

CONSTRUCTION INTERNSHIP PROGRAM



2017-2019
Retrospective Report



Mission & Vision

The mission of the South Dakota Native Homeownership Coalition is to increase homeownership opportunities for South Dakota's Native people to build strong and healthy communities. The Coalition works to achieve its vision of strong, thriving, sustainable communities in South Dakota where Native people have the opportunity to achieve their dream of homeownership.

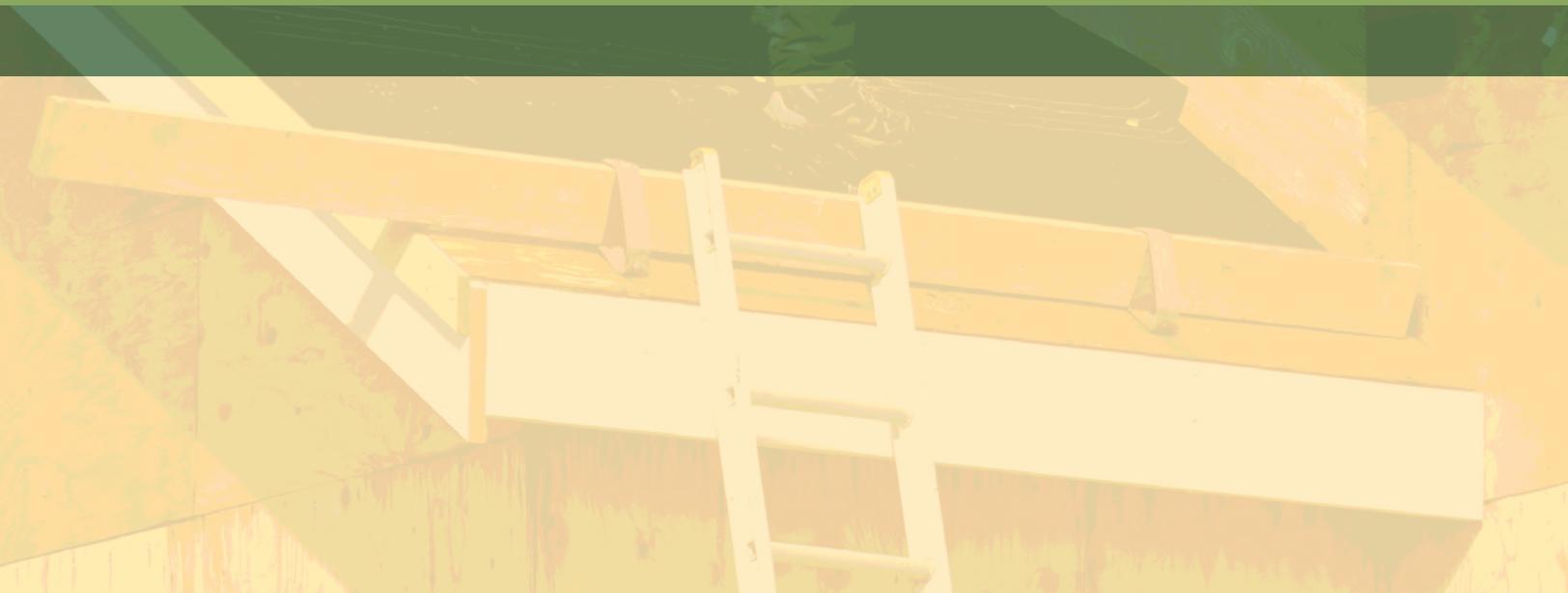




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TAWNEY BRUNSCH

Executive Director, Lakota Funds

THIS WAS a milestone year for the Coalition's Construction Internship Program as we expanded to include two new partner sites and grow the construction industry's workforce on South Dakota's reservations even more. Since launching the program in 2017, it has developed an outstanding reputation that has attracted interest from many Native communities. We were pleased to select a few new community partners – Rosebud Economic Development Corporation, Rosebud Sioux Tribe Housing Authority/Sicangu Wicoti Awanyakapi Corporation, and Sicangu Nation Employment and Training Program on the Rosebud Reservation and Sisseton Wahpeton Housing Authority and Sisseton Wahpeton Employment and Training Program on the Lake Traverse Reservation – to continue building and replicating the model throughout the state.

