

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY CHANGE

Key Points:

- Job growth opportunities for native youth are critical to the future success of our tribes since Native youth are the fastest growing population in the United States.
- A comprehensive, multi-agency approach is necessary to address the issues hindering economic success for many tribes.

Economic Development: For generations, Native peoples have faced harsh economic conditions that are more pronounced than those generated by the Great Recession. Today, while unemployment rates across the country hover around 6 percent, tribal governments and businesses wrestle with unemployment rates that have well-exceeded ten percent and beyond for decades. The lack of employment opportunities in Native communities has had a wide-ranging impact, affecting all aspects of life. While tribal governments have successfully supported job creation both in government and in the private sector, ensuring that job growth keeps pace with the growing Native youth population is an ongoing challenge. Considering that Indian Country has one of the youngest populations in the nation, with 42 percent of Native people under the age of 25, workforce development opportunities are of critical importance.

A comprehensive, multi-agency approach is necessary to address the issues hindering economic success for many tribes. Conditions such as minimal access to capital, poor physical infrastructure, lack of broadband access, and a need for workforce training all combine to contribute to the economic development challenges found in Indian Country. These conditions, along with inadequate funding and programs for tribes have contributed to the chronically high unemployment rates throughout Indian Country. Honoring the trust responsibility and addressing the key economic needs will unleash the economic power of Indian Country. The results will be beneficial for not only our tribal nations but for the United States as well. Tribal nations and the federal government must work together to fulfill the promises of the past to secure prosperity for future generations.

Financial Literacy: Native communities have historically lacked access to traditional sources of credit, capital, and financial institutions. However, this is beginning to shift, due to increasing economic prosperity, recent legal settlements, and technological advances that have become available to tribal communities – in particular Native youth. With 42 percent of the Native population younger than age 25, tribal leaders have prioritized empowering Native young people to better understand and navigate financial decisions, both as individuals and future leaders of Native nations.

Job Readiness: As trustee to tribes, the federal government has a solemn responsibility to support the economic prosperity and security of Indian Country. The empowerment of tribal efforts to manage and control their own affairs requires the federal government to provide tribes with the flexibility needed to prepare their tribal workforce, while removing barriers and bureaucratic hurdles that undermine tribal self-determination and discourage private investment in tribal communities.

One of the key challenges to tribal governments is creating job opportunities at the local level while building capacity of tribal members to fill those positions when they become available. This requires the appropriate educational and training opportunities are available to tribal members in conjunction with the long term planning efforts of the tribal government so that tribal members can fill jobs in critical fields that will make a difference for their communities over the long term.

From youth-based workplace internship programs to service-based college scholarship programs to master-apprentice job training initiatives to ongoing professional development opportunities for tribal employees, more and more tribal nations are ensuring that their youth have the opportunities to succeed individual and on behalf of their tribal nations.