

# Tribal Early Learning Initiative: Collaborative Success



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## Executive Summary

The Tribal Early Learning Initiative (TELI), which was launched by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in fall 2012, has offered a unique and important opportunity to four tribal communities to bring together their Tribal Home Visiting (Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting), American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start/Early Head Start, and Tribal Child Care (Child Care and Development Fund) programs to support high-quality, coordinated early childhood development services for Native children and families. ACF has partnered with tribes to support activities aimed at developing a seamless system of support for early childhood services in their communities.

The four TELI grantees, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes in Montana, Pueblo of San Felipe in New Mexico, and White Earth Nation in Minnesota, each developed projects designed to build a strong foundation for continued and expanded collaboration across partners. These four projects now serve as a model for tribal early childhood programs to work in a cohesive and aligned way to support young children and their families and break down program silos.

This document describes each TELI project, including the activities, results, and perspectives of the grantee partners. In addition, common themes that emerged from the TELI projects across grantees are shared. All grantees emphasized the significantly improved relationships across the programs partners, increased understanding of each other's programs, and a new way of working together that has now become the norm for these programs.

In general, the TELI grantees describe similar processes and stages of collaborative activities, which began with relationship building and increased understanding of each other's work. From there, grantees moved into leveraging activities by jointly providing training and professional development activities, and by jointly creating community resource guides and co-hosting communitywide events. Deeper collaboration was also realized in the form of coordinated assessments and, in one case, development of a shared database system.

For each community, the TELI has been successful in achieving initial goals. Each grantee has improved coordination across partners, created a solid foundation for expanding early childhood in its community, improved quality services to families with young children, and made significant progress breaking down barriers to collaboration and working toward a unified vision for all children and families it serves.



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## Overview

The Tribal Early Learning Initiative (TELI) is a partnership between the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and four American Indian tribes that have Head Start/Early Head Start, Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), and Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting grants.

Head Start/Early Head Start is a federally funded program that promotes the school readiness of young children from low-income families. It supports the comprehensive development of children birth through age 5 in centers, family child care provider homes, and family homes. Services address early learning, health, and family well-being. There are 150 American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start/Early Head Start grantees, including tribes, consortia of tribes, and tribal organizations.

The CCDF funds state, tribal, and local efforts to provide child care services for low-income families who work, train for work, attend school, or whose children receive or need to receive protective services. There are 260 Tribal CCDF grantees, including tribes, consortia of tribes, and tribal organizations.

The Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program (hereafter referred to as “Tribal Home Visiting”) provides grants to tribal entities to develop, implement, and evaluate home visiting programs in AIAN communities. The program is funded by a 3% set-aside from the larger federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. Tribal Home Visiting grants have been awarded to 25 tribes, consortia of tribes, tribal organizations, and urban Indian organizations.

In tribal communities, these three programs often work independently to meet the needs of young children and their families, yet there are areas where services overlap. This has the potential to create both gaps in and duplication of services for families without intentional coordination and collaboration. The TELI partnerships are focused on developing and expanding coordination and collaboration across these early childhood programs in tribal communities.

The purposes of the TELI are to:

- Support tribes to coordinate tribal early learning and development programs.
- Create and support seamless, high-quality early childhood systems.
- Raise the quality of services to children and families across the prenatal-to-age-5 continuum.
- Identify and break down barriers to collaboration and systems improvement.

The TELI began in the fall of 2012 with four tribal communities: Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) in Montana, the Pueblo of San Felipe in New Mexico, and the White Earth Nation in Minnesota. ACF provided small amounts of incentive funding (between \$65,000 and \$85,000 each over 3 years) to tribes to address and meet goals around cross-program collaboration and early childhood systems development. In addition to incentive funds, ACF provided focused technical assistance (TA), which included webinars, regular calls, an onsite visit, and an in-person meeting, to support these programs. Grantees identified their own local priorities and developed individualized, tribal-specific work plans, activities, and goals with ACF support and guidance. The current grants will end September 29, 2015.



## Context

The TELI was envisioned with the understanding that all young AIAN children and their families need access to high-quality services, early care and education, health and mental health, and parenting supports, and that programs and services addressing these areas are only as strong as the infrastructure that supports them. To be effective and efficient, programs must be organized within cohesive systems that coordinate and align a broad array of services.