With a few years of experience under my belt in implementing the program on the Pine Ridge Reservation, I was honored to provide support to our new program partners. A lot of the work we did in this regard was essentially providing peer-to-peer technical assistance to share best practices and help our new partners identify priorities and action items to get their local programs off the ground. Although formalizing these new partnerships was complicated by distance barriers, it came with great rewards. In 2017, we had 11 interns complete the program, and in 2018, we had 26. This year, that more than doubled to 55 interns! We have now engaged nearly 20 contractors in Indian Country, providing capacity-building assistance as well as a willing workforce.

Another exciting new development is the partnership we are forming with South Dakota's Department of Labor and Regulation (DLR). We began exploring the possibility of creating synergies between our internship program and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) more than a year ago. Although we found a very willing partner in DLR, we came across some regulatory challenges. Despite that, we continued working together to find a solution. Due to the persistence and dedication on both ends, it seems very promising that our next group of interns will participate in the state's WIOA program. This will not only provide critical funding to continue and expand the program, but it will also connect the interns to additional resources.

Now, going into our fourth year of the program, our partnerships are stronger than ever. We have formed a small, but dynamic group of partners that is building momentum and creating change in Indian Country. Together, we are working to identify more best practices and establish a model that can be replicated in Native communities everywhere. I can't wait to see what we do in the years to come!



ALISSA BENOIST

Program Coordinator, Four Bands Community Fund

AS FOUR BANDS has been working with the young people of the Cheyenne River Reservation for over a decade, it was a natural progression to integrate the Coalition's Construction Internship Program into our youth programming. For the last three years, we have placed approximately 20 of our 50 summer interns in construction-industry jobs. Although it is the busiest time of year for me as the Program Coordinator, I enjoy it and feel it is worthwhile. The interns gain an appreciation for the trades as well as some experience in working and saving.

Time and again, the internship program has brought applicants to light that have been passed over by construction firms before. With the assurance that Four Bands works closely with each of our interns, our local contractors become more willing to take risks in hiring a candidate without experience or that doesn't fit their standard qualifications. This gives the interns the chance to prove themselves, and in the bigger picture it creates an equal opportunity for willing workers to improve their work skills and provide for their families. This strategy is a proven success as evidenced by the fact that we have several interns who were hired on permanently, have progressed in the work place, and are still working for the same employer years later. This is huge!

But, it is not only about the jobs; it is about providing a support system that is not readily accessible to so many of our youth. I have found that building connections right away is the key to ensuring we can deliver the support our participants need. Through a visioning exercise that we implement with our interns, we have found that no matter their background or their life circumstances, everyone wants their own home, a safe place for their family, a nice vehicle, and a job. Of course, there are variations to this. The training we deliver after that exercise is designed to provide the interns with the tools they need to achieve their goals. It includes a wide variety of topics, such as budgeting, resume building, or communication. These are skills that interns can take with them beyond the project period and that contribute to a stronger local workforce all together.

As we are preparing for our fourth year of the Coalition's Construction Internship Program, we are looking forward to working collaboratively with our partners to continue strengthening this amazing program.

AS A NEW PARTNER SITE in the Coalition's Construction Internship Program, I couldn't have imagined what an amazing experience this was going to be. To begin with, the demand for the program exceeded our expectations. We ended up placing 15 interns in construction firms, and 12 completed the program. However, there is far more to the story than the numbers.

