



## Overview of Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Supportive Services

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*This practice brief is part of a series of practice briefs being developed by the Tribal HPOG evaluation team, comprised of NORC at the University of Chicago, Red Star Innovations and the National Indian Health Board (NIHB). The briefs will be used to disseminate important lessons learned and findings from the Evaluation of the Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, which is being funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The HPOG program was authorized by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to support 32 demonstration projects, including 5 Tribal Organizations and Colleges, to train Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other low-income individuals as healthcare professionals. The Tribal HPOG program aims to meet local healthcare demands by increasing the number of well-trained health professionals in underserved tribal communities. The program is designed using a career pathways approach where students advance through related trainings that build on each other to deepen students' healthcare knowledge and skills. The purpose of this practice brief is to discuss the academic and social supportive services that students in the Tribal HPOG program are receiving to support their participation, retention and advancement in their trainings. It provides an overview of Tribal HPOG and the supportive services offered as part of grantees' programs; how academic and support services meet students' academic and social needs; and promising approaches in delivering supportive services.*

National shortages in the health workforce coupled with growing demands for health care have prompted action to develop and sustain a health workforce that meets high standards for education, certification, and professional development.<sup>1</sup> To meet these critical needs, the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program provides education and training in the healthcare field to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other low-income individuals for occupations in the healthcare field that pay well and are expected to either experience labor shortages or be in high demand. Funded through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and administered by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Family Assistance, the HPOG program has made grant awards to 32 five-year demonstration projects across 23 states. Of the 32 demonstration projects, five were awarded to Tribal Organizations and Tribal Colleges—Blackfeet Community College (Browning, MT), Cankdeska Cikana Community College (Fort Totten, ND), College of Menominee Nation (Keshena, WI), Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc. (Anchorage, AK), and Turtle Mountain Community College (Belcourt, ND). The Tribal grantees' programs are distinct from those of non-Tribal grantees in that they aim to integrate health professions training programs with culturally-informed models of learning and practice, such as cooperative learning and mentoring, to nurture and educate low-income individuals from American Indian/Alaska Native populations into healthcare careers. The Tribal HPOG programs are designed to benefit underserved members of Tribal communities who are eligible for or receive TANF or have low incomes.<sup>2</sup> They specifically recruit prospective students who reside on or

### Tribal HPOG Grantees

- Blackfeet Community College
  - ▶ Location: Browning, MT (Glacier County)
  - ▶ Project: *Issksiniip Project: Meeting the Holistic Health and Education Needs of the Niitsitapi*
- Cankdeska Cikana Community College
  - ▶ Location: Fort Totten, ND (Benson County)
  - ▶ Project: *Next Steps: An Empowerment Model for Native People Entering the Health Professions*
- College of Menominee Nation
  - ▶ Location: Keshena, WI (Menominee County)
  - ▶ Project: *College of Menominee's CNA to RN Career Ladder Program*
- Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc.
  - ▶ Location: Anchorage, AK (Anchorage County)
  - ▶ Project: *Cook Inlet Tribal Council Health Professions Opportunity Program*
- Turtle Mountain Community College
  - ▶ Location: Belcourt, ND (Rolette County)
  - ▶ Project: *Project CHOICE: Choosing Health Opportunities for Indian Career Enhancement*

near Tribal reservations, with the goal of meeting local healthcare demands by increasing the number of well-trained, culturally competent health professionals in tribal communities. NORC at the University of Chicago has collaborated with Tribal partners at the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) and Red Star Innovations, LLC, to conduct a culturally responsive evaluation of the Tribal HPOG program.

## OVERVIEW OF SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Tribal HPOG training programs incorporate a career pathways approach in which students advance through trainings that build on each other to deepen knowledge and skill level. Critical to enabling participation and retention of students and advancement in career pathways is the provision of supportive services. Services designed specifically for the unique academic, social, cultural and psychological needs of American Indian/Alaska Native students have proven to be an effective retention strategy.<sup>3</sup> At each site, Tribal HPOG program staff assesses participant needs during the intake/orientation process and throughout student training. Tailored support services are then provided to facilitate participants' success in their trainings. Support services assist students in the actual training program (e.g., remedial education, purchase of supplies), and provide social support to enable the students to seek training (e.g., childcare, housing support). The Tribal HPOG programs use grant funds and leverage non-grant resources such as community partners to provide an array of supportive services to participants. Providing supportive services is a requirement of the HPOG program because supportive services have been shown to decrease barriers and potentially increase participation in the program.