Tribal early childhood development programs that serve young children and their families have historically been developed in “patchwork” fashion in response to specific needs. They frequently have separate funding sources, standards, regulations, and governance structures. Over time, a maze of discrete programs can develop, often with conflicting policies, inconsistent quality and accountability, and uneven investment. In a well-aligned system, programs are seamlessly integrated. The TELI is aimed at achieving this program cohesion, supporting tribal communities in making progress toward a comprehensive early childhood system.

Creating a shared systemic vision for supporting our youngest children and their families requires focus and commitment. Steps include establishing collaborative planning and decision making structures, action planning for coordination across services, and continued collaborative efforts to promote linkages and align activities. The TELI projects were structured to achieve these steps.



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## TELI Process

The TELI emerged as a result of onsite visits to tribal communities where ACF leadership witnessed a quality gap between federally funded Head Start/Early Head Start and Tribal CCDF programs on reservations. As a result, staff from the Office of Head Start, Office of Child Care, and Tribal Home Visiting program developed a strategy for supporting tribes to improve quality across all early childhood programs.

In August 2012, ACF sent an invitation to a group of tribal leaders soliciting their interest in participating in the TELI. The invited tribes were identified as eligible because they were currently receiving grants under all three tribal early childhood development programs (Head Start, CCDF, and Tribal Home Visiting). A small amount of funds was made available to participating tribes to help achieve TELI objectives. TA and support was provided through ACF's network of TA providers and Federal Program Specialists across the three tribal early childhood development programs.

Four of the eligible tribes indicated an interest in participating in the TELI, and the tribes received program expansion supplements to their Head Start/Early Head Start and Tribal Home Visiting grants, totaling \$65,000–\$85,000 each over 3 years. As part of the grants, TELI grantees were asked to submit initial deliverables, including a self-assessment of their early childhood programs and systems; a statement of support from tribal leadership; a statement of commitment from representatives of the tribes' Head Start/Early Head Start, CCDF, and Tribal Home Visiting programs; and a TELI work plan.

## Self-Assessment

The TELI self-assessment process helped participating tribes develop a clear picture of how their early childhood programs were functioning and identify the best areas for collaboration. In the self-assessment process, the four TELI grantees were asked for information about their geographic area, characteristics, and relevant demographic information. They were also asked to identify major strengths and challenges within the tribe related to supporting young children and their families, gaps in early childhood services, existing collaboration across early childhood programs, obstacles to collaboration, and goals for the TELI. The following table summarizes the highlights of the grantee self-assessments.

Table 1: TELI Grantee Self-Assessment Highlights

Grantee	Self-Assessment Highlights
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma	<p><u>Identified Strengths:</u> Highly experienced, well-qualified, and dedicated staff</p> <p><u>Identified Challenges:</u> Serving families in such a large geographic area; availability of up-to-date information about children; duplication of services; lack of funding; waiting lists; parents refusing services</p> <p><u>Identified Gaps in Service:</u> Lack of early care and education and home visiting services for children ages birth to 3 years</p> <p><u>Identified Gaps in Service:</u> Lack of early care and education and home visiting services for children ages birth to 3 years</p> <p><u>Existing Integration/Collaboration:</u> Serving on each other's advisory boards; sharing staff development; serving as referral partners for one another</p>



<p>Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma</p>	<p><u>Identified Obstacles to Collaboration:</u> Size of the Nation’s service area makes in-person meetings challenging; rapid growth of programs has occurred without assessing current services offered; lack of up-to-date information due to antiquated style of collection methods; communication challenges across so many programs; conflicting federal regulations for different programs</p>
<p>Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), Montana</p>	<p><u>Identified Strengths:</u> Communities have access to Head Start/Early Head Start program; positive attitude and willingness to look for solutions to improve early childhood systems</p> <p><u>Identified Challenges:</u> Overwhelming number of children and families on Head Start/Early Head Start waiting list; hiring and retaining qualified teachers; poverty level; education; domestic violence</p> <p><u>Identified Gaps in Service:</u> Community education on the importance of home visiting services and families accepting these services</p> <p><u>Existing Integration/Collaboration:</u> Some collaboration but lots of room to enhance</p> <p><u>Identified Obstacles to Collaboration:</u> Identifying resources that each program currently provides and figuring out how to share information and services</p>
<p>Pueblo of San Felipe, New Mexico</p>	<p><u>Identified Strengths:</u> Advice/teachings that come from leaders and elders; parenting as a shared responsibility; prayer; traditional ceremonies (dances, feasts); individuals are taught by the whole community</p> <p><u>Identified Challenges:</u> Low parental involvement across programs; appointments are missed and cancellations occur with difficulty in rescheduling; programs work independently</p> <p><u>Identified Gaps in Service:</u> Children age out of Early Intervention after the cut-off date for Head Start and there are no spaces available so they are wait-listed; lack of funding for summer programs to ease transition between school years; no shared data system; communication between programs is weak</p> <p><u>Existing Integration/Collaboration:</u> Child Care and Head Start staff are members of the Tribal Home Visiting Advisory Committee</p> <p><u>Identified Obstacles to Collaboration:</u> No leadership for program coordination, programs do not have information about all resources available within the community</p>