We had an amazing group of young people that were so grateful for the opportunity, because there just aren't any jobs in our community. I had the privilege of working directly with our interns, and got to support them through their challenges as well as celebrate their successes. Many of our interns came from dysfunctional homes, led rough lifestyles, and had been incarcerated before. But, this program changed their outlook on life. It provided them with a positive experience and demonstrated how hard work and responsible financial choices results in the achievement of one's goals.

I was surprised by the fact that all of our interns said they found the classroom training component of the program very valuable. Our comprehensive training enabled them to build their financial, workplace, social and emotional, and personal goal-setting skillsets. It was awesome to see them put those skills into practice! One of our interns purchased a computer, and another bought books for school. I was in awe when the two wildest of the bunch bought cars, accessing reliable transportation for the first time in their lives. One of our interns moved to a nearby city and started out as a bus boy at a restaurant. Because of the work ethic he gained in our program, he was promoted to cook within a matter of months.

As this was our first year participating in the Coalition's Construction Internship Program, we learned a lot. We were grateful that we could draw on the wisdom and support of the program partners that had a couple more years' experience than us. We also appreciated the flexibility in the program model to adapt and customize program components to best fit the needs of our participants and community. All in all, it was a very successful outcome and we look forward to making it even better next year.



**TAFFY
LAFFERTY**

Development Officer, Rosebud Economic Development Corporation

A circular portrait of Elias Mendoza, a man with glasses and a dark jacket, looking slightly to the right. The portrait is framed by several concentric orange and yellow circles.

ELIAS MENDOZA

Program Director, Sisseton-Wahpeton 477/Employment Training Service Center

OUR 477/EMPLOYMENT Training Service Center at Sisseton is unique in that it co-mingles our adult education, workforce development, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs so that we can leverage resources and maximize our effectiveness. The Coalition's Construction Internship Program fit well into the mix, and I thought it was one of the best things we put together in a long time. By working together with the Sisseton Wahpeton Housing Authority, we brought five interns through the program with a 100% completion rate.

When we explained the financial literacy requirement to the interns, they all thought at first it was going to be boring. But Mary Barse, our Financial Literacy Instructor, did a great job. By the end of the summer, all of our interns thought it was the most beneficial part of the program. They appreciated it so much and wish they knew about it before. We were grateful to leverage funding from Northwest Area Foundation to deliver this program component.

We use a flexible curriculum and customize it to fit each class, but we always emphasize saving. Our interns heard from local financial institutions on how to open an account, apply for loans, and other financial products. The things they learned open their eyes to things they maybe feared before.

Many of our interns were never taught how to manage money responsibly. The topic of finances seemed overwhelming. When we sat down and started to break it down for them, it was an empowering experience. What's even greater is they had the perfect opportunity to put the principles they learned in the classroom into practice with their paychecks.

Our interns developed a solid work ethic, got on-the-job experience in an industry that is in high demand, and gained critical financial knowledge. In short, it gave these young people the tools they need to move forward in this world in a positive way.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW



Introduction

In 2017, the South Dakota Native Homeownership Coalition launched our Construction Internship Program, placing college students with local construction contractors for a ten week period over the summer. Over the past three years, we have provided the opportunity for college students to gain valuable work experience, expanded from two tribal communities to four, seen contractors hire their interns on a permanent basis, implemented impactful financial education training, and built the capacity of local contractors. For many interns, the Construction Internship Program has been life-changing, increasing their self-confidence and belief in themselves.

The Coalition's Construction Internship Program came out of conversations with construction contractors, who shared that one obstacle to residential construction is the lack of a qualified workforce. In working to increase Native homeownership, the Coalition had identified the lack of housing stock as one critical barrier to Native homeownership, and began hosting "contractor roundtable discussions" to explore why contractors weren't building more homes in Native communities. Recognizing that many Native communities have tribal colleges with building trades programs, the Coalition designed the internship to place construction students with contractors, providing the opportunity for contractors to train and mentor interns, with the understanding that they would hire interns if they had positions available.