All Tribal grantees offer multiple services to address the academic challenges of participants and to meet their individual and family

**Framing Is Everything.** *The Project CHOICE HPOG program at Turtle Mountain Community College encountered initial challenges when trying to connect students with the appropriate supportive services. After engaging in discussion with other Tribal HPOG programs, the Project CHOICE staff learned that instead of using the term "case managers" for the individuals who link students to academic and social supportive services, other sites use titles such as "support services coordinators" or "support service specialists." As one administrator said, "there is a different connotation between support services and case manager."*

living needs. Across the five Tribal grantees, a variety of services are provided to assist students with common educational needs, such as paying for tuition, textbooks, and other training costs, offering mentorship, tutoring, and study groups, and arranging enrollment in prerequisite courses. Similarly, social support services are offered to participants and their families to provide assistance for rent and food, securing reliable transportation, and arranging childcare.

To illustrate the ways in which supportive

services aim to meet students' academic, social and family needs, this practice brief uses data collected from the first year of evaluation activities (February–November 2012) with the Tribal HPOG programs. Information presented in this brief is drawn from site visits, which included interviews with administrative and

implementation staff, focus groups with current students, and telephone interviews with program completers and non-completers as well as a document review of grantees' proposals and progress reports.<sup>4</sup>

## MEETING STUDENT NEEDS

Tribal HPOG programs assist students by providing supportive services directed at their academic needs and individual/family needs. These support services are intended to enable participation in and completion of HPOG training. Academic support services facilitate success in the classroom, while other supportive services cover individual/family needs. Supportive services related to individual/family needs support student retention and academic success by reducing the financial burden on students (e.g., providing basic living expenses such as rent and transportation) and eliminating other barriers in order for students to sustain participation in program activities (e.g., childcare).

Each grantee has one or more coordinators in place to manage the administration of supportive services. In some instances, the coordinator position existed prior to HPOG, and in other instances, coordinators are personnel that were hired specifically to assist HPOG participants in accessing supportive services. To determine students' educational and social support needs, supportive services coordinators conduct an intake assessment with each student as he or she enrolls in the HPOG program. Based on information supplied by students during the intake assessment, program staff matches students with applicable supportive services and, if appropriate, provide referrals to supportive services offered in the community or by partner organizations. At most institutions, program staff works with students to develop educational success plans that integrate students' academic and career goals with supportive service needs. Since grant personnel also learn of students' supportive service needs throughout the academic program, these educational success plans are revisited regularly throughout students' enrollment.

### Academic Support Services

Each Tribal HPOG grantee has designed academic support services intended to help students be successful in their coursework. Across institutions, grantees offer financial assistance for tuition and fees to support enrollment in healthcare training programs in areas such as nursing, allied health, nutrition and pharmacy. In addition to supporting the cost of training, HPOG grantees aim to provide clear direction to students regarding academic standards, and hold regular meetings or check-ins with students to assess academic progress. Based on student progress and needs, grantees offer mentoring and tutoring which can help students who are transitioning to college or off the reservation for the first time. Other important components of HPOG academic supportive services are retention services that aim to minimize student attrition (i.e., academic skills development) as well as employment services such as job shadowing.

### Financial Assistance

Each Tribal HPOG program provides financial assistance to reduce the costs of tuition and fees. Financial assistance is distributed based on student need; students qualify for HPOG funds by meeting certain income criteria set by the program. Financial assistance helps to alleviate students' financial burden and minimize the need for extensive student loans. Depending on grantees' requirements, financial assistance can be in the form of a scholarship that

students can apply toward tuition or cost of attendance (such as books or internet service) or the grantee can pay tuition and fees directly to the institution at which students are completing their coursework. Across institutions, students reported that financial assistance was the most critical support provided by the Tribal HPOG programs. While many students explained that the financial support allowed them to focus better on their studies (as they were not as burdened by the need for outside employment), others stated that without the financial aid, they would not be able to pursue their education at all.