<p>White Earth Nation, Minnesota</p>	<p><u>Identified Strengths:</u> Support and endorsement of the early childhood programs by the White Earth Tribal Council leadership; implementation of a universal data system that is designed to meet the unique needs of the Nation; full transfer and responsibility for health and human services programs currently delivered via county systems to the White Earth Nation for all tribally enrolled members</p> <p><u>Identified Challenges:</u> Operation of programs in silos</p> <p><u>Identified Gaps in Service:</u> White Earth Early Childhood Scholarships need for more early childhood slots to refer families to, particularly for families to utilize their scholarships; need more funding for staff in general, many staff wearing multiple hats and juggling multiple projects; waiting list in many of our locations/sites; filling vacant job positions due to the lack of persons in our area or willing to relocate to the reservation that meet the minimum qualifications and education requirements</p> <p><u>Existing Integration/Collaboration:</u> The primary programs are currently involved; in addition, White Earth is working with Indian Child Welfare, Indian Health Services, WIC and White Earth Tribal Mental Health to provide increased understanding of the home visiting programs; this includes development of a universal data-sharing form and increased understanding and access to referrals for all relevant agencies</p> <p><u>Identified Obstacles to Collaboration:</u> Programs tend to operate in silos</p>
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### TELI Work Plans

Tribes consistently identified the first step of the TELI process: for each partner to get to know the other programs that also serve young children and their families in the community. A common theme at the outset of the TELI projects was that directors of each program did not know the full scope of what the other early childhood programs within the tribe offered. Once this deeper understanding was developed, programs more easily identified ways to work together.

With regard to this initial process of getting to know each of the programs, Jenae Sanchez of Pueblo of San Felipe shared:

In regards to providing quality services to our community, I'm really proud of the work TELI has done as far as making sure that we know what each of our programs are doing and what services we have to offer to address the needs of the community. Prior to TELI, programs operated in silos, not realizing that we may have been duplicating services. Now, through TELI, communication and collaboration has been improved and we can say each of our programs is really working towards one end; providing services in different ways but still coming together to make sure we are supporting each other along the way.

Most tribes developed similar areas of focus related to hosting and organizing joint professional development trainings, joint community events, and resource sharing through the creation of a

resource directory. In addition, increased collaboration impacting direct service delivery was also realized through joint visits to the family and improved referral systems. As relationships between the programs developed, the collaborative efforts and projects became more involved. Tribes went from sharing information and learning about each other to identifying overlap of services and efforts where they might be able to streamline and create efficiencies in processes. Examples include sharing client data across programs and increasing appropriate cross referrals. The following table summarizes initial work plan goals developed by TELI participants in each tribe.