This report shares details about our Construction Internship Program over its three-year history:

- ✘ An explanation of how the program works and how it has evolved
- ✘ Program impact and outcomes
- ✘ Success stories
- ✘ Key partnerships
- ✘ Lessons Learned
- ✘ Plans for the future

How the Program Works

Through the internship, interns are placed with participating contractors. Managing organizations on each site oversee the program, conducting outreach to interns and contractors, managing the application and selection process, making placements, holding orientation sessions for interns and contractors, managing stipends, monitoring on-site work, troubleshooting issues as they arise, and conducting exit interviews with interns and contractors. Interns work for up to 400 hours over the summer, averaging 40 hours per week. The Coalition has raised funds to pay each intern a \$10/hour stipend, for up to \$4,000. The Coalition has also provided a modest stipend for contractors (\$1000 - \$2,500) to offset their expenses in taking on an intern. In addition to their on-site work, interns are required to participate in regular financial education classes taught by the managing organization or a partner organization.



A Brief History: How the Program has Evolved

The Coalition began piloting the Construction Internship Program in two tribal communities in 2017, on the Cheyenne River Reservation and the Pine Ridge Reservation. During this first year, all interns attended Oglala Lakota College. Two Native Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) served as the managing organizations for the pilot: Four Bands Community Fund on Cheyenne River, and Lakota Funds on Pine Ridge. The goals of the pilot were to:

- ✘ Provide hands-on construction experience for building trades students;
- ✘ Create the opportunity for local, reservation-based contractors to “test” and build relationships with building trades students for possible future employment; (in a risk-free arrangement);
- ✘ Develop pools of employment-ready graduates, which can play a key role in strengthening contractor businesses through expansion opportunities;
- ✘ Provide employment opportunities for building trades graduates in reservation communities with high unemployment rates;
- ✘ Enable interns to access financial education instruction to teach budgeting, money management, understanding credit, and the importance of saving;
- ✘ Increase interns’ access to financial products, including bank accounts and loans; and
- ✘ Create a workforce development model that can be replicated in tribal communities across the state and nationwide.

In 2018, the Coalition continued the pilot program on Cheyenne River and Pine Ridge, partnering with Four Bands and Lakota Funds to solidify and stabilize the program. During this second year, the program was opened to students beyond Oglala Lakota College. In 2019, the program expanded to two additional tribal communities: the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate on the Lake Traverse Reservation and the Sicangu Nation on the Rosebud Reservation, bringing the number of communities offering the program to four. Partner organizations on each site are outlined below:

- **Cheyenne River Reservation**
Four Bands Community Fund
- **Pine Ridge Reservation**
Lakota Funds
- **Lake Traverse Reservation**
Sisseton Wahpeton Employment and Training Program, Sisseton Wahpeton Housing Authority
- **Rosebud Reservation**
Rosebud Economic Development Corporation (REDCO), SWA Corporation (Rosebud Housing Authority), and Sicangu Nation Employment and Training Program

“

I never thought about credit or about building credit. I never thought I needed it. I now know the importance of it. It is important to understand when renting an apartment or gaining employment.

”



“

I liked the financial literacy part and learning about how important credit is in the world.

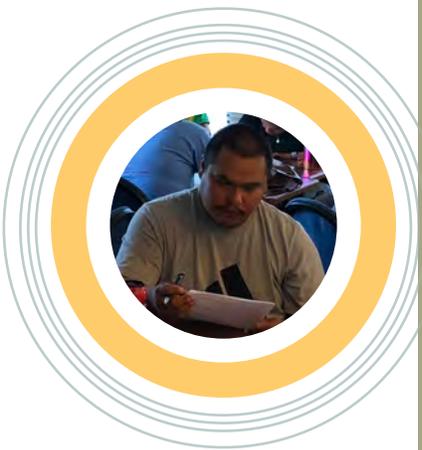
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“

I learned how to build credit and save in the financial literacy class. I am saving a little more money now.

