history, service area, customs, and cultures of those served. Others place less emphasis on whether the home visitor is from the community and instead focus on hiring home visitors who are able to build relationships and make connections for the family.

**Offering ongoing professional development and on-the-job training.** Grantees report that professional development and on-the-job training are important for building the capacity of staff who work with families. Several grantees are offering their home visitors training on Motivational Interviewing,<sup>1</sup> a method that focuses on problem solving and goal setting and encouraging use of this technique within home visits. One grantee trained all staff on the curriculum Promoting First Relationships.<sup>2</sup> Another grantee offers Mental Health First Aid<sup>3</sup> training, which teaches how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders.

Rebecca Riley of NAPPR believes that an effective way for home visitors to learn is by receiving immediate feedback on the job. The program manager often joins staff during a home visit to observe the interaction and offer feedback afterward: “We find that immediate reflection on what was observed is even more effective than doing a webinar or training.” NAPPR uses the Home Visiting Rating Scales-Adapted and Extended (HOVRS A+) measure quarterly; it is formally administered once annually for their Tribal MIECHV performance measure and informally administered three other times to provide regular feedback to the home visitors.

**Providing reflective supervision and case conferences.** Grantees provide supervision and support to their home visitors in multiple ways. In addition to general administrative supervision, all offer reflective supervision. Reflective supervision is a regular, collaborative practice that focuses on the supervisory relationship as a parallel process and offers a reflective space for home visitors to examine how their own thoughts, feelings, and values are affecting their work with families. “Reflective supervision is key to make sure we are our best selves and are as sharp as pencils in delivering quality services,” said Shamika Dokes-Brown of NAHC. Several grantees said that reflective supervision is critically important, as it models for the home visitor how to engage families in a reflective process.

According to Rhea Pierre, “CSKT provides reflective supervision two times a month. We have a strong partnership with Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children’s Health), and they provide additional reflective practice sessions. We also have a collaboration workshop once a month. So, we have many things going on in any given month that encourage staff to reflect on what they are doing. They are encouraged to look at whether there might be an area that they can change and what that change might look like.”

1 For additional information on Motivational Interviewing: <https://www.integration.samhsa.gov/clinical-practice/motivational-interviewing>.  
2 For additional information on Promoting First Relationships: <http://pfrprogram.org/>.  
3 For additional information on Mental Health First Aid: <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>.

In addition to these various forms of supervision, some grantees also organize case conferences so that home visitors are able to talk as a group about challenges they might be having with a particular family and receive feedback from their peers. Sometimes a fellow home visitor might have unique insights about the family that can be helpful, or they may have helped another family address a similar challenge. It was suggested that these case conferences provide an important support system to the home visitor, especially when they are confronting a difficult situation and can benefit from gathering wisdom from their peers.

**Attending to the needs of home visitors.** In addition to hiring the right people and offering a range of professional development and supervision opportunities, Tribal MIECHV grantees also need to be mindful of the individual needs of their home visitors. Working day in and out with the highest risk families can cause secondary trauma. “Our families notice when their home visitor is really present and engaged,” said Katherine Chavez of Taos Pueblo. When grantees are serious about caring for their home visitors, they take into consideration working conditions, such as time for lunch and breaks, to help the home visitors be more energized when they are working with families. They also consider how they can support the home visitor with safe modes of transportation and may offer agency vehicles. Grantees also provide technology, such as cell phones and laptops, so that the home visitor has a way to stay in contact with the office and so work can be completed while in the field. Finally, grantees consider professional growth for staff, ensuring that all staff have opportunities to learn, grow, and advance in their careers, avoiding the complacency that often comes with job stagnation.

Riverside San Bernardino County Indian Health, Inc., (Riverside) engages a psychologist from the local health clinic to talk with the home visiting team about managing aging families in crisis and how to approach a warm handoff when the needs of the family exceed what the home visitor can offer. According to Jaclyn Gray: “We find that when families are in crisis, they often do not want to engage, and they say it is not a good time for the home visit. But our focus groups remind us that families really appreciate the support of the home visitor, especially in times of significant challenge. So, we are working to arm the home visitors with tools like Motivational Interviewing so that they know how to engage the family and find ways to nudge that door open.”