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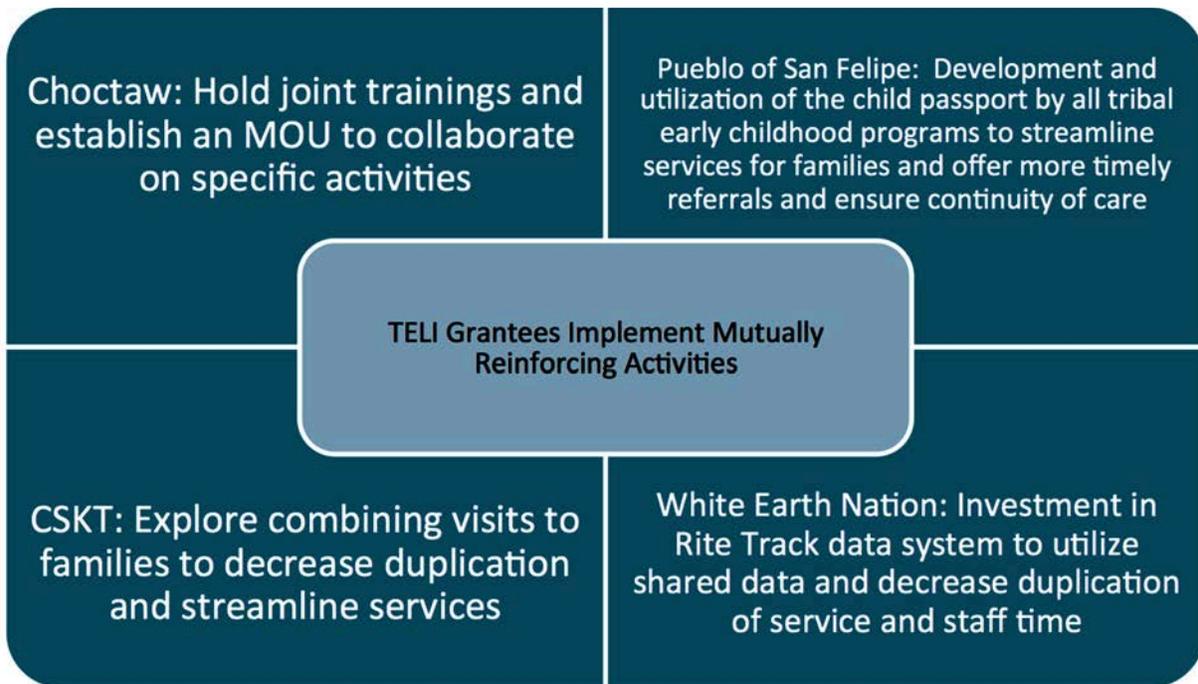
Table 2: TELI Grantee Initial Work Plan Goals

Grantee	Summary of Initial Work Plan Goals
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Care, Head Start, and Tribal Home Visiting (CC/HS/THV) Directors and participating parents will get to know each other’s programs, including curriculum and educational activities, assessment tools, policies and procedures, community assessments, training, and professional development opportunities.</li> <li>• Jointly create a community-based resource directory for parents. Resource and referral agencies included were: early childhood services, education and scholarships, health services, domestic violence and child abuse prevention, housing services, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and transportation services.</li> <li>• Conduct one shared early childhood training day for the three TELI programs each fiscal year to foster communication and collaboration between them, including appropriate topic experts, team-building activities, and cultural integration.</li> <li>• Collaborate on identifying and serving environmentally at-risk, developmentally challenged, and/or disabled young children. The programs intended to assess their current procedures and resources in this area and collaborate to serve these children and their families in a comprehensive manner.</li> <li>• Develop and implement an early childhood education campaign, including outreach to Choctaw Nation staff, tribal members, and the greater southeast Oklahoma community.</li> <li>• Develop a shared referral database for tribal families for young children. The first step in this process is to develop a shared referral form. The following barriers were also identified: time, funding, and access to certain types of technology.</li> </ul>
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), Montana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform and invite each other to existing training opportunities in the community.</li> <li>• Fund joint professional development trainings for all staff and child care providers.</li> <li>• Provide all training participants with training materials and memberships to the National Association for the Education of Young Children.</li> </ul>

<p>Pueblo of San Felipe, New Mexico</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate professional development, team building, and training across CC/HS/THV programs.</li> <li>• Work together to promote healthy nutrition and healthy wellness behaviors among tribal members to improve health outcomes for future generations.</li> <li>• Increase parent/family involvement in CC/HS/THV program initiatives and meetings.</li> <li>• Develop a community-based resource directory of all child-serving agencies in the San Felipe community servicing families from prenatal to age 10.</li> <li>• Coordinate with other agencies, such as Dental Services and the San Felipe Family Services Department, to ensure children receive dental care prior to age three and ensure staff understand the proper protocols for mandated reporting of child abuse cases.</li> <li>• TELI CC/HS/THV partners will collectively review the eligibility criteria for recruitment and selection into Head Start to broaden admission to children who may otherwise not be eligible for services.</li> <li>• Work toward alignment of CC/HS/THV program goals so that San Felipe children are provided with a comprehensive education that emphasizes San Felipe culture in addition to the core learning standards emphasized in the New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines.</li> </ul>
<p>White Earth Nation, Minnesota</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate space utilization across programs; hold joint monthly program staff meetings.</li> <li>• Review policies and procedures to see which ones might be jointly adopted.</li> <li>• Jointly support and promote community programs that benefit/serve involvement in the early childhood system (e.g., fatherhood/male involvement).</li> <li>• Review and agree upon common assessment tools to use across programs.</li> <li>• Jointly create a Universal Demographic Collection Form that is common to each partner agency and share relevant data across program partners with appropriate safeguards for parental consent, confidentiality, and protection.</li> <li>• Jointly report program data and other information to funding agencies.</li> </ul>

