Experiences with Incorporating Culture into Tribal Green Reentry Programs

**From the Cross-Site Evaluation of OJJDP’s Tribal Green Reentry Program**

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# Introduction

Since October 2009 three American Indian Tribes—the Hualapai Tribe in Arizona, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) in Mississippi, and the Rosebud Sioux Tribe (RST) in South Dakota—have been implementing community-based reentry initiatives through the Tribal Juvenile Detention and Reentry Green Demonstration (“Green Reentry”) program funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). These programs are designed to help tribal youth successfully reintegrate into their communities upon release from confinement and/or to address problems causing their referral to the program. The programs serve justice-involved youth through innovative approaches that combine traditional reentry interventions such as individual assessment, education, counseling, and reentry planning with “green” activities such as gardening, beekeeping, hydroponics, and skill development in green technologies. These three programs are also participating in a cross-site evaluation being conducted by RTI International and American Indian Development Associates, LLC. The evaluation includes a process evaluation that describes the implementation experiences of the demonstration grantees, and an outcome evaluation that will determine the effectiveness of the programs. For more information about the Green Reentry initiative and detailed information about the funded sites, please see <http://www.rti.org/pubs/topicalbrief1_final_feb2013.pdf>.

While the structure of each Green Reentry program differs, there are some common programmatic aspects regarding the use of tribal culture through activities, education, ceremonies and other strategies described in this brief. In particular, the programs engage tribal Elders in the process as they are considered to be the most knowledgeable and experienced people in their communities. This brief discusses the cross-site efforts and strategies that grantees are using to infuse culture into the Green Entry Programs. Tribal Elder perspectives on effective ways to incorporate culture into tribal green reentry programs are also presented.

# Importance of Cultural Aspects in Tribal Reentry Programming

As awareness and concern over the effectiveness and appropriateness of programs serving American Indian populations has grown (BigFoot & Braden, 2007), tribal programs are increasingly incorporating culture into prevention and intervention activities, and as a source of healing. Acquiring cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences increases grounding and connectedness that some youth need to make changes in other aspects of their lives. Connectedness has been defined as the interrelated wellbeing of the individual, family, community, and the natural environment (Mohatt, Fok, Henry, Burket, & Allen, 2011). Inclusion of cultural programming in the Green Reentry program is helping youth well versed in their culture to draw upon it to help them redirect their lives. For example, learning songs at an early age helped one Green Reentry participant to resume this cultural skill to overcome his use of alcohol and drugs. Instead of hanging out with peers and “partying,” he focused his free time on practicing songs, which eventually replaced the urge for “drinking and drugging.” For some participants, the Green Reentry cultural components presented new cultural education, awareness and skills to apply in their lives. For these youth, acquiring cultural knowledge provided insight into the ways their culture can help them understand themselves and their environment better. These changes in participants are in line with several studies citing cultural identity as a protective factor for Native youth that promotes personal and community resiliency (Oetting & Beauvais, 1990; Whitbeck, McMorris, Hoyt, Stubben, & Lafromboise, 2002; William, 2005; Lafromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006; Gray, Wolf, Mays, Equihua, Gomez, Tellez, Tellez, Rappa, Jirsak, & Nye, 2008).

Programs incorporating culture rarely receive sufficient evaluation to be considered evidence-based practices (EBP), which is the gold standard for program evaluation and replication. Without the EBP mark, programs are considered to lack credibility and should not be replicated (Roger, 2012). To address these concerns and give successful programs the recognition they deserve, another standard, practice-based evidence (PBE) has emerged. PBE refers to methods and/or approaches that have longstanding usage, but that have not been formally evaluated or researched. Use of tribal or culture-based methods fit the PBE definition. Several fields outside of criminal justice have included PBE in preventive medicine, treatment, mental or behavioral health therapy, and substance abuse counseling (Isaacs, Huang, Hernandez, & Echo-Hawk, 2005). PBE studies also indicate that learning activities should be centered on the cultural context within which individuals live (Davis, McGrath, Knight, Freelander, & Hudson, 2004). Locally defined PBE builds upon each Tribe’s cultural knowledge, beliefs, traditions, and practices and identifies the most appropriate ways to use them in program strategies.