## Orientations and Meetings

The Tribal HPOG grantees hold orientations to introduce students to the HPOG program and the associated supportive services. To integrate families into students' academic careers, many sites invite family members to attend student orientation. This strategy aligns with HeavyRunner & DeCelles Family Education Model<sup>5</sup> and the importance of creating an extended family structure that welcomes and honors family involvement and support. At orientation, grantee staff communicates expectations for students' academic participation and provides information related to available support services. At some sites, students' initial intake interviews with supportive services coordinators take place during orientation. Most

### Orientation

*The College of Menominee Nation HPOG program has implemented a standardized orientation process structure – a boot camp orientation. The boot camp is a multi-day, mandatory orientation where students participate in various sessions related to the nursing program, HPOG, and relevant skills, such as test taking, APA style, and financial management. The boot camp also provides an opportunity for students to engage with classmates and program staff.*

grantees also arrange regular meetings between staff and students to facilitate ongoing communication regarding student progress and needs. Some sites also provide opportunities for student peer support. For example, at Blackfeet Community College's secondary implementation sites (Salish Kootenai College, University of Montana Missoula and Montana State Bozeman), students attend peer support meetings to interact and learn more about topics relevant to Native Americans and the healthcare field.

## Mentoring and Retention Services

Across institutions, students work with mentors to improve their time management, leadership, and communication and networking skills. Mentors focus on academic issues as well as life issues -- mentors described their roles as ranging from helping students find their academic passions to overcoming challenges in the classroom to managing transitions from college into the workplace. For students that have relocated to enroll in an HPOG program, mentors can help ease the transition by sharing advice or simply by listening. For example, Cankdeska Cikana Community College is carrying out an intensive mentorship approach that involves pairing each participant with a mentor from the Recruitment/Retention of American Indians into Nursing (RAIN) Program at the University of North Dakota. Mentors will meet with their mentees on a daily basis during the initial training and at least weekly after their initial training. In addition to mentoring, some institutions offer direct retention services which include monitoring student performance, counseling, and referral to additional supportive

services. For example, at Blackfeet Community College, a retention counselor reaches out to at-risk students who have demonstrated poor attendance or who are struggling academically. The retention counselor provides counseling to students on academic and non-academic issues such as grief, relationships or family issues.

## Tutoring and Remediation

Students can use tutoring for direct academic assistance for their courses. In many cases, program implementation staff works with students to arrange tutoring. In other cases, program instructors provide tutoring on an informal basis. Many institutions have previously established tutoring services that are supplemented using HPOG funds. Across sites, tutoring is commonly used in courses that are intensive in math, science and writing. At College of Menominee Nation, students can receive academic tutoring through a 'simulation lab' that provides students with the opportunity to apply material learned in class to real life situations in nursing. Similarly, at Turtle Mountain Community College, students have access to an allied health lab, which simulates the work environment and prepares them for their clinical rotations and future employment. Additionally, some students, especially those in nursing programs, reported forming study groups with other HPOG participants to review course materials prior to exams.

## Employment-related Services

Most sites work with students or plan to work with students to develop job readiness skills. Turtle Mountain Community College has dedicated a staff member to provide employment-related services.

### Job shadowing

*Cook Inlet Tribal Council partners with the South Central Area Health Education Center to provide job shadowing prior to students' first semester of HPOG training. Because they participate in a job shadow before classes begin, students reported that they entered their training programs with a closer grasp on what a future in their selected health profession would be like. HPOG staff also reported that the job shadowing program serves as a tool to ensure that students understand the rigors of the profession they are seeking and provides the opportunity for participants to reevaluate career objectives before they are too far into the program.*

### Mentoring

*At Blackfeet Community College secondary implementation sites, students are matched with mentors that are well-versed in students' specific course of study. In addition to academic issues, students connect with their mentors about issues related to managing the transition to college or being off the reservation for the first time. One student at a BCC secondary implementation site shared, "[My mentor is] there to support me no matter what. It made a big difference to have her there as a foundation."*

Their job placement coordinator assists students with resume development and interview preparation, and works to develop partnerships with employers in the area to help students obtain employment upon graduation. Some Tribal HPOG grantees work with partner organizations in the surrounding communities to coordinate on-the-job training opportunities for students. For example, students at Blackfeet Community College can experience riding in the ambulance and administering emergency medical services by conducting practicums with the Glacier County

Emergency Medical Services. However, integrating a job training component into supportive services delivery can be challenging because of limited opportunities and partners in the local and regional labor market.

