

Bridging Tribal Colleges with Tribal Environmental Departments Gets Results

Montana Indian Country CARE Project (MICCP), CARE Grantee: Rocky Mountain College (RMC), Level II

Introduction: Rocky Mountain College served as a neutral administrator of the Montana Indian Country CARE Project (MICCP). The Project included four communities, Fort Peck, Fort Belknap, Northern Cheyenne, and Crow are comprised of American Indian people predominantly living in poverty. These communities are remote, with very few services, environmental infrastructure, and employment opportunities. They are similar in that members experience environmental challenges including: emissions from coal fired power plants, close proximity to mining activities, cement plants, abandoned mines, leaking underground storage tanks, hazardous and non-hazardous waste management, water quality compromises, underfunded programs, and indoor air quality challenges.

Communities came together through MICCP because they shared a common interest in improving the health of their community and environment. Unlike other EPA programs, CARE focuses on community-based identification of environmental priorities and interventions to facilitate change.

Needs: Initially there was a need to determine how each community would work independently, in conjunction with partners, and as an active partner in the overall Project. During the Project, there was a need to evaluate the effectiveness of working collectively. In the end, it was evident that tribal colleges and tribal environmental departments who are part of the same community are often synergistic in their activities and results. Therefore, the promising best practice is, Bridging Tribal Colleges with Tribal Environmental Departments Gets Results.

Promising Practice: Bridging Tribal Colleges with Tribal Environmental Departments Gets Results.

Tribal colleges located in CARE communities serve as neutral places for learning and meeting. Tribal environmental departments are located in CARE communities but serve a different purpose, to protect the environment through regulatory measures that promote environmental stewardship and environmental best practices.

It is not unusual for programs and resources to work autonomously, without the assistance of one or more agency in Indian Country. The isolation that tribal programs feel when working on environmental toxic reduction projects may, in some cases, be overwhelming. The Montana Indian Country CARE Project was a neutral partner in each community. This neutrality facilitated partnerships that bridged tribal colleges and tribal environmental departments.

There were a number of principles that the CARE Project documented during the grant period that may be useful to other tribal recipients or multi-community recipient.

- Flexibility in time. The continuum of time proved both beneficial and challenging. Community based projects took longer than expected, and in general the greater number of people involved the more time a project will take.
- Monetary support. It is important to pay project staff for their time. Unemployment and poverty levels are high. CARE must include monetary support for workers, businesses, colleges, and other partners.
- Education to see change. Bringing community members into a tribal college to learn a new skill relating to toxic reduction pays off. The Project utilized tribal colleges for labs, computer applications, and meetings. This was extremely effective in growing the partnership and the knowledge of communities.
- Change as the community changes. There were a number of partners who left the project and some new partners that joined. Communities were changing each day, month, and year. The Project changed with them and modified the work plan to address change.
- If a community does not show a commitment – stop. This seems obvious enough but is worth repeating. There were a number of times when original activities were cancelled because the Project did not have adequate commitment from the community.
- Services to community. It was important that CARE be visible to community members, not a brochure or pen. Communities want action and results through service and opportunities for service.
- One size does not fit all. When there is not a brochure or resource available on a certain topic (i.e. junk vehicles for Indian Country), make one. The importance of sharing pertinent resources with a community that will enable them to address their needs is most important.

Overall Project Progress and Results:

- Indoor Air quality/Asthma- 93 homes at Northern Cheyenne and Fort Peck reached on indoor air quality and asthma triggers.
- Healthy homes training – reached 28 people using multiple partners and remote sites.
- Home inspections- three homes inspected as part of the healthy homes training.
- Removed 7,058 pounds of hazardous chemicals from 13 schools; protecting 2,533 students.
- Recycled 295,460 pounds of metal from cars. Recycled 34 tires, 780 pounds of toxic fluids, 12 truckloads of scrap metal, 1,333 tons of cardboard, 102 foam rubber carpets, plastic components (PCB) disposed; and 31.57 tons of solid waste disposed
- Convened environmental professionals from 11 different tribes to learn about Solid Waste compliance and enforcement.
- 3,500 people contacted about illegal dumping, signs posted at 8 sites.

- Removed 102 mercury switches from cars, 19.2 pounds of mercury from a school lab, 57 car transmissions & oil disposed from car recycling, and 102 car batteries (acid) disposed of properly.
- 88 community members learned how to use GIS/GPS. Second class offered on remote sensing reaching 21 people.
- 100 K-12 students at Crow and Northern Cheyenne schools participated in a Lead Poster contest and learned about the impact of Lead in the environment and on health.
- \$29,221 received from multiple organizations in the community.
- \$50,000 received from EPA for school chemical clean-out.
- \$ 30,000 Community Leadership Training awarded to Fort Peck.

- Overall the Project touched the lives of 21,910 people.