Research applying PBE methods is revealing that culturally infused interventions such as positive tribal community identity and participation are associated with lower depression, lower alcohol use, lower anti-social behavior, and lower levels of dysfunctional behaviors among Native youth (Whitesell, 2008). Strong cultural identity has been associated with lower substance abuse (Moran & Reaman, 2002) and positive effects on suicide prevention and intervention (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008). Green reentry participants, their parents and staff cite cultural programming as one of the most powerful aspects causing positive changes with youth (Lindquist, Melton, McKay, & Martinez, 2013). Youth participants report feeling better about who they are as a Choctaw, Hualapai, or Lakota person because they have learned—either through hands-on experience, teachings, or other oral traditions—something about their culture or those of other Tribes that instills a sense of pride for being who they are.

For each of the Green Reentry grantees cultural components have been prominent features highlighting the importance of culture for tribal programs. Through cultural programming the Green Reentry Programs are demonstrating the use of culture as a resource to help justice-involved youth. This not only contributes to strengthening culture, but also ensures passage of knowledge to the next generation. At all three sites, interviews with staff, stakeholders, parents, and youth indicate the importance of using culture to help young people feel good about themselves and who they are as Indian people. By incorporating cultural components into the Green Reentry Program, staff and stakeholders feel they are helping their Tribes fulfill the tribal responsibility to bring up culturally informed and capable youth.

# Access to Cultural Information

Each Green Reentry Program has used different strategies to acquire the cultural knowledge and information needed to make decisions about what to include in their programs. Several researchers have identified enculturation strategies that help people learn and understand their tribal culture (Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, Washienko, Walter, 1996; Winderowd, Montgomery, Stumblingbear, Harless, & Hicks, 2008). All three programs are using these methods to increase youth cultural knowledge, understanding, and capabilities. The methods described below to access cultural information are in use at each tribal site.

*Cultural Experts:*  Each program has relied on cultural experts to design some of the cultural aspects being applied in various activities. Experts have included degreed professionals with specific knowledge in cultural anthropology, botany, law, and other areas; tribal employees such as museum staffs, judges, and peacekeepers; and younger Native people with specific skills in cultural arts, crafts, ceremonies, and other cultural areas. Activities have included indigenous farming techniques, spirituality and healing ceremonies, history lessons, and teaching each Tribe’s core values.

*Oral Traditions:*  The Green Reentry Programs have tribal staffs that are culturally knowledgeable and informed. These staff members are able to apply what they know and also to identify other tribal citizens that can help fill gaps in knowledge or capabilities. Oral tradition is most applicable with spirituality and healing ceremonies, teaching tribal arts and crafts, drumming, singing, and language instruction.

*Written History:* All the Green Reentry Programs make use of documented history and knowledge for instructional purposes. This includes the use of tribal-based resources, such as tribal museums and archives, cultural-specific programs, natural resource programs, and local university programs. Using these sources has expanded each program’s efforts to provide a wider range of topics and more in-depth cultural knowledge to include in programming.

*Borrowing from Other Tribes:* In some instances, the cultural methods and approaches used by other nearby Tribes or those in other parts of Indian country have been applied. For example, some of the indigenous farming techniques, conflict resolution or peacemaking using talking circles, and healing ceremonies have been borrowed from other Tribes. All three programs acknowledge the shared history and experience among Tribes enable their ability to include other tribal traditions and practices. The programs also practice this through the cultural exchanges that take place during peer-to-peer training and technical assistance events hosted by each Green Reentry Program.

*Elder Wisdom:* More than any other source, each Green Reentry Program is seeking access to cultural knowledge and experience from Tribal Elders. Program staffs often refer to Elders as “living and talking libraries” full of cultural knowledge that can only be taught or explained using tribal languages or choosing English words, tones, and insights that are most effective in conveying the cultural instruction or meaning. Programs are also seeking Elder involvement in general and cultural-specific program activities and events.

# Application of Culture

Five common cultural elements were included in programmatic efforts by the three Green Reentry Programs. These include:

1. Tribal life ways,
2. Language,
3. Art and literature,
4. World views including spirituality or religion, and
5. Tribal history and socioeconomic factors.