## ENSURING FAMILY READINESS AND ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

It is important to recognize that some families may not be ready to fully engage in a home visiting program. Their readiness can depend on multiple factors:

- **Time.** Families may be receiving services from other agencies and are simply overbooked. They may have required visits with child welfare, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and health or mental health providers that take priority. Some families are busy with the activities and schedules of their older children and find it difficult to commit to a home visit. One grantee reported that it is common for families to learn their work schedule only a week in advance, so scheduling appointments with their home visitor is challenging.

**“When voluntary home visiting is added on top of other visits and programs, families might opt to make home visiting a lower priority, since it is not required. We try to find the magic ingredient that will make families want to participate in a voluntary program. For families that have been engaged for three or more years, we know that we’re doing something right.”**

**—Rebecca Riley, NAPPR**



- **Communication.** Grantees report that consistent communication with families is a challenge and can interfere with their ability to engage the family. Many families have month-to-month phone plans, so there are periods when they have no phone service, or they change phones and numbers frequently. Grantees find that texting or communicating via social media works for some families but is also dependent upon the families' access to the Internet and phone service, which may be intermittent so not foolproof.
- **Stigma and skepticism.** Some families worry that the home visiting program is connected with child welfare. Others don't understand why the home visitor wants to come into the home. "Too often, families connect us with social workers coming in and removing children. It takes time for them to understand that is not what we do. We go in and offer support to strengthen and build upon what is already there," said Dokes-Brown of NAHC. These families need regular reinforcement that the home visitor is there to support the family and to meet them where they are physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- **Transportation.** Grantees highlight transportation as a barrier to engagement. For families living in urban areas, traffic and frequent gridlock can mean that it is difficult to keep appointments. In rural areas, distances between households and accessibility due to weather and road conditions may affect regularly scheduled visits. There may also be inadequate and unreliable public transportation in both urban and rural areas.
- **High-risk situations.** Families who may be struggling with depression or substance use, who may be experiencing intimate partner violence, or who are grappling with housing instability may not be able to fully participate in the home visiting intervention.

Because of these challenges, programs need to take time during intake or as part of a family readiness assessment to ensure that each family they are enrolling is ready to participate fully in the home visiting program.

Once it has been determined that a family is ready to participate, there are steps that the grantee takes to help solidify the commitment.<sup>4</sup> These include:

**Finding the right fit between family and home visitor.** According to Barbara Moffitt of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, "Families need to connect with the home visitor to engage. They need to feel a sense of self-worth from the home visitor." Given this realization, grantees pay particular attention to matching the family and home visitor. They consider whether the family would work better with a home visitor who is more high-spirited or more reserved, who has experience parenting, or who is not yet a parent, among other characteristics. They also consider how closely connected the family is to their culture and whether it is important to have a home visitor who shares that cultural orientation and experience.

**Defining expectations from the start.** Grantees say that it is important to make clear from the start what the family expects from the home visiting program and what the program can commit to offering. "Because Strong Families does what we say we will do—we show up, we deliver lessons, we review lessons, we help connect families to services—it makes it easier for participants to engage and stay engaged. They know we are there for the community . . . that we are reliable and consistent and here for you," said Dokes-Brown of NAHC.