### Grantee Results

TELI grantees have made major strides in improving their early childhood systems and services, starting with building strong relationships across programs. The following graphic illustrates examples of these collaborative approaches that benefit all TELI partners.



TELI grantee activities were focused on accomplishing initial goals. All grantees were successful in achieving those aims and, in several cases, have realized successes beyond their initial intentions. Successes have included progress toward shared assessment and enrollment, collaborating on a range of joint activities, and allocating costs across early childhood program grants to provide more efficient and responsive services. In addition to these achievements, the TELI work has also positioned some tribes to successfully apply for early childhood system building funds through ACF's Early Head Start- Child Care Partnerships and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Project LAUNCH program.

**Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.** Due to their large land base, many of the Choctaw Nation early childhood programs were not collaborating with one another at the start of the TELI and have built awareness and relationships through the initiative. In addition, the directors of each of the programs wrote up informative briefs to publish in each other's newsletters to increase parent knowledge of each program.

The programs have now formalized their TELI partnership and celebrated the "Day of the Young Child" on April 17, 2015, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that intends to provide more opportunities for a system of care across early childhood programs, including: 1) a standard release of information form, 2) a joint application form, 3) shared professional development opportunities, and 4) a strengthened referral system.

One goal of the Choctaw TELI was to have programs work together to better serve children with special needs. The specific focus areas in the MOU accomplish this in a comprehensive way. One example is described by Choctaw staff:

**The Benefits of having joint trainings is that the entire Choctaw Nation Early Childhood System of Care is receiving the same message as to special needs and we as a team all understand the importance of this education as we are working with our Tribal Members" ~ Brandi Smallwood, Chahta InChukka Home Visitation Program**



Photo: © Cassie Russ

The agencies have also developed a resource manual and a TELI brochure outlining the services of each of the agencies.

By having a common resource manual, we are able to all locate resources within our communities that our Tribal Members are in need of. It is helpful to all of our families to understand the different type of services that are available and how to reach them if needed. This resource manual is the first step to empowerment of family potential. ~Choctaw Head Start Teacher

The “Day of the Young Child” celebration included participation from tribal leaders and also included a training opportunity for early childhood program staff on autism. The tribe has now expanded the initiative to increase awareness around autism throughout the community. Temple Grandin will be presenting at an event in Choctaw Nation in October 2015. There is also discussion around creating a shared data system to use across early childhood programs. Choctaw Nation also recently received an Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships grant.

**Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (Montana).** CSKT TELI participants have built relationships across their Head Start, Child Care, and Tribal Home Visiting programs. CSKT has also concentrated on creating joint professional development opportunities for providers, as well as holding community events focused on building parenting skills of parents with young children. Some topics of the joint trainings were the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL).

Because the programs developed better understanding of each other’s services, the quality and timeliness of referrals has also improved. Programs are more willing and interested in sharing resources with each other. Jeanne Christopher, Director of Early Childhood Services at CSKT, reflects on the improved communication:

I want to share our services and I want other programs to share theirs. Since the TELI grant, I have shared more and I have thought a lot about the silos we are in. I have developed better relationships...I want folks to refer to us and I am referring more to them.

There has been conversation about combining visits to the families to decrease duplication and streamline services. TELI partners are also considering coordination with Part B providers (e.g., therapists) from the initiation of services if the child has a known potential developmental disability. A major undertaking the TELI team is exploring is the possibility of investing in a cross-program data system that would facilitate centralized intake across programs. Various data systems are being researched and are under consideration. CSKT also recently received a Project LAUNCH grant and an Early Head Start expansion grant.

**Pueblo of San Felipe (New Mexico).** San Felipe Pueblo TELI programs have made excellent progress building relationships across their Head Start, child care, and home visiting programs. They have focused their TELI collaboration on conducting joint dental services for children, working to extend categorical eligibility for Head Start services to children receiving home visiting services, and conducting joint professional development opportunities. San Felipe Dental Services will support TELI efforts through provision of dental services to children ages birth to 10 years.