These elements help to define what is cultural in each community along with the values, beliefs, practices, and approaches attached to each element. All three Green Reentry programs have incorporated cultural programming for various purposes using the different strategies and methods discussed below.

## Teaching Tribal Basics and Tribal Life Ways

Teaching the basic cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities that one needs to feel connected to one’s Tribe has helped youth in the Green Reentry programs experience a greater sense of belonging. Each program uses “oral tradition” or hands-on learning methods through the green activities—gardening, and raising bees, chickens, and other farm animals, which supports cultural elements related to socioeconomic and tribal life ways. Youth have learned about traditional subsistence and indigenous gardening methods. Gardening has enabled youth to sow gourd seeds that they cared for, picked, dried, decorated, and used as rattles to accompany their singing of the bird songs they were taught by hired cultural experts or elders. Some of the herbs grown are picked and used in meals or to make ointments; and honey is harvested from the bees.

Several programs include language, arts and crafts, literature, drumming, and singing classes or activities aimed at increasing a youth’s knowledge, skills, and abilities in using these elements in their daily lives. Providing these cultural resources helps youth to become more culturally informed and capable. Even youth that are not fluent in their language have an opportunity to learn about their culture, for example, by making their own regalia and being taught what the different colors, symbols, or patterns represent. Teaching them cultural etiquette for sacred ceremonies, i.e., burials, healings, or preparation for dances helps youth to know how to conduct themselves in different situations.

## Tribal History and Socioeconomic Factors

Being culturally informed includes have knowledge about the Tribe’s history. Each Green Reentry program includes oral and written history lessons through classroom and off-site activities. Intergenerational cultural excursions have been filled with oral traditional methods that have included storytelling, hands-on cooking, rafting skills, horsemanship, and lectures on tribal history and relations with the state and federal governments. Each Tribe has used its cultural centers and/or museum programs to teach tribal history through lectures, videos and documentaries, plays, and storytelling, among other methods.

Tribal history also educates youth about the heroism of their own people, tribal leaders—men and women—and each Tribe’s own tribal sovereignty narratives. Through this education, youth gain better understanding about the contemporary socioeconomic factors their own communities face in comparison to all Tribes and with mainstream America. This helps youth have a better appreciation for the adult pressure to obtain a good education that will enable their success to obtain employment, housing, and other essential basics in life.

## Teaching Core Values

The oral tradition and hands-on activities described above also help to teach cultural values. These include work ethics learned through gardening and construction projects. These projects also teach about tribal life ways for working together to plant and cultivate a garden and with communal sharing of harvests. Some green reentry activities have taught youth about respect for nature and the environment through recycling and service-learning projects focused on beautification. Drumming, singing, and storytelling are oral traditional methods that have been used to teach youth to meditate, pray, and learn indigenous parables and teachings. These oral tradition methods help youth to listen, be calm, show respect, and have patience. Through songs and storytelling, youth learn about the culturally specific ways to give thanks; appreciation for what they have; showing praise, love, and caring for others; apology and forgiveness; asking for and giving help; and many more values important to each community.

## Spirituality and Healing

A great number of cultural beliefs and values, customs and traditions are learned through ceremonies and practices. The Green Reentry program teaches youth to pray, through oral prayers, chants, songs, and dance and traditional healing practices, such as sweats.

The above cultural aspects collectively teach youth about tribal life ways from the past and as they have evolved to the present. The Green Reentry programs are using several forms of oral tradition—language, song, dance, storytelling, and hands-on experiences—to help youth learn. Green Reentry participants are learning about their culture by being surrounded with cultural imagery and symbols, music, arts, foods, spirituality, and other everyday ways of living to become informed and proficient in their—Choctaw, Hualapai, or Lakota—culture.

# Challenges to Incorporating Culture

Staff, stakeholder, parent and youth interviews have revealed the capacity and capability challenges programs are encountering in their effort to incorporate culture, involve cultural experts, adults, and elders in their Green Reentry programs.

