

## Systems Access & Navigation Goal, Objective 3: Native Center, Year 4

### **Proposal submitted by UA Sonoran Center; \$120,000**

The Circle of Indigenous Empowerment (CIE; i.e., Native Center), the Native American-focused Sub-Center within the University of Arizona's Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities (Sonoran Center), partners with Arizona's 22 Tribal Nations, to further develop activities fostering awareness, services, and partnerships benefiting Native communities. The CIE's mission centers on providing culturally sensitive programs to amplify awareness of disability services, advocacy, and support within the Native American population across Arizona. Their indigenized approach to disability has proved to help reach our Tribal members with disabilities in rural hard-to-reach communities and villages. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, they have a strong digital presence that allows the Sonoran Center to continue to reach the target populations through monthly webinar series and special online events.

In its initial year, the Native Center initiated foundational activities to establish its presence. These included meetings, presentations, and outreach efforts to communicate project objectives to the community. Concurrently, partnerships with Tribal Nations, state agencies, and community organizations were cultivated, allowing for comprehensive landscape analyses of varied communities within the state.

The second year focused on implementation and expansion, manifested through talking circles, coordinated meetings, a quarterly newsletter, and a successful monthly webinar series, all geared toward addressing issues within Native American communities.

During this past third year, the Native Center faced staff changes and the hire of a new Program Manager in January 2024. With new staff, the project rebranded to the Circle of Indigenous Empowerment (CIE), broadened outreach to new partnerships with organizations focused on Tribal education, disability non-profit and advocacy programs, higher education institutions and Tribal community advocacy programs to continue monthly webinars, presentations at local, state, and national conferences, and development of awareness resources on Traumatic Brain Injury, college resource guides, and toolkits.

For the first 3 quarters of the grant period, nine webinars were held; 838 people registered and 439 attended. Attendees identified their primary role and tribal affiliation:

# Individuals with Disabilities = 22

# Family Members = 20

# Professionals Trained = 327

# Tribal Affiliated =192

The Native Center webinars, which started as Arizona statewide events, have grown to a national event attended by Tribal leaders, professionals, and individuals with disabilities across the United States. This has been pivotal in helping to grow our partnerships and outreach. Also, feedback from participants is used to guide Year Four program objectives and planned activities.

Activities planned for Year 4:

***Objective 1: Expand Outreach and Engage with 16 Tribal Education and Health Departments and 3 Tribal Colleges to identify disability and workforce needs***

Each of the 22 federally recognized Tribes have Tribal Education and Health Departments which oversee K-12, adult education, higher education assistance, Vocational Rehabilitation, Supportive Employment, Workforce Investment Opportunity, and mental health-substance misuse programs. In Year Three, the CIE has met with six Tribal Nations (Navajo Nation, the Tohono O'odham Nation, Hopi Tribe, Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community, Gila River Indian Community, Pascua Yaqui) to reestablish partnerships to identify training and educational material development needs and provide Sonoran Center resources. In Year Four, the CIE will expand outreach and engagement to additional Tribal Education and Health Departments and Tribal Colleges.

***Objective 2: Strengthen Native Youth and Adult Workforce Resources and Opportunities in Three Tribal Communities***

By forging partnerships with Tribal and non-Tribal businesses, state programs, and training centers, we intend to highlight the need to create diverse employment opportunities and culturally responsive training programs that match the skills and aspirations of Tribal Nations and members. In Year Three, the CIE met with the Navajo Nation, the Tohono O'odham Nation, Hopi Tribe, Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community, Gila River Indian Community, Pascua Yaqui and White Mountain Apache Vocational Rehabilitation and affiliated schools to share resources and identify youth and adult workforce needs. In Year Four, the CIE will focus on convening partners, increase capacity, and highlight practice-based Tribal programs.

***Objective 3: Expand monthly training and continuing education opportunities key stakeholder to increase awareness on disabilities in AZ Tribal Nations***

The CIE will provide on-site and virtual training, continuing education, and workshops for parents, health professionals, educational staff and other identified key stakeholders to improve educational services and healthcare services for Tribal members with disabilities. In Year Three, the CIE successfully hosted 11 webinars to date on topics pertinent to Tribal partners, key stakeholders and health care providers and developed resources on Traumatic Brain Injury, College Transition, Transition Services and Hearing Impairment in Tribal Communities. In Year Four the CIE will expand efforts to create additional educational resources.

***Objective 4: Focus Collaboration with State and National Federal Agencies and Tribal Programs to increase awareness on disability services for AZ Tribal Nations.***

In Year Three the CIE collaborated with the Department of Labor's Division of Indian and Native American Programs (DINAP) and provided technical assistance on nation-wide accessible training and content. In Year Four, the CIE will collaborate with higher education institutions, federal agencies, and Tribal programs to discuss, develop working groups, and increase awareness of the need to create a comprehensive network of services that address the diverse needs of Native individuals with disabilities.

***Targeted Disparity as required by ACL: By 2026, the Council will strengthen a program that increases meaningful employment opportunities for transition aged youth with I/DD (ages 14-22)***

*from the Navajo Nation by supporting a focus on training, technical assistance, direct services, and resources.*

Since the advent of the CIE, including projects under the Native Center, the transition and employment outcomes for Navajo youth with disabilities has progressed through the creation and maintenance of participation in pre-Employment Transition Services, Project SEARCH, school pilot site partnerships, and Tribal/State Vocational Rehabilitation employment supports.

The CIE staff will have a primary role in coordinating and integrating across Sonoran Center Native and Transition projects focused on meaningful employment opportunities for Native transition age youth with disabilities. This includes our partnership with the Navajo Nation's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation to build capacity for providing transition services and work-based learning opportunities that prepare and support Native youth with disabilities for post-secondary education and employment. They will work with project partners to assist in the development of training and relevant resources for schools and families, as well as participate in outreach and recruitment of Navajo youth with IDD to engage in leadership, skill building, and work-based learning opportunities that will be implemented as part of the proposed Objective 2 activities.

Evaluation data to capture for the Targeted Disparity requirement includes:

- # Navajo youth with IDD participating in work-based learning.
- # Navajo youth with IDD participating in leadership, advocacy and skill building activities.
- # Navajo Nation schools and staff receiving training and technical assistance to build capacity for transition services provision leading to meaningful employment.

The budget supports the activities, and key staff are experienced in this work. If approved, the project will begin October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025.