



Cankdeska Cikana Community College Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program—Overview and Preliminary Outcomes

This practice brief is one in a series 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 funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The HPOG program is funded by the Affordable Care Act to support 32 demonstration projects, including five 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 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. This practice brief provides an overview of the Cankdeska Cikana Community College (CCCC) Tribal HPOG program and key findings to date.

OVERVIEW OF THE CCCC TRIBAL HPOG PROGRAM KEY FINDINGS TO DATE¹

Cankdeska Cikana Community College (CCCC), chartered in 1975 by the Spirit Lake Tribe, is a Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG) recipient serving the people of the Spirit Lake Reservation and other tribal communities in North Dakota. CCCC offers an array of educational programs that integrate the Spirit Lake Dakota culture and language into curricula and prepare students for achievement in higher education and meaningful employment. The CCCC HPOG program, known as Next Steps, provides scholarships and training opportunities in healthcare fields to students at CCCC, the grant's lead organization, as well as to students at partner institutions, including Fort Berthold Community College (FBCC) (New Town, ND), Sitting Bull College (SBC) (Fort Yates, ND), United Tribes Technical College (UTTC) (Bismarck, ND), the University of North Dakota (UND) (Grand Forks, ND), and 10 other academic institutions in the State. Next Steps provides financial assistance as well as academic and social support services that enable students to pursue training and promote their successful completion of training programs. Financial assistance consists of scholarships to assist with tuition and fees, and assistance with childcare, transportation, and other living expenses while attending college. The supportive services include mentoring, tutoring, academic advising, referrals to public assistance and behavioral health programs, and career development, such as job shadowing and career fairs. The training opportunities available through Next Steps include programs in nursing, nutrition and wellness, medical coding and billing, and other health professions.

Program Structures

- **Statewide Implementation.** The Next Steps program is implemented through a statewide consortium that includes the primary implementation site at CCCC, three secondary implementation sites at UTTC, FBCC, and SBC, and a statewide program for students to attend other colleges throughout the State while receiving Tribal HPOG funding through CCCC. In addition, Next Steps has contracted with the RAIN (Recruitment/Retention of American Indians into Nursing) program at UND to have RAIN staff members serve as mentors for Next Steps students.
- **Mentor Model.** The RAIN mentors provide case management oversight and support to Next Steps students across the multiple implementation sites. Designated site mentors, as well as a "statewide" mentor that provides support to the students attending academic institutions across the State, have worked with all 222 Next Steps participants thus far. Each mentor is responsible for helping students become acquainted with the program, set up a plan of study, and access Next Steps supportive services and reimbursement through case management tracking. Mentors also provide academic and personal support as needed. Next Steps participants have continually lauded their mentors as a major factor in helping them to successfully complete their academic programs.
- **Variety of Academic Programs.** Having multiple implementation sites and the statewide program has increased the number of health professions training programs that Next Steps is able to offer its students, while enabling the program to reach a larger number of

¹ The findings to date on program structures, program processes, and program outcomes are derived from three site visits to CCCC which included 80 key informant interviews with administrative and program implementation staff and other program stakeholders, 15 focus

groups with the CCCC students, and 6 completer and non-completer phone interviews with CCCC students. Information was pulled directly from the interviews and focus groups.

prospective students across North Dakota. The primary training focus for Next Steps is a nursing career ladder from Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) to Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) to Registered Nurse (RN). In addition to the nursing ladder, students can complete degrees or certificates in Nutrition and Dietetics, Health Information Technology, and Medical Coding and Billing, among others. Next Steps students report being grateful for the array of options available to them for continuing their education.

“I don’t think you would have as many students making it in the nursing program without the Next Steps funding and mentoring.”
 –CCCC Program Participant

Program Processes

- **Participant Needs and Goals.** Mentors assess student needs and goals during orientation and throughout the program as part of regular meetings and informal discussions with students. Program staff indicate that this is a critical aspect of program implementation since mentors play a key role in connecting students to the supportive services they need. By understanding Next Steps students’ changing needs, mentors are able to support them in reaching their academic and career goals.
- **Comprehensive Support Services.** Next Steps offers an array of supportive services to participants to address their needs and facilitate their academic success and program completion. Eighty-two percent of Next Steps students required assistance with social supportive services, including transportation, childcare, and food. Many Next Steps students also required academic assistance including help with paying for tuition (76%), cultural programming (52%), and training and work supports (92%), which included textbooks, uniforms, and computers (including Internet access), as well as tutoring and educational remediation to improve math, reading, and writing skills. Nursing students incur expenses related to their required hands-on training in clinical settings, for which nursing students must travel to off-site hospitals or clinics and stay overnight. Thus, they have additional expenses related to transportation, lodging, and meals. By ensuring that these basic needs are met, Next Steps allows students to focus on their education. Students participating in focus groups agreed that the supportive services were critical to their academic success, and instructors reported that the supportive services are vital to students’ retention in their training programs.
- **Employment Services.** Next Steps places a strong emphasis on helping students find employment by offering career counseling, job search and placement assistance, and employability and life skills training. The Next Steps Employment Specialist holds employability workshops in which students learn how to search for and maintain a job in their field, including instruction on resume writing and interviewing skills. The Employment Specialist works with students leading up to and after graduation to help them secure meaningful employment.

“My life has changed because of this whole experience. It wasn’t easy going through the nursing program, and there were times when it got really tough not only with school and homework but being five hours away from family. But I went to school and came back to the area where I’m from to help people struggling with things I’ve seen, and I’ve realized that anything is possible. The doors are open. You can do anything.”
 –CCCC Program Completer

Program Outcomes²

- **Educational Attainment and Employment Outcomes.** As of April 2015, a total of 222 participants had been enrolled in the Next Steps program since its inception and, of those, 66 percent had

successfully completed their training program. During the final year of implementation, Next Steps staff anticipate that enrolled students will continue to graduate from the LPN, RN, Nutrition and Dietetics, and Medical Coding programs. Program staff report that job readiness workshops and support from the Employment Specialist have helped 128 out of 147 Next Steps program completers gain employment since program intake, and 78 percent of those have found work in the healthcare sector.

- **Multi-Generational Effects.** Next Steps participants report that the program has broad effects not only on themselves, but also on their families who benefit from their greater employability, earning potential, and confidence. Some participants explained that they serve as role models for their children and to others in their tribal communities by demonstrating that higher education is an accessible path to a rewarding career that will allow them to support their families and their communities.
- **Stakeholder Satisfaction.** Stakeholders, including students, staff, faculty, employers and others, reported great appreciation for and satisfaction with the Next Steps program and the educational and career opportunities that it offers. In general, students felt more financially secure and indicated that the comprehensive support services that they received helped them to successfully complete their academic programs. Students expressed appreciation for the opportunity to further their education in order to improve their financial stability and their lives.

“Without Next Steps, I would not be pursuing this degree. This program helps get people out of little rural communities into bigger universities. Then, people can return for job placement in their community.”
 –CCCC Program Participant

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² Although the evaluation describes preliminary outcomes for program participants, we do not know what the outcomes for participants would have been in the absence of the program.