Home visiting family advocates at Lake County thought it might be helpful to families if they developed a simple expectations sheet that could summarize the information shared during the hour-long intake interview. They undertook a continuous quality improvement (CQI) project to test this approach and learned that having a clear, concise program expectations sheet was a valuable tool

<sup>4</sup> Readers are reminded to review the Tribal MIECHV Issue Brief "Empowering Families Through Tribal Home Visiting" (2015) for a more complete report on strategies for readying families. The 2015 brief talks about what home visitors, supervisors, and program leadership can do to keep home visiting focused on the evidence-based curriculum while also empowering families to address their needs.



in conveying appropriate participant expectations. Now, advocates use the one-page expectations sheet on the first visit, and they bring it back every six months as a discussion topic and reminder.<sup>5</sup>

**Showing up no matter what.** Several grantees shared their strategies for making sure that families learn that the home visitor is there to support them and is not going to give up trying to connect. Some send text messages before a visit as a reminder and follow up with a text if the family misses an appointment. Others leave notes at the house or send a “miss you” letter if a family has not had a visit in 60 days. “If the home visitor keeps coming back, the family will eventually engage,” said Moffitt of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

**Meeting families where they are, both emotionally and physically.** Simply put, Dokes-Brown of NAHC stated, “Nothing works until we have full buy-in. How do we get that? By being consistent and meeting them where they are.” At the beginning, sometimes families need more social support visits than curriculum-focused visits. Home visitors continuously consider how to find this balance.

Daphne Colacion of Lake County noted, “Sometimes the biggest barrier is that the family does not want the home visitor in the home. So we find ways to work around that. At intake, we let them know that the visit can take place wherever they feel comfortable—the park, a local McDonald’s, the program office.” Other grantees mentioned coordinating visits at the TANF office when the family is attending an appointment there. CSKT finds it challenging to meet families who are transitioning out of various stages of homelessness. In addition to offering to meet in alternative locations, the program has a room set aside in the office where home visitors can meet with families.

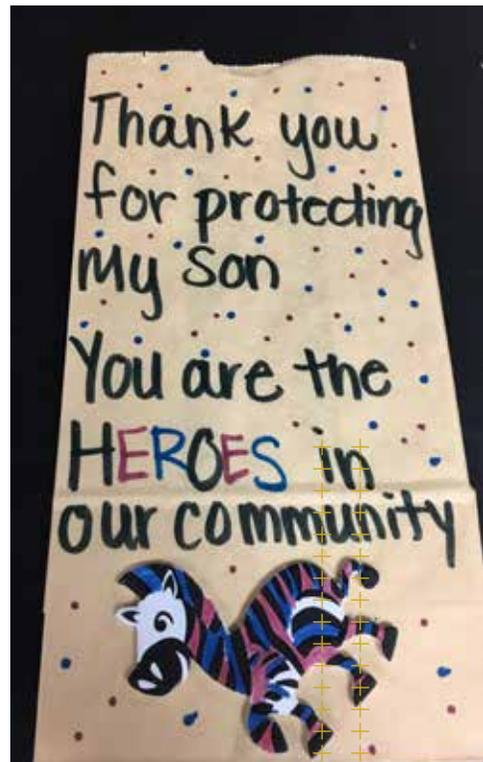
**“We had a family that participated until the child went to kindergarten. The family had been living in a shelter for more than two years. The home visitor found that the mom wanted support, but it was difficult to develop a relationship with her, likely because she didn’t have many trusted relationships in her life. They made progress but the interactions were still challenging. From this, we learned that it is important to give space and think about individual families and their starting points and find ways to grow together. There is no right or wrong way to engage families; it needs to be tailored to their experience and ability to participate.” —Katie Hess, UIATF**

**Asking for feedback and using it.** Families are more likely to engage when they feel they are being heard and their ideas are being honored. Grantees use several methods for gathering family feedback. For example, Turtle Mountain disseminates parent satisfaction surveys because they feel that families will be more honest about their thoughts on a form than they would be in person or on a call. Although some surveys use pen and paper, a few grantees are moving toward surveys that can be completed quickly on smartphones. Focus groups provide another vehicle for feedback.

In addition to electronic surveys and focus groups, NAPPR gathers feedback through a parent advisory group (PAG). Riley facilitates the PAG, which meets four times a year and is open to 15 clients. Meetings include updates and feedback on the last meeting, and about half of the time is set aside for brainstorming. “The brainstorming portion is an ‘anything goes’ discussion. This gives parents space for expressing their voice. We find that families have a sense of ownership if they feel they have a say in how the services will be delivered. The program is putting the gas in the vehicle but facilitated program groups like the PAG are telling us where we need to go,” said Riley.

