



governance toolkit

best practices

Principle: Performance Evaluation

Government: Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Nation

OPPORTUNITY

Like many rural tribal nations, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate in South Dakota struggled for years to combat high levels of unemployment and widespread poverty. This changed with the establishment of the Dakota Western Bagging factory and several gaming facilities, generating rapid economic growth over the past ten to fifteen years. As a result, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate is now the largest employer in the northeast corner of the state of South Dakota. However, while jobs are plentiful, many Oyate citizens have been unable to maintain employment and by the year 2000, the nation was experiencing a 70% employee turnover rate.

A coalition of concerned tribal leaders began evaluating the employee retention problem. The evaluation identified several primary issues, including limited work experience and formal education and lack of reliable transportation, as possible underlying factors. However, in addition to these primary factors, it became apparent that many tribal citizens were also coping with personal issues such as drug and alcohol addiction and a lack of inter- and intra-personal skills.

NCFNG

is a national, independent, First Nations-controlled organization dedicated to supporting First Nations as they work to implement their inherent right to self-governance. The development of a set of shared principles that clearly articulate our approach to effective governance is one way in which we support that work. This NCFNG Effective Governance Case Study profiles a best practice in the principle "Performance Evaluation".

To learn more about this case study, contact:
Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Nation
www.earthskyweb.com/sota.html

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It was evident that rather than offer the usual job skills training of resume writing and interviewing, there was a need to create a program focused on developing those inter- and intra-personal skills. Addressing these skills would not only help at-risk employees become better workers, but would also empower citizens to become healthier people, positively impacting both families and the community. To meet this need the Professional Empowerment Program (PEP) was established and offered its first two-week course in 2002.

PRINCIPLE IN ACTION

The Professional Empowerment Program (PEP) uses a curriculum based on emotional intelligence theory and centres on individuals' abilities to monitor their own and/or other people's emotions. The program uses ideas about human development to build a number of skills within each individual. By receiving both emotional and educational support, participants develop increased self-confidence, better communication skills, and the ability to manage time, finances, and emotions more effectively. They also learn how to deal with change, create long-term plans, and make healthier decisions.

PEP is impacting the Oyate in a variety of positive ways. PEP is improving the tribal economy by improving employee retention. Because of this, graduates of PEP are more financially secure and better able to care for their families. In fact, the rate of families needing assistance services has decreased from 34% to 7%. PEP graduates show higher levels of commitment at work and demonstrate improved workplace skills, such as coming to work on time, communicating more effectively with managers and co-workers, and higher levels of productivity. Most importantly, PEP is helping participants make significant changes in their lives. Program graduates testify to the impact of PEP in their lives, saying that it helped them to be more positive and be better role models for their families and community.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The continuing success and positive impact of PEP is supported by several key qualities of the program's implementation. One is a dedication to the belief that the health and well-being of every tribal citizen is important to the overall well-being of the tribal community. Also important is a commitment to structuring the program to treat the whole person in order to help them improve their lives. Constant monitoring of the program's impact on the participants and the community and adjustment where needed is vital.

PEP is deeply rooted in the fabric of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate nation. By integrating Dakota culture and values into the training curriculum, participants feel a direct connection between their everyday lives and the skills they are developing.

The program is also fully integrated into the more formal organization of the tribal government and its business enterprises. PEP was created and supported through a unique collaboration among tribal programs, businesses and agencies, including education, welfare, health care, and mental health services. Because of this complex partnership, PEP participants are better able to access services with PEP acting as a facilitator.

In 2005 the positive impact of PEP was recognized by an Honoring Nations Award from the Harvard Project.

CHALLENGES

Many PEP participants come from situations where they have experienced failures in learning, working and in their personal relationships. Making PEP a safe place for relevant, personal development to take place was critical.

Early on it was important to develop the curriculum in such a way that the people would enjoy coming to class

By starting with a solid belief that “nobody is expendable” and a dedication to improving the overall well-being of its citizens, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Nation was able to create in the PEP a program addressing the holistic needs of each person through a focus on inter- and intra-personal skills rooted in the fabric of the tribal community.

— The Harvard Project

and so that it would meet the needs and learning levels of a wide variety of participants. PEP's structure ensures mindfulness of the circumstances of individual participants' lives. As one example, because attendance is mandatory and participants often have children or other responsibilities, the program occurs over two weeks. This condensed period of time better allows for participant completion and shortens the time away from work for those supporting families.

NCFNG GOVERNANCE LESSONS LEARNED

The effective governance principle of Performance Evaluation allows for the recognition of achievement, while also shedding light on what adjustments should be implemented when expectations are not being met. Parallel to the significance of evaluating performance, is the need to report results back to the community.

In beginning with an honest assessment of their community needs and embedding ongoing evaluation in the design and implementation of PEP, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate realized a highly successful program. The following lessons learned can be transferred to other communities:

- Recognizing that in healthy societies no one is expendable, nations are wise to create programs that foster healthy individuals, thereby contributing to a strong, professional workforce as well as the overall well-being of the community.
- By focusing on the development of inter- and intra-personal skills that incorporate cultural values, individuals can be empowered to be better family members, employees, and citizens.
- Collaboration across departments, services, and employers can better facilitate professional and personal development for citizens most in need of support.

LINKS AND MORE INFORMATION

The Harvard Project: 2005 Nominee
www.hks.harvard.edu/hpaied/hn/hn_2005_ProfessionalEmpowermentProgram.htm

Honoring Nations Awards 2005
www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=509717

Arizona Native Net: video resources
www.arizonanativenet.com/news