The three programs have also jointly sponsored the annual “Katishtya TELI Fall Festival” celebration of young children and families in the community for the last 3 years. There have been up to 700 people in attendance for this event. The TELI team has also begun development of “early childhood passports,” a tool that contains important health and service information for every child and family and eases data sharing across programs within the tribal service system.

We have recently purchased the child passport system...We are expecting that [by using this system] programs will become more united in efforts to streamline all of our services. The intention is for all early childhood programs to use this as an education tool for their participants and to create a universal approach to health service information. We are hoping that all San Felipe families will learn the importance of child file organization, immunizations, keeping well-child appointments and that programs will know where to appropriately route referrals when families are in need of supplemental services. We see the passports as a vehicle for programs to talk to one another and in that way improve upon the services that each program is providing. ~Jenae Sanchez, San Felipe Home Visiting Coordinator



Photo: © Linda Logan

The San Felipe TELI work has also been vital in terms of looking at the program curricula in the context of culture. All partner programs have supported each other in developing ways to bring cultural and language enhancements to their respective programs, creating a unified focus across programs. Directors of the programs shared passionately that they want children to understand that their roots are tied to San Felipe, but that they also have many opportunities. Programs want children to feel empowered to go out and explore and know that college is an option for them.

**White Earth Nation (Minnesota).** White Earth TELI partners started their project with a strong foundation of communication and cooperation across early childhood programs. The TELI provided an incentive for White Earth Child Care, Head Start, and home health programs, including Tribal Home Visiting, to build deeper collaborative working relationships after many years of working in parallel. Building on the TELI, White Earth Nation is implementing WE-CARE (White Earth Coordination, Assessment, Resources, Education), a holistic case management model that is client focused, client driven, and requires the client's input and involvement. The model requires collaboration and communication across all tribal programs working with a client and is intended to decrease duplication of services and staff time by utilizing shared data in the tribe's Rite Track data system. Funds from the TELI were instrumental in purchasing and supporting the Rite Track system, and the White Earth TELI team is taking the lead to pilot WE-CARE due to their increased coordination and collaboration through their TELI efforts. One example of how WE CARE is being used is the creation of a tab within the software to share ASQ information so families are not repeatedly completing the same information for different programs.

The WE CARE system in process is probably the most prominent and biggest outcome [of TELI]...even though it continues to be a work in progress, it's the major accomplishment of the partnering relationship and it's much bigger than the three early childhood programs. TELI served as an impetus for making WE CARE go tribally wide. While it started small, when the value of it became fully identified, it went way beyond this TELI partnership. It's now a tribal wide initiative. ~ Cyndi Anderson, Consultant to White Earth TELI

Something else that unexpectedly came out of this collaboration was the recognition that there was less overlap of families being served within the three programs than originally thought. Regardless, the partners realized that there was still some duplication of services and that this duplication may also occur with other programs. This underscored the importance of continuing to expand collaborative efforts with additional partners in order to identify where this might be happening and maximize resources.

Once TELI program directors started to fully understand each other's services and the scope of their programs, they also began to notice certain "rules" that were in place that were assumed rather than mandated by funders. There was an assumption that non-Head Start children could not ride the Head Start bus and that home visitors from different programs could not do visits together. When

these assumptions were uncovered and explored, even more possibilities for working together were discovered. As a result, there was discussion around pairing professionals for home visits, where one professional may focus more on the child and the other may focus more on the family in order to meet each program's objectives.