Supporting connections to peers and community. Grantees understand that families are more motivated to participate in the home visiting program when the offerings are meaningful to them. Given this, grantees are continuously thinking about the array of programming that they can offer that will interest families and give them critical information and experiences that can enrich their

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A for the program expectations sheet.



Photos: Lake County Tribal Health Consortium, Inc., Taos Pueblo, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians

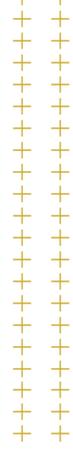
parenting. Although the core of the home visiting intervention is one-on-one support to families, most home visiting evidence-based models include family events or group socialization experiences that support the formation of peer connections. Parents who have positive connections to peers and community are more able to meet their basic needs, achieve their goals, and successfully raise their children. (Office of Head Start, 2013). Recognizing this, Tribal MIECHV grantees have designed many opportunities for peer and community connection. For example:

- Lake County organizes three family dinners and a summer picnic each year. Usually, a cultural teacher is on hand to present something from her life, and she asks families to share from their culture as well. The staff reports that parents enjoy the time to socialize without drugs or alcohol present. About half of the families attend, and those who do complete surveys afterward to make suggestions for improvement.
- Taos Pueblo partners with a nutritionist who offers a quarterly nutrition class for families. Classes have focused on prenatal nutrition, teething biscuits, and nutritious crockpot meals. A healthy meal is always provided as part of these classes.
- A recent family night at Turtle Mountain focused on emergency responders. Families wanted their children to feel safe with and trusting of police officers and firefighters. Many families attended and children enjoyed sitting in the emergency vehicles and trying on firefighter hats. Following the event, families and their children gathered to create thank-you cards for the emergency responders. It was then decided that the program would have an event in the community to honor the emergency responders who work to save lives every day in their community. More than 350 people came out for the event, and the Tribal Council provided a meal. "The kiddos presented the thank-you cards and posters. They now see the emergency responders as their heroes," said Amy Gourneau.

## RESPONDING TO BASIC NEEDS OF FAMILIES

Congress intended the Tribal MIECHV program to serve families with highest risk. Recognizing that deep poverty often interferes with the ability to be present and fully engaged, grantees have developed innovative ways to respond to the basic needs of families that are aligned with the value base of the programs.





- **Welcome offering.** Some grantees provide special offerings to welcome the birth of a child and show the family that they care. This may be a basket filled with early necessities, a diaper bag with layette items, or a diaper cake.
- **Books.** A few grantees leave behind books at every home visit, and others provide books less frequently. Most often, the books are tied in some way to the curriculum and are developmentally appropriate. The hope is that the books can help with parent–child bonding, promote early literacy, and build a family library.
- **Diapers.** Many families struggle, particularly at the end of the month, to have enough diapers for their children. Some home visitors leave a few diapers behind after each visit, others leave a box at the end of a month when the family has participated in at least two visits, and still others leave diapers less frequently.
- **Themed baskets.** When a family is consistently engaged in the home visiting program for three months, the Riverside grantee presents a basket for the entire family. Once, the grantee created a “movie basket” that included a code for a Redbox rental, popcorn, and other treats. Another time, families received a bucket filled with sand and water toys, chalk, bubbles, and sunscreen. Contents of the baskets are determined based on family surveys and feedback.
- **Family store.** Grantees use different approaches for the concept of a “store” where participants can access necessities. Families generally receive points for participating in home visits and group meetings that they exchange for items at the store. Sometimes, the store is a physical place where families can go and pick out items they need; other times, it is a virtual store, and the home visitor talks with the family about needs and brings items from the “store” to the next visit. Items can include diapers, wipes, learning toys, or cultural items.
- **Transportation support for group events.** Several programs offer gas vouchers to families to help offset the cost of their traveling to group activities. When NAPPR families participate in a formal meeting (e.g., a focus group or a PAG), they receive a meal, a bus pass or gas voucher, a Target card, and a \$10 card if they needed to hire a babysitter to participate. CSKT partners with a local transportation company to provide free rides to group events as often as possible.