”

BUILDING PERSONAL SKILLS



IN ADDITION TO hands-on construction experience, interns were also required to complete training designed to build a variety of personal skills. These classes were scheduled in coordination with pay days to incentivize interns to attend and participate in these value-added trainings. Some of the partners used the Native youth financial education curriculum that Four Bands developed, and agreed that it was an effective tool for the interns. The curriculum covers financial education topics using language, activities, and exercises that meet the needs of participants.

Topics that the curriculum covers include:

- ✘ Identifying needs vs. wants
- ✘ Budgeting
- ✘ Checking accounts
- ✘ Credit
- ✘ Values
- ✘ Goals
- ✘ Saving
- ✘ Plugging spending leaks

Each partner organization customized the training component of the program to meet the specific needs of their community members. Partners also added additional topics, such as communication, resume building, and social emotional training to improve employability skills of program participants.

The training interns receive during the program is especially effective because participants have the opportunity to put new knowledge and skills to practice in a real-life situation right away. At the start of the program each year, interns typically are not excited about the training component. However, by the end of the internship almost all participants say that it was the most valuable part of the whole program. As a result of the training, interns have opened bank accounts for the first time ever, started budgeting, established savings goals, and purchased vehicles.



PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The impacts of the Construction Internship Program have spread far and wide, effecting individual workers and local communities as well as regional economies. The program is building up a qualified trades workforce and strengthening the construction sector in reservation communities, which supports increased housing stock and homeownership options for Native families.



Students gained hands-on construction experience on actual construction projects in the community.



Contractors developed relationships with future employees.



Students are more confident about their prospects of finding employment on the reservation after graduation.



Contractors have already hired a number of interns, and are growing their businesses.



Local CDFIs (Lakota Funds and Four Bands) have strengthened their relationships with local contracting businesses (current and potential clients).



Interns have strengthened their financial skills and have increased their access to financial products.



Contractors expanded their capacity to meet the increased demand for housing stock.

BUILDING A WORKFORCE FOR A STRONGER CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Cambryn Rivers & Cheyenne River Housing Authority



“
*Cambryn showed up all the time,
got started, and wanted to work.*
”

IN 2018, Cambryn Rivers had been working at the grocery store on the Cheyenne River Reservation in Eagle Butte, South Dakota for several years. Although it was a steady job, there wasn't much room for advancement. As a student in Oglala Lakota College's General Construction program seeking to better himself financially, Cambryn applied for a job at Cheyenne River Housing Authority. It was a disappointment when he never got a call back, but he discovered another opportunity through the Construction Internship Program that was being delivered in partnership by Four Bands Community Fund and the South Dakota Native Homeownership Coalition. Through the Program, Cambryn ended up being placed just where he wanted to be – at the Cheyenne River Housing Authority.

Aaron Webb, a head supervisor at Cheyenne River Housing Authority who is responsible for up to 50 employees, has participated in the Construction Internship Program since its launch in 2017. As he takes on interns, he finds out their interests and pairs them up with experienced workers so they can learn.

“Everyone starts in labor positions, but they get an opportunity to work in the area they would like to learn about,” says Aaron.

Cambryn's first assignment was renovating the inside of a house. As it was something new, he says he was kind of nervous, but he stuck with it and became a model employee.

“Cambryn showed up all the time, got started, and wanted to work,” says Aaron, reflecting on Cambryn's internship.

The day after Cambryn completed his internship, he was hired on full-time.

“I was surprised in a good way,” he says.

Three years later, Cambryn says he knows a lot more than he did coming into the internship, and he is more confident.



“Now I can drive heavy machinery. I never did that before. Having the opportunity to gain that experience has given me confidence,” says Cambryn.

He enjoys the variety his job offers and the comradery among co-workers. He has also become a resource for family and friends. People come to him for advice on how to do things, and he is happy to give it to them.