### Individual/Family Support Services

Many of the supportive services offered through the Tribal HPOG programs address the basic living needs of participants and their families. The Tribal grantees provide services for housing, transportation, food, and childcare, as well as other miscellaneous living demands.

### Housing

The individuals served by the HPOG program – TANF recipients and other low-income individuals – commonly need financial assistance for housing costs. HPOG students may live in college housing or in

#### Rental Assistance

*“In the beginning, Cook Inlet Tribal Council said they could help with my rent, but I was too proud, I had never asked for help, ever. But I had to quit my night job because it was interfering with school, and I needed the rental assistance. When I was losing my apartment, I talked with the program coordinator and she said that they could help me out. I was so happy they were able to help me. If they hadn’t, I was going to have to leave the program.”*

local rental units, and all Tribal grantees offer either some form of financial assistance to pay a portion of participants’ rent or a referral to a local agency to better assist students. Through providing rental assistance, the HPOG programs help to remove the threat of eviction and diminish participants’ concerns over housing, freeing them to focus on their training programs. Across Blackfeet Community College implementation sites, students receive a scholarship through the HPOG program that can be used toward room and board expenses, depending on student need.<sup>6</sup>

College of Menominee Nation and Turtle Mountain Community College offer separate assistance for rent payments. The College of Menominee Nation assists their students with short-term emergency housing issues. At Turtle Mountain Community College, students voice their needs for rental assistance to Project CHOICE staff and staff will refer students to local agencies that can better assist them with any housing issues; and, at times, the Project CHOICE career program facilitators will advocate for a student at these local agencies.

### Transportation

Given that the Tribal HPOG programs are primarily located in rural areas, many HPOG participants report traveling long distances for their training programs, often without a dependable mode of transportation. Although Cook Inlet Tribal Council offers training programs in an urban setting (Anchorage, AK), some students live outside of the city and face long commutes, which is particularly challenging in the harsh winter months. Even if participants own cars or have access to public transportation, car trouble and unreliable bus schedules can threaten their efforts to arrive to class on time. Stringent attendance policies at the HPOG training programs make a reliable means of getting to class a necessity, and all programs offer to help students secure transportation, primarily through financial assistance. Cook Inlet Tribal Council offers both gas vouchers and bus passes, and College of Menominee Nation provides transportation for students to get to their clinical

rotations and testing sites. Blackfeet Community College offers gas cards for students using personal vehicles and transit passes to Blackfeet Transit, a tribal service for transportation within the Blackfeet reservation, so that students can receive free rides to and from the college. Blackfeet Community College also arranges for the replacement of car parts or tires for students, if necessary. Turtle Mountain Community College provides mileage reimbursement, which students report to be the most widely used supportive service. Should a student require car assistance, Turtle Mountain Community College staff will refer students to local agencies that can provide the proper support for such a problem.

### Food

HPOG participants commonly need some assistance to provide for their daily meals. Through offering food vouchers and other forms of financial assistance, the Tribal HPOG programs can help to reduce participants’ concerns over being able to afford meals for both themselves and their families. Cook Inlet Tribal Council offers food vouchers to HPOG participants and can also coordinate their participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as Cook Inlet Tribal Council houses the State of Alaska Food Stamp center. Across Blackfeet Community College implementation sites, students receive a scholarship through the HPOG program that can be used toward living expenses, which includes food.

### Childcare

HPOG program administrators, faculty and students indicated that a lack of reliable childcare would prohibit many students with dependent children from pursuing the training and education opportunities offered through the HPOG programs. The Tribal HPOG programs fulfill this need in a variety of ways, through offering direct childcare services, providing financial assistance to pay for childcare, and helping to identify and secure childcare arrangements for participants. The scholarship that students receive across Blackfeet Community College implementation sites

#### Childcare Assistance

*Turtle Mountain Community College will reimburse up to \$200 in monthly child care costs. As one student said, “(the program) covers up to \$200 in childcare costs so when you get a bill for \$700, it (the program) covers a chunk of that.”*

*Childcare financial assistance is one of the primary benefits for students in the Turtle Mountain program as over 70% of students have at least one child.*

can be used toward childcare expenses. Additionally, Blackfeet Community College now offers childcare through a small group of state-certified providers and is increasing its capacity to provide certified childcare to individuals on the reservation, including HPOG participants. The College of Menominee Nation offers childcare reimbursement for childcare that the student has already secured, on and off the reservation. Cook Inlet Tribal Council provides assistance with childcare services through providing referrals to their Child Care center.