**“Each visit, Anna brings a book for my daughter. Hadleigh looks forward to the book. My fiancé, Hadleigh, and I get together at night to read them or do a learning activity that Anna has shared with us.”—Ashley Young, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**



Incentives are one tool used in a broad array of culturally and contextually appropriate supports for families, often tied to cultural customs. Incentives are not a reward system but rather a way of demonstrating respect, building relationship, honoring generosity, and helping families overcome barriers to their participation. When used effectively, they can be a helpful tool for engaging families and meeting their needs. It is in this spirit that most Tribal MIECHV programs have woven incentives into their programs.



- **Flexible funding at staff discretion.** Lake County has a stipend of \$50 per year for each family in the program. The family advocate decides when and how the funds are used to support the family. For example, a family might need a safety gate, or a mom might be applying for a driver's license and need the fee to be covered, or a copy of a birth certificate might need to be purchased. The advocate might also choose to use the funds to celebrate with a client when a goal has been met, such as going out to lunch or offering a small incentive.
- **Emergency relief.** Some families find themselves in situations where they need emergency relief. They may be facing eviction or disconnection of their electricity. Grantees make every effort to connect the family to programs in the community, like the Salvation Army, that can provide emergency aid. Some also have a partnership with National Relief Truck/Partnership for Native Americans. At times, the grantee provides support directly. According to Katie Hess, "UIATF supports families when they have emergency needs. It's very small scale. Maybe once every two months we may have a family without money for diapers or food. What we offer doesn't solve their problems, it barely gets them through, but it is part of building relationship and making sure the family knows that we are there for them." Hess continues, "When we first started the program, we were very hesitant to offer emergency assistance. We felt that lots of families would have challenges that needed support. But after a few years, we realized how meaningful these small gestures of support are to families."
- **Family field trips.** Several grantees provide family field trips. For families actively enrolled for six months, the Riverside grantee organized a special field trip to an aquarium in Long Beach. Those who participated appreciated the trip and especially the opportunity to share time with other families and build peer relationships.
- **Other small items, including program-branded items.** "We have some small items available—mugs with native design or notebooks—that I can bring to families when I join a visit. It is important culturally for us to honor families to show that we are grateful for their presence, time, and energy. We also like to celebrate accomplishments with families, a GED graduation or a graduation from the home visiting program. We might make a photo album for the family or a family shield that includes a photo of the child," said Hess of UIATF.

Although all of these incentives—from diapers to gas vouchers and emergency relief—are intended to influence participation, the ultimate goals are to respond to family needs and honor cultural customs.

Photo: SPIPA



When asked about the role of incentives in their program, grantees responded:

**"We find that our families may be excited about incentives at the beginning of their enrollment, but after they are already engaged, the incentives are not as important to them anymore. That's because they come to recognize the true value of the services that they are getting."—Jaclyn Gray, Riverside**

**"Many of our families didn't complete high school, so this reminds them that if you work for something and stick with it, you will be rewarded in the end."—Amy Gourneau, Turtle Mountain**

**"Incentives are an added bonus. Our families are not in the program for the incentives, but rather the services we are providing."—Shamika Dokes-Brown, NAHC**



**"Incentives may be something that brings a family in, but it's really the work they do with their advocate and when they see themselves accomplishing goals or developing better relationships with their children, that keeps them coming back. Seeing their own growth is the key."—Daphne Colacion, Lake County**

**"We have found that if families receive something (e.g., a breast pump, diapers, a gas card) just for participating, it is more effective than if we say they can only get that item after a certain number of visits. When programs put a lot of rules and qualifiers around an incentive, families lose interest. Incentives are not meant to be transactional, but instead they are woven into the fabric of the program as a way of trying to help meet the basic needs of the family. We try to provide things with respect and a sense of trust rather than scrutinizing why families may need certain things."—Rebecca Riley, NAPPR**