“Signing up for the internship was the best choice I made so far,” he says.

After being hired on full-time, Cambryn continued with his education and received his Associate’s degree in General Construction in 2019. He continues to raise the bar for himself, and recently went back to school for a Bachelor’s degree. He is also working at building up his credit so he can purchase a vehicle, and would someday like to own his own home. He says the financial education he received during the internship has influenced his personal goals and habits. During the internship, Cambryn completed a total of 10 hours of personal finance training and built his skills in the areas of identifying needs versus wants, budgeting, checking accounts, credit, goals, and saving.

“Those classes helped me out. Some stuff I still do – like the budgeting,” says Cambryn.

Aaron is looking forward to another year of participating in the Construction Internship Program.

“I tell them every year, I’ll take all you got,” he says.

He says the best thing about participating in the Program is that they get to help a lot of local people out and show them what they do at the Housing Authority. It’s a career, not just “a fall back if they can’t get anything else.”

“If they want it, there’s a future in it. There are options,” says Aaron.



“
*Signing up for the internship was
the best choice I made so far.*
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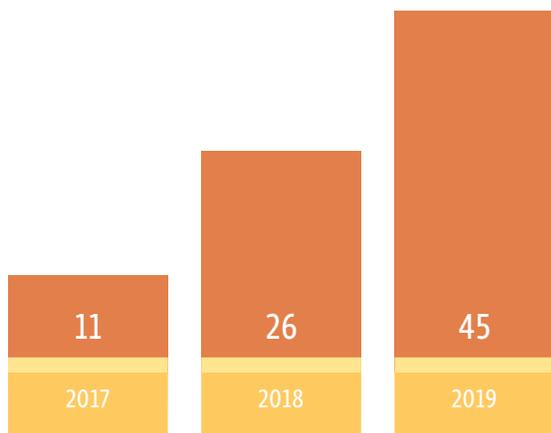
KEY INDICATORS OF PROGRAM SUCCESS

Partner organizations collected a range of data, which was compiled and analyzed to gauge the success of the Construction Internship Program. Metrics revealed program success across several dimensions, including completion rate, higher education, employment, personal finance skills, and contractor capacity.

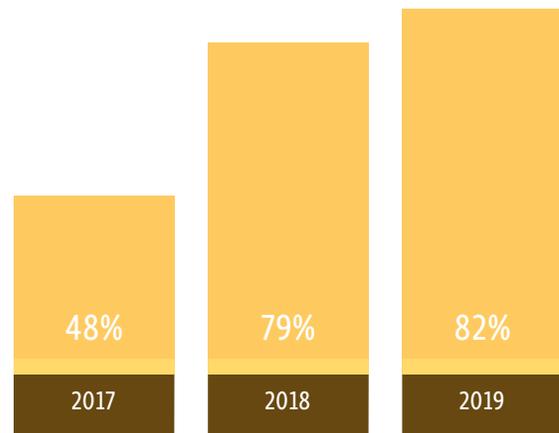
➤ PARTICIPATION & COMPLETION (2017-2019)