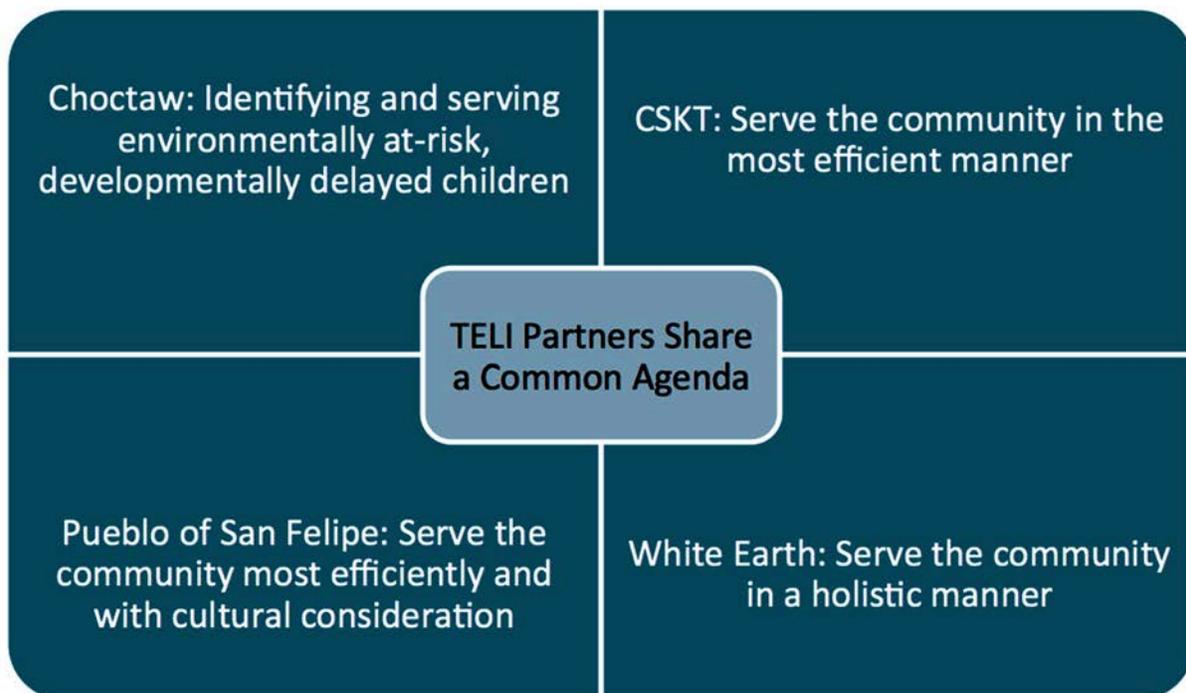
Photo: © Carrie Peake

## Common Implementation and Outcome Themes

One of the main results common across the participating tribes was a sense of deeper relationships, support, and respect across the partner agencies. By partners spending time learning about each other's programs and meeting regularly, the trusting relationships evolved and led to increasing levels of collaboration.

TELI is now part of what we do every day. Every training, speaker, community event, we think how we can do it as a TELI partnership, not just as an individual organization. ~ Jen Stevens of White Earth Nation

All the tribes seem to have gone through a similar process. First and foremost, they were interested in serving the community in the most efficient manner. The graphic below describes the common agenda each TELI partnership identified that set the foundation for achieving collaborative success.



As TELI partners came to know the specific services each program provided, they were able to assess where there were duplications or a gap in services. Each tribe had different ways of addressing these issues. Heads of each agency have organized ways for their staff to work together and/or receive joint professional development to foster a more collaborative environment. Other activities to increase efficiency included staff across programs combining visits and investigation, and purchase of data systems in an effort to share information to ensure continuity of care as well as timely referrals. As the project has continued, agency directors have reported being able to connect with each other more informally for support as well as to make joint decisions impacting children and families.

We find a little bit of respite in talking to each other. It's a safe place.  
~ Jeanne Christopher, Early Childhood Services Director at CSKT

Staff across programs now has regular opportunities to meet in large staff meetings or tribe-wide education programs related to early childhood. This has become the new way of working together.

## Lessons Learned/Grantee Recommendations



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The work of the first cohort of TELI grantees is instructive with regard to supporting early childhood systems-building work in tribal communities. The cohesive messages grantees have shared about their TELI projects are impactful and speak to the importance and value of investing in collaboration. Upon reflection of their TELI processes, grantees shared the following lessons learned.

Tribes have the capacity and the desire to build on existing collaborative work that has been happening for decades in many tribal communities. The TELI created a fresh opportunity to build trust, address misconceptions across partner programs, and foster true collaboration.

The TELI projects have demonstrated that a small amount of federal incentive funds and TA can support tribal programs to look beyond their silos and create tribe-specific plans to develop and improve early childhood systems in their communities.

Ultimately, what TELI resulted in is a change in how we do business; that working together is presumed at the onset and it's not an afterthought – when you're all the way down the road on a project or a purpose. ~ Cyndi Anderson, White Earth Nation

Strong collaboration across early childhood programs at the federal level can help tribes identify and address both real and perceived barriers to effective collaboration and systems development. A more structured set of guidance and supports throughout the project could result in even better outcomes across sites in a shorter timeframe.