*Challenges in Using Culturally Informed Adult Experts and Elders:* Culturally relevant strategies for recruitment of Elders and other adults to serve as educators, mentors, and cultural advisors were highlighted. Retention strategies were also mentioned to address volunteer burnout and to increase their skills for interacting with young people, for example learning how to *talk with, not at* young people. Some noted conflicts with the appropriate compensation—traditional payment or cash incentives—especially for those with low or fixed incomes. All acknowledged the need to “honor” Elders and other volunteers in respectful and appropriate ways and to show appreciation for their involvement.

*Bridging Generation Gaps:* The lack of opportunities for personal interaction across age groups was highlighted, which contributed to the quality and frequency of communication with one another at individual and program levels. Some felt that both youth and Elders needed training on effective communication and listening skills, which would increase their comfort levels in one another’s company.

**Elder Focus Group Methods & Approaches**

The focus group employed protocols found in oral tradition. Elders were invited by program staff to attend a meeting. The Elders self-selected to attend and participate in focus group meetings facilitated by two Native evaluation team members. Focus groups occurred at a tribal museum and cultural center and local senior centers. Informed consent was provided through verbal and written notice.

***Focus group purposes:***

1. Input on culturally respectful ways that the Green Reentry programs can obtain Elder wisdom, cultural knowledge and expertise.
2. Identify respectful and appropriate ways to involve Elders in Green Reentry activities with youth.
3. Obtain input on Elders’ views about the needs and issues affecting youth in the Green Reentry program.

Facilitated discussions centered on problems and concerns, strengths, barriers, and solutions.

*Program Capacity:* The ability of programs to include cultural programming with financial and other resources such as transportation, incentives, strategies for background checks, and intra-agency relationships were also identified as challenges to overcome. Some stakeholders while supporting the Green Reentry Program were limited by overstretched staff and financial resources to cover requests for involvement or contributions. Interagency agreements were considered essential to tap into the available governmental and community resources to support coordinated effort and collaboration among tribal programs.

# Elder Perspectives on Involvement in Green Reentry Programs

To better understand the challenges for involving elders, the RTI-AIDA evaluation team conducted three Elder focus groups to provide an opportunity for Elders to express their views on issues tribal youth face and their perspectives on what the Elder role can or should be with youth in general and in the Green Reentry programs.

### Elder Views on Issues Facing Tribal Youth

Elders were asked about the youth problems most prevalent in their communities and/or the main worries or concerns they have for youth. Their concerns fell into the following related categories—community, intergenerational, behavioral and social, tribal government, and cultural.

*Community Concerns:* The Elders who participated in the focus groups generally believed that the communities were failing youth by not providing positive role models for living a “good life”—that is, a life of kindness, generosity, honesty, appreciation, and caring for one another. The Elders suggested that problems such as tolerance for bullying on school campuses, substance abuse, crime, and gangs, indicated a lack of responsibility by the community to assert discipline and promote community and cultural standards of behavior. As a result, they noted, youth are focused on keeping safe rather than on getting an education.

*Intergenerational Concerns:* Most concerns in this category dealt with parenting roles and responsibilities, and parental misconduct that exposed youth to violence, drugs and alcohol at an early age. Elders suggested that not understanding disciplinary roles attributed to parents’ defensiveness of wrongful behavior by their children, over indulgence with material things, including the lack of chores, which contributed to irresponsible behavior among youth. Lack of parental involvement and guidance was attributed to the increase in teen parents, underage alcohol and drug use, and generally being unaware of children’s education, social, health, or wellness needs. Parent employment in far away, off-reservation locations was also identified as a contributing factor for diminished parental involvement. Elders also indicated that single-parent households due to divorce or parents not being married, over-crowded living conditions, and ill-equipped grandparents raising grandchildren were factors hindering effective care and rearing of adolescent children.

Elder participants did not excuse themselves from the responsibility to provide positive role models, which several suggested was needed to narrow the generation gap keeping youth and elders apart, and to model respect and care rather than fear for each other.

*Behavioral and Social:* Underage alcohol and drug use were the most frequently cited problems. The causal factors Elders identified included the lack of positive activities or recreation, lack of parental involvement and discipline, parental substance abuse, youth defiance, and community tolerance for drug or alcohol abuse. Youth violence, such as bullying, vandalism, property crimes, and stealing from grandparents and parents were also noted. The causal factors Elders identified were gang involvement and exposure to childhood violence in the home, including violent video games and movies.