## PROMISING APPROACHES IN DELIVERING SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

In the first year of the HPOG program, grantees at each implementation site have delivered supportive services to HPOG program participants, as documented from students and program administrators during site visit interviews and focus groups.

Supportive relationships with program staff and leveraging existing infrastructure are factors reported to have been particularly helpful in the grantees' implementation of supportive services.

### Supportive Relationships with Program Staff

Across sites, students reported that supportive relationships with program staff, including administrative staff and supportive services staff, were important to their academic success. In general, program personnel understand the unique aspects of Tribal culture, which may include traditional values, communication, and learning styles, and work to create a strong sense of belonging among students. In many cases, program staff comes from the same Native communities as students.<sup>7</sup> Staff feels that shared backgrounds facilitate students' comfort in approaching staff with their personal or academic issues. Students remarked favorably on the value of knowing that staff was available to listen to and support them. A College of Menominee Nation program participant explained, "[The staff] is always there. If they don't know the answer, they'll find the person with the answer... They want you to succeed and give you every opportunity to ask for help; give you everything you need for whatever your problem is."

### Leveraging Existing Infrastructure

Some of the Tribal HPOG grantees had well-established infrastructures for delivering supportive services to students prior to HPOG and were able to supplement this infrastructure using HPOG funds. These grantees were also able to leverage resources from community partners and host institutions to provide supportive services. College of Menominee Nation leveraged institutional resources to develop, implement and maintain the HPOG program. In addition to providing equipment, supplies, and facilities, the College underwent extensive remodeling to supplement an existing building and meet the expanded needs of the nursing career ladder. Additionally, existing relationships and partnerships were leveraged to provide academic and social supports. Similarly, Cook Inlet Tribal Council is a social service organization, and a coordinated referral system within the organization was in place prior to HPOG. Cook Inlet Tribal Council operates one-stop wrap-around support services, which are located in the same physical building. Services at Cook Inlet Tribal Council include the Alaska's People Center for job seeking services, Tribal TANF center, Child Care, General Assistance program, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program, State of Alaska Food Stamp center, and State of Alaska Department of Labor satellite office. With this structure in place, Cook Inlet Tribal Council staff members reported being able to integrate the delivery of all supportive services to ensure that no need goes unaddressed.

### CONCLUSION

Across grantees, staff and students emphasized the importance of academic and social supportive services in allowing students to participate in and successfully complete their HPOG training. Supportive services such as housing, transportation, food and childcare helped students and their families meet basic living needs.

Academic support services such as tuition payments, mentoring and tutoring were intended to help students be successful in their coursework. Supportive relationships with program staff and leveraging existing infrastructure were reported to have been particularly helpful in the grantees' early implementation of supportive services. ■

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Health Workforce Analysis. (n.d.). Retrieved January 4, 2013 at <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/>.

<sup>2</sup> The definition of low income is defined differently, depending on the site.

<sup>3</sup> Guillory, R. M. (2009). American Indian/Alaska Native college student retention strategies. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 33(2), 20-38.

<sup>4</sup> Site visits were conducted at Blackfeet Community College, College of Menominee Nation, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc., Turtle Mountain Community College and Cankdeska Cikana Community College from February-November 2012.

<sup>5</sup> HeavyRunner, I., & DeCelles, R. (2002). Family education model: Meeting the student retention challenge. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 41(2), 29-37.

<sup>6</sup> The number of implementation sites varies across the Tribal HPOG programs. BCCC and CCCC are implementing their HPOG program at their respective colleges and then also at 4 other locations across their states of Montana and North Dakota. CMN is implementing their HPOG program at one other location in Wisconsin, and TMCC and CITC are implementing their program solely at their respective college.

<sup>7</sup> Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116.

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