More specific recommendations and observations from the tribes support that the funds were viewed as an incentive to build collaborative relationships. Without the funds and the recognition that the tribes had the potential to truly shift early childhood practices, there may not have been the motivation for programs within the tribe to get to know each other better. A strong recommendation was to get to know the specifics of what each program does before writing the work plans and goals. Placing the client in the center can help to clarify specific needs, and this vision can be used to determine when and how to collaborate.

Grantees also recommended that federal staff prioritize site visits. Site visits were viewed as a mechanism for deepening the federal support for the project as well as adding another layer of accountability toward the overarching goals. The TA was also seen as very valuable. It was beneficial to have a TA specialist participate either via phone or in person on calls at regular intervals in order to stay connected with the projects and support their progress.

### Potential for the Future

Grantees consistently reported that the TELI fundamentally changed the way the programs worked together. By spending dedicated time and energy learning about each other and intentionally finding ways to collaborate, the programs now find that their interdependency is established; working together is now just the way they approach their business. The collaboration has been woven into

the fabric of each program through established communication loops and joint activities. These infrastructure pieces are in place and serve as a foundation for continued and deepening partnership.

### Grantee Intentions for the Future

#### o Choctaw

The partners each understand the value and importance of meeting and are committed to meet on a regular basis. They are interested in looking at a data system to use across programs. Their shared professional development opportunities will continue, and the autism awareness work that started as a result of the TELI funds will continue to grow.

#### o CSKT

The relationships that were developed as a part of this project will continue to grow. The tribe is also eligible to apply for second round of TELI funding and wants to use that opportunity to further research and implement a data management tool to use across early childhood systems as a continued way to collaborate and work in partnership.

#### o San Felipe

The partners are interested in exploring establishment of school readiness goals for birth to 8 years. There is a strong, shared focus on integrating culture into the school readiness domains, and the TELI programs are looking at ways to enhance their curricula to include a strong cultural piece as well as including all the school readiness goals. Specific plans have been put in place for families transitioning from the home visiting program into the Head Start program, such as sharing ASQ screening information, providing tours to families, and giving children time to familiarize themselves with their new classroom before starting the program. There is also an interest in expanding the TELI by bringing more partners to the table, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

#### o White Earth

White Earth plans continued collaboration across TELI partners through utilization of the Rite Track software. They will continue monthly cross-sector meetings with home visitors that include an educational component. This grant has changed the way the programs operate. Due to the change in the foundation of the interaction, partners will continue collaborating with mutual understanding of and respect for each other's programs.



Photo: © Scott Tanesia

## Federal Intentions for the Future

In response to the success of the TELI pilot and the continued focus on supporting early childhood system development in tribal communities, ACF is providing a new opportunity for expansion of the TELI, with grants to be awarded starting in fiscal year 2015. Eligible entities for this opportunity include Tribal MIECHV grantees that also have a Region XI Head Start and/or Early Head Start program and a Tribal CCDF program in at least one of the communities they serve.

Through this opportunity, tribal entities are eligible to receive incentive awards of between \$40,000 and \$120,000 annually for up to 2 years, as well as focused TA support to accomplish the goals of the TELI. In addition, tribes will continue to receive TA and support through ACF's network of TA providers and Federal Program Specialists from the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care.



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The TELI Expansion will also provide grantees with TA tools and resources based on the “collective impact” model and will incorporate leadership and skill-building opportunities for the TELI leads at each site. Collective impact takes a strategic and data-driven approach to collaboration and systems development. The expansion is expected to run from October 2015 through September 2017. Similar to the pilot, the first year of the TELI Expansion will be focused on planning and the second year will be focused on implementing the TELI work plan.

**In Conclusion,** as tribal communities begin or continue to work toward early childhood system development, the example of the first group of TELI grantees is instructive and inspirational. ACF intended that the TELI grantees would take on the sometimes challenging and barrier-ridden work of cross-system collaboration. The TELI grantees have done just this as they work to break down long-standing silos. With the skillful engagement and support of tribal leaders and early childhood program leaders, grantees are making progress in developing new directions for partnership, addressing service efficiencies, and setting higher quality standards for early childhood programs. The impacts of these TELI projects will benefit AIAN communities far into the future.

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