**"We used to offer phone cards on a monthly basis. That became prohibitively expensive for the program, so we changed that. Families that were accustomed to the phone card were initially flustered, but we provided them a lot of notice in advance of the change. Others who have joined the program since the card was discontinued have no idea about the past cards and are so excited for the resource materials and education component provided by the parent educator."—Rhea Pierre, CSKT**



## TAOS PUEBLO HOME VISITING EVALUATION:

### Findings from a Random-Controlled Evaluation of Two Incentive Plans

The Taos Pueblo Tribal MIECHV grantee engaged in an evaluation to determine whether the timing of incentives influenced family retention in the program.

Families were told that they would be eligible for \$200 in vouchers to the Super Save grocery store in Taos, NM. All would receive a \$50 voucher at their first visit, and those randomly assigned to Plan A would receive the remaining vouchers spread out over the first year, and those assigned to Plan B would receive their incentives at the end of the year.

The program tested two hypotheses:

- Do families that receive incentives spread out over the first year (Plan A) receive a higher total number of home visits (and higher percentage of recommended visits) than families that receive a larger incentive at the end of the first year (Plan B)?
- Are families that receive a large incentive at the end of the first year (Plan B) more likely to still be active in the program at the end of the year than families that receive incentives spread out over the first year (Plan A)?

The study found that there was no difference between the two groups at the end of the year; however at the six-month mark, participation was higher among the families that were in Plan A. This led the program to conclude that, although overall retention is not dependent on the timing of the incentives, it is advantageous to spread out incentives during the year as it increases the number of visits early on for these families.

*Taos Pueblo Tribal MIECHV Final Report to the Secretary (2016).*

## Children, Families, and Programs Benefit From Strong Engagement

Every day, Tribal MIECHV grantees are able to experience the benefit of strong family engagement. They see children who are thriving. They see parents who are developing confidence in their parenting, finding their voice, and speaking up to set their own goals as well as influence the direction of the program. They see home visitors who are working in a more collaborative way with families, sharing power, and recognizing the value of their work.

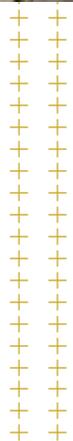
Sometimes stories are best for communicating this.

In the following two stories, parents talk about valuing their relationship with the home visitor. In addition, one highlights the benefits to her daughter, and the other focuses on how the home visitor has been able to effectively connect with both parents.



**“When I had to go back to work, I didn’t want Gail to stop coming. We wanted Caleb to be able to continue in the program. So I told my husband that he had to do the visits. At first he didn’t know if he wanted to because he wasn’t comfortable with the idea and had not participated in visits while he was working. But now he is there for most of the visits and he too has a great relationship with Gail. I think Gail’s background as a Native person and growing up on a reservation connects them. She does Circle of Security with us and helps us think about our own goals. She is friendly, helpful, and affirmative. I’m glad we have her as our home visitor.”—Misti Dickens, NAPPR**

**“Our home visitor has become like family to us. She plays an important role in my daughter’s life. She treats Hadleigh like her own. Hadleigh is just over two-and-a-half years old and already knows what day of the week Anna is coming. She will wake up with a smile and tell me that today is her day to see Anna. I know she is getting so much from the visits. And I am too. Anna helps me see things from a different point of view.”—Ashley Young, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma**



Program leaders also shared stories that emphasize the importance of relationships, meeting families where they are, and walking alongside them. These efforts by the home visitor help parents understand how to engage their children, how to set their own goals, and how to persevere for the benefit of their family.