Elders noted that youth lack respect for themselves and others, which was indicative of values not being taught or passed on by adults and Elders or the community. They suggested that stressed out parents also tolerate more from their children and become more lenient with chores, curfew, homework, and overlook underage drinking or drug use and put up with disrespectful behavior. As a result, they noted parents and communities have lowered expectations of adolescents, resulting in lowered aspirations and decreased self-worth among youth.

*Governmental Concerns:* Elders discussed the role of tribal government in addressing youth problems and needs. Elders faulted inadequate local education systems as a major factor preventing youth success while in school and as a hindrance for future opportunities with college, getting a good job, and other pursuits, and as a preventive measure for staying out of trouble.

Lack of effective system responses to underage drinking and drug use and violence were also noted. Most agreed incarceration should only be used for serious crimes, not for underage drinking and other minor or victimless crimes. The lack of incarceration alternatives was noted as harmful to positive youth development, especially if treatment, education, and rehabilitation programs were not part of the confinement experience.

Elders highlighted the importance of good leadership by elected tribal officials. Cited problems included an over emphasis on money to get things done, instead of what can be accomplished through policy and procedures, consequences for non-compliance, and high work ethics and standards.

*Cultural Concerns:* The major concern was with passage of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities to youth. Elders stated that youth were over influenced by mainstream culture or gang culture instead of their tribal culture first. Elders acknowledged all the contributing factors related to historical trauma that caused the loss of land, language, tribal economies, cultural institutions, cultural arts, and ways of life. Several shared their own experiences with relocation and boarding schools that contributed to their own loss of language, learning parenting skills and many other cultural skills and abilities because they were not living in their tribal community. Many held themselves accountable for not instilling cultural values, beliefs and helping youth to overcome any shame for speaking their language. Elders asked, "Why kids had to get in trouble to learn about their tribal culture?" Most agreed with the need for Elders to overcome what they experienced when they were young and turn that into an opportunity for teaching culture to youth.

### Cultural Strengths and Solutions Identified by Elders

Elders emphasized the importance of using culture to help justice-involved youth and their families. They identified strengths found in their culture, community standards, environment, tribal government, and people that could help youth to sustain a “tribal way of life”. These strengths fell into the following categories: community, intergenerational, cultural, and tribal government.

*Community Strengths:* The communal strengths Elders included focused on people over money and things, sharing resources, such as harvests and hunts, and being equally helpful during calm periods and times of crisis. Culture was described as alive and well, noting that people still spoke their language; sang and danced to their songs; made and wore their own regalia; prayed and gave thanks in their own tribal ways; expressed their culture through paintings, sculptures, song, and writing; practiced healing ceremonies using indigenous medicine and methods; and had oral and written histories of their Peoples’ journeys. Elders suggested these were all things that could be taught to youth through the cultural centers available in each community.

*Intergenerational Strengths:* The roles of family members and relatives in helping to raise or help with child rearing were identified. For example, uncles still provided advice through “a talking to” or dispense corrective disciplinary action to nieces and nephews; and aunties still taught shawl making and beading to their nieces in some communities. Elders considered this a helpful activity that not only taught young girls a cultural skill but also kept them occupied while under the watchful and caring eyes of another adult female. Most expressed the need to increase intergenerational activities through the Green Reentry program to help narrow the generation gap.

Elders cited family gatherings based on kinship networks were still in place and were used to plan and celebrate life events, such as births, burials, community events, and ceremonials; and for other purposes such as solving family problems and conflicts. Healthy relationships with grandparents, their adult children, grandchildren and great grandchildren were also noted. Elders agreed that having grandparents in the home or nearby also engaged the whole family to provide love, care and support. Elders suggested that as grandparents they were available for storytelling about life in the “olden days” or to tell cultural parables, legends, or other teachings and suggested that programs take care of the logistics for elder participation. More outreach by tribal leaders and tribal program staffs was suggested to ensure people are aware of what is available in the community and to educate Elders about ways they could become involved.