**“We had a mom enrolled in our program who thought she should let her baby be independent and did not see the value of parent–child interaction. After all, that was how she was raised and her only point of reference. Over the period of a year with regular home visits, things began to turn around as the relationship between the baby and mom developed. The mom began engaging more with her older children too. The secret sauce seemed to be the relationship between the home visitor and the mom, and the resources of the home visiting curriculum. The mom was able to see ways that she could engage with her children, which was different from what she experienced as a child.”—Amy Gourneau, Turtle Mountain**

“We had a mom in our program that was using meth. She had a newborn and two older children. It was very difficult to engage her, but the family advocate did not give up and kept going back to try to connect. The advocate would bring toys to play with the older children and would hold the baby. As the children took a liking to the advocate, the door started to open. Then the mom lost custody of her oldest daughter, and at that point, the mom fully engaged in the program. She would meet with the advocate four to six times a month. She was focused on personal goals and stopped using. She got pregnant twice while in the program and for the first time she gave birth to children who were not born exposed prenatally.”—Daphne Colacion, Lake County

“We had a family that had been in and out of child protective services and was on the verge of losing their child. The family agreed to voluntary home visits even when the child was temporarily living with the aunt. One of the parent educators was able to meet with the parents on a weekly basis to give them information and support them in their parenting. In time, the parents were in a place where they could have their daughter back. The parent educator goes weekly and has built a strong relationship with the family in part because she was able to support them, answer questions, and be someone on their side during the time they were trying to regain custody of their daughter.”—Rhea Pierre, CSKT

## Closing



Tribal MIECHV grantees have come to understand that strong staff and family relationships are the heart of home visiting programs. These relationships contribute to an environment that supports authentic family engagement, and authentic engagement is predictive of a host of positive outcomes for children and families.

Grantees have been inventive, thoughtful, and intentional in creating approaches to family engagement that consider the needs of families and ensure that both staff and families show up to work together with respect and a goal-oriented focus that holds children’s well-being as the ultimate marker of success. In this, they have been guided by an emerging understanding of what constitutes meaningful family engagement and have buttressed that with cultural and community practices. Grantees are enhancing staff capacity for effective family engagement through providing training and reflective supervision, ensuring that staff have the core knowledge and skills to effectively engage, and attending to staff needs for safety and well-being. They are considering family fit and readiness, and individualizing within the parameters of the home visiting program so that services meet families where they are.

Over the years, grantees have made adjustments in practices to find ways that most effectively incorporate incentives that align with cultural practices and that meet the basic needs of families. Throughout these years, grantees have been guided by a commitment to strengths-based programming that honors the circumstances of families and provides opportunity for them to realize their goals.

As evidence of this commitment and the ensuing results, the descriptions contained in this brief have highlighted many program examples and numerous quotes from those personally affected while emphasizing the ongoing need for flexibility, creativity, and the use of trial and error to learn what does and does not work within programs and with families. With these values as a guide, programs and staff continue to expand and improve their family engagement efforts.



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## Appendix A

### GOUK-GUMU XOLPELEMA TRIBAL HOME VISITING PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS FOR PARTICIPANT

To get the most out of the Tribal Home Visiting program, please consider the following:

- Home Visiting is for your children just as much as it is for you.
- Meet with your Family Advocate regularly and at least twice a month.
- Identify goals that will help you and your family and actively work on these goals.
- Complete Circle of Security Parenting Class with your Family Advocate or with the Circle of Security Parenting Group at Legacy.

- Participate in assessments of child development (Ages and Stages Questionnaire [ASQ], ASQ: Social-Emotional [ASQ-SE]) and parent–child interaction (Parenting Interactions With Children: Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes [PICCOLO]) with your advocate to support the growth and development of your child.
- Participate in completing paperwork with your advocate to help track your progress.
- Incentive cards are limited and given to support goal achievement and for completing some assessments and paperwork.
- Transportation by your Family Advocate is limited and is provided to assist in completing goals.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_

THV Program Expectations

Rev. 6.18

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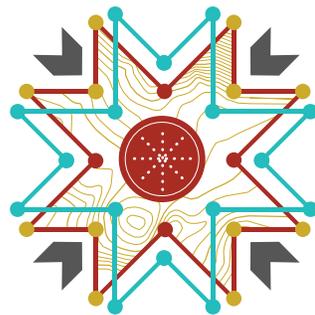
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# TRIBAL HOME VISITING

ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

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