*Cultural Strengths:* Elders suggested that since Tribes still had their languages it should be used in schools and other settings. Elders noted that while some citizens know their tribal history, young people needed more instruction to help them understand the current circumstances of tribal life and government. Native music, dance, arts, sports, and gardening were noted as being revitalized by young adults and youth with the help of elders for ceremonial, social and even entrepreneurial purposes. The existence of cultural centers and/or programs in each community was considered an important and deliberate step to ensure cultural knowledge is not only recorded, but also passed on to each Tribe’s children and youth. Practice of culture-based spirituality was thought to be widespread and was helpful to many tribal people enduring hardships or that needed help to heal from substance abuse or violence in their lives. Many expressed the healing powers that could be found in their culture in medicine and ceremonies to cure ailments or injuries and to alleviate mental and/or physical distress. They noted that tribal healers are still called upon to address physical, mental and spiritual healing needs. They suggested that programs should use these cultural remedies more in tribal programs.

*Governmental Strengths:* Elders indicated that their tribal governments provide a number of services and resources for youth, such as schools, health, Boys & Girls clubs and other recreational outlets and activities. Noting in particular that tribal citizens on school boards have increased cultural education in some school curriculums. They also cited the tribal cultural programs are helping strengthen cultural knowledge, information, and preserve artifacts, etc. Elders suggested that the school- and tribal-based cultural programs should be expanded to the programs for youth in the Green Reentry programs. They agreed that these programs would be helpful to prevent youth recidivism.

## Barriers To Using Cultural Strengths Identified by Elders

The barriers identified by Elders for involvement in the Green Reentry programs and other programs included time constraints, competing interests, cultural competence, cultural differences, and outreach efforts.

*Elder Outreach Efforts:* Most Elders indicated that they were generally uninformed about the cultural programming initiatives by the Green Reentry programs. Personal interaction with program staffs was considered minimal, most did not know program staff, or had simply never been asked or invited to participate in tribal programs. Most indicated that they would participate if they were asked to help. The personal interaction was considered important when asking an Elder to share their cultural knowledge with others. Elders that were involved in programs expressed burnout and feeling that they are the only ones being called upon by programs.

*Time and Resources Constraints:* While Elders may appear to have time on their hands, they often need more time to get things started and completed. This includes daily self-care needs or tending to significant others, or grandchildren that may be in their care. Most Elders noted their availability to participate in programs depended on the time (about four hours) they allocated to sharing meals at the senior centers located in each tribal community. However, this depended on their ability to access transportation from public or family sources.

*Competing Interests:* Some Elders noted the need to keep working to make ends meet financially. Others indicated helping to raise grandchildren prevented their ability to participate in tribal programs for youth.

*Cultural Competence and Cultural Differences:* Historical experience with contact and ongoing American Indian policy has impacted some of the cultural strengths in the three tribal communities. The table below summarizes the perspectives of Elders regarding the weakening of specific cultural elements and their impact.

| **Cultural Elements** | **Impact on Culture** |
| --- | --- |
| Language | Decreased fluency with language at all age levels has strained the ability to share cultural knowledge, skills and abilities. |
| Spirituality | Religious censorship and/or exposure to other religions decreased use of cultural-based ceremonies, knowledge of songs, dances, prayers, medicines, and healers. |
| Economy | More reliance on a cash economy has strained traditional subsistenance through farming, hunting, and tribal arts and crafts. Parents often work in off-reservation settings, which further strains culture-based childcare and child rearing. |
| Cultural Education | Relocation and boarding schools affected continuous connection to tribal culture, language and ways of life during important developmental periods for youth, which decreased oral passage of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities. Minimal effort to teach culturally relevant topics in public schools persists. |
| Intertribal & Interracial Relationships | Intertribal and interracial relationshps have increased the number of people from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds. This has increased conflicts on which cultural systems to teach or follow; where to enroll children; and raised questions about the rights and privileges of multi-Tribe, race or ethnic children and youth. |

# Suggestions for Strengthening Cultural Programming Efforts

The Elder focus groups and interviews indicate strong support for incorporating culture into the Green Reentry Programs. The programs are using several methods described earlier to access cultural knowledge and information. Some overlapping suggestions include the following:

* Build upon cultural activities, such as drumming, singing and dancing into a cultural immersion program that becomes a permanent part of the Green Reentry Programs.
* Create varied, multiple and continous education, awareness and outreach activities that encourage adult and elder participation in the Green Reentry Program.
* Include age-appropriate orientation sessions that focus on communication and interaction skills, including effective and respectful listening skills, and ways to help each other work and play together.
* Provide education for adult and elder volunteers about the needs of justice-involved youth, including protocols for working in youth detention facilities.
* Use cultural centers as “safe” places to hold intergenerational activities.
* Create specific programs such as *Adopt a Grandparent* program, where Elders come and just spend time with youth one-on-one or in paired group activities.
* Sponsoring more intergenerational, cultural excursions planned by youth and Elders.
* Increase service-learning activities that are reciprocol, such as chores for Elders or providing garden harvest in exchange for storytelling nights, teaching a beading class or regalia-making class, and so on.

# Evaluation Perspectives: Considerations for Cultural Planning

The Green Reentry programs all use partners in several programmatic aspects to implement cultural activities— healing ceremonies, cultural arts and crafts, indigenous gardening, cultural excursions, and cultural education, among others. Partnerships are necessary because of the rural and often isolated location of many Tribes, which often means fewer organizational resources available in tribal communities. This challenges programs to find all the resources needed to provide recovery support, education success, mental health, employment, and other resources to nurture positive youth development. Fewer conventional resources accentuate the need to enlist other community-based programs to support reentry initiatives. This means expanding the reach to programs other than governmental agencies to private or non-profit organizations, businesses, and culture-based groups such as spiritual leaders, and faith-based organizations or churches. The Green Reentry Programs have reached out to many community-based groups to implement the cultural aspects of their programs. The process evaluation has identified some important considerations for implementing tribal or culture-based programming that are discussed below.

## Programmatic Role of Culture

Culture has a significant role in administering tribal justice programs and services on four levels (Melton & Chino, 2001). First, agency or program professionals and paraprofessionals need to be culturally sensitive, informed and competent; that is, staff should be knowledgeable about the tribe's history, language, beliefs, practices, and socioeconomic and other cultural nuances and they need to know how to apply them in their work. Second, the youth’s level of cultural competence or proficiency needs to be assessed and services provided accordingly. Third, interventions and programs need to promote both in order to adequately address the needs of the Indian youth and determine the most appropriate course of action. Fourth, programs need to incorporate interventions and remedies that reflect the culture of the tribe being served. All three programs have incorporated some of these features. Written guidelines would enable each program to document how programs are fulfilling the roles described.

## Cultural Programming Plan

The focus group discussions and interviews revealed the need for guidance that a written cultural program plan can provide to help solidify the efforts already in place. A written plan can be used to document the cultural aspects currently in place at each Green Reentry site and provide guidance to staff, volunteers, and program partners. Some essential components to include in a plan are described below:

### Consultation and Input Strategies on Cultural Programming

Green Reentry staff consulted with their program partners, tribal officials, cultural experts and Elders to determine what cultural activities to include in their programs. Written consultation policies and/or protocols could be helpful to document and describe the levels of consultation with different or overlapping groups that may be necessary. Protocols could include consultations with:

* Governmental officials—tribal, local, state and or federal;
* Tribal-specific cultural programs and resources;
* Community leaders;
* Male and female spiritual leaders, medicine men and women, other natural healers; and
* Elders, cultural groups, and other cultural experts.

The main consultation purpose could be to gain input and guidance about what cultural elements are appropriate for use in programs and how they should be applied. As noted above, programs are accountable to ensure the cultural program or activities selected are relevant, appropriate, and correctly implemented. These consultations could be used to gain concurrence on select cultural elements. They can also be helpful to gain support, sponsorship, volunteers, resources, endorsements, and open doors to more opportunities.

### Ongoing Cultural Guidance

Different from consultation is building ongoing strategies to guide program design, development, and implementation. Often individuals that are not from the Tribe operate tribal programs; as a result, they need guidance from culturally informed tribal experts. Even when tribal staffs and volunteers operate programs, it is helpful to have concurrence from recognized tribal experts to ensure cultural appropriateness or validity in programs. Green Reentry programs regularly encountered these types of situations. This could be addressed by having a protocol for setting up short-term work groups put in place just long enough to design a component or complete a task. For example, identifying the components of an intergenerational excursion program or cultural immersion component.

### Program Guidelines

Focus-group participants indicated not knowing what they would do if they became a volunteer. Similarly, staff and stakeholders stated that they sometimes they did not know how to determine cultural qualifications or to hold a consultation session or to deliver services to incarcerated youth. Written program policies and procedures would be helpful for consistency and guiding staff and volunteers. It is often a program’s responsibility to accurately implement culture-based practices and approaches. Minimally guidelines could include:

1. Protocols for consultation with tribal governmental and community level groups,
2. Cultural guidance protocols to maintain ongoing input and advice,
3. Policies and procedures to guide staff with:
	1. Determing cultural qualifications or requirements;
	2. Recruitment and retention of cultural experts;
	3. Appropriate recording, usage, and documentation of cultural resources; and
	4. The cultural protocols for obtaining permissions to access and/or use cultural knowledge, practices, and other resources.
4. Specific program components would outline the cultural features, target population to be served, activities to be accomplished, and the dosage and frequency of interventions. This should also describe program costs, partnerships and participatory agreements, and cost and resource-sharing agreements.
5. Adaptations of another tribe’s or ethnic group’s culture-based program or practice should begin with validating their relevance and appropriateness for use in the local program. To the extent possible, consultation with the tribe would be helpful for establishing the required cultural elements.
6. Sustainability strategies should be included in the plan to ensure continuance of ongoing and new culture-based programming, including:
	1. Community involvement and integration;
	2. Program visibility through appropriate messaging, marketing, and community education and awarenes;
	3. Strategies to institutionalize culture-based features and elements into program policies and requirements;
	4. Resource development that includes financial support and culturally competent training and technical assistance.

## Cultural Programming Expectations

Access to culturally relevant services and resources is both a right and an obligation that tribal governments share with other state and federal agencies. The three Green Reentry Programs are incorporating cultural programing, which is helping each of their tribal governments provide culturally relevant and appropriate services and resources to their young tribal citizens and their families. The cultural expectations emerging from these programs’ use of culture include:

1. Increased collaborative planning for culturally germane services and programs.
2. Increased service collaboration among tribal and community-based cultural resources, such as spiritual leaders and other cultural experts.
3. Increased youth knowledge and use of tribal culture to reduce behavioral problems during and after confinement.
4. Institutionalization of culturally relevant and appropriate programs in the Green Reentry Programs.
5. Increase in human capital to provide cultural programming.
6. Increase in youth internalizing cultural values, beliefs, traditions, and practices and drawing on them to minimize their engagement in high-risk behaviors.

While all the expectations for incorporating cultural elements into the Green Reentry programs are ongoing, several expectations indicate that cultural programming promotes positive self-identity, tribal pride, and increases youth resiliency (Lindquist, Melton, McKay, & Martinez, 2013). These programs are showing that Tribes strengthen culture merely by using it in all aspects of life—personal, family, community, and government.

# Conclusions and Next Steps

The Green Reentry Programs noted the importance of providing culturally relevant programs in their proposals. All three programs have included a number of cultural activities delivered using cultural methods, approaches, and practices.

The main barrier and challenge, albeit not insurmountable, are engaging the community, especially Elders, who are considered the “keepers of tribal wisdom and knowledge,” to become more involved in the Green Reentry Program. The Elder focus group indicated a strong willingness to become engaged and a sense of responsibility for teaching youth what they know. Youth and parents also expressed a desire to learn from Elders. What seemed to be missing most was the opportunity for engagement that staff could address, with help from program partners.

Another program challenge at all three sites was the lack of program plans and guidelines for the cultural components. As a demonstration project, this is an important lesson learned. Clear descriptions of program features and expectations will help the programs identify the cultural elements most responsible for changes in a youth’s life. With help from local cultural experts, each program can identify the cultural performance measures and types of program data to collect.

The evaluation will continue to gather information about program efforts towards cultural program planning, the cultural activities, the methods and practices being used, the lessons learned, and the impact of cultural programming with youth in the Green Reentry program at each site.

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