➤ INTERNS WHO COMPLETED



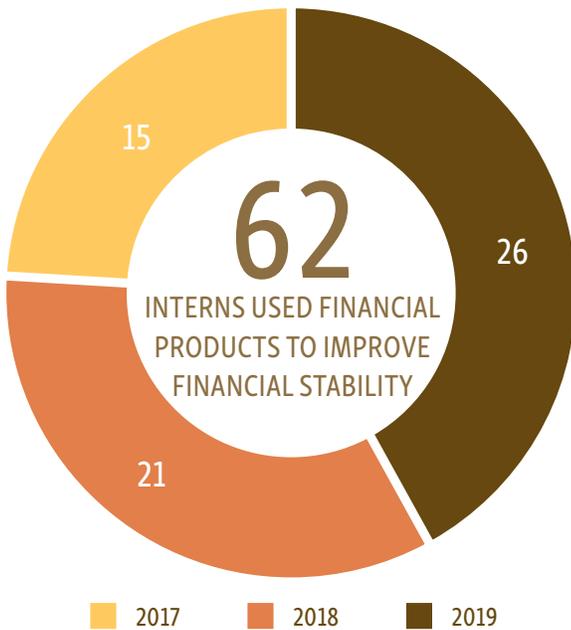
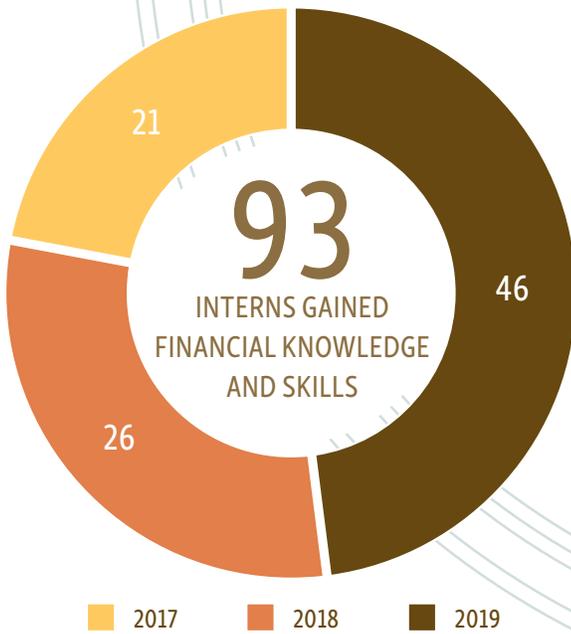
➤ COMPLETION RATE



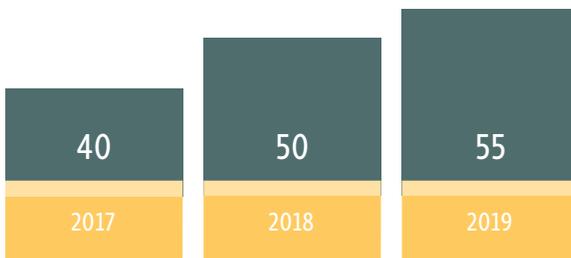
➤ EMPLOYMENT & EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS (2017-2019)



➤ FINANCIAL CAPABILITY



➤ CONTRACTOR CAPABILITY



HOURS OF TA DELIVERED

TESTIMONIALS

- “ Being a part of a team was the most valuable thing to me.
- “ This was a chance to step out of my comfort zone.
- “ I learned how to hold myself and others accountable.
- “ There are people on the reservation [Rosebud] that actually do for the good of the Oyate. Wopila.
- “ I learned how to better communicate to get the job done faster. I had to communicate a lot with my co-workers. I learned that by watching them.
- “ I have more confidence than I did before. I know more of what an employer expects in the workplace.
- “ I feel more valuable to my tribe and community.
- “ Honestly, I'll be able to work with my head up for a while, a big change.
- “ I'm conserving and saving my money as much as I can now. Budgeting ahead before I spend.
- “ This was amazing program that offered many different opportunities.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

Partner Commitment and Planning

Partner commitment and joint planning has played a critical role in the development and success of the Construction Internship Program. Since the inception of the program, partners have met by phone on a regular basis throughout the year, and conducted an in-person planning session each fall. This session focuses on reflecting on the previous summer – looking at what went well, and potential improvements. Partners also develop a detailed timeline, outlining key steps to prepare for the coming summer’s programming.

In the fall of 2019, program partners met for a full day in Pierre. During their session, partners had the opportunity to address key questions, including:

- ✘ Should we broaden our definition of construction and eligible placements?
- ✘ Can we expand beyond college students?
- ✘ Should the Coalition secure resources to hire a CIP manager?
- ✘ What should partnership with the Department of Labor and Regulation look like?
- ✘ What should we do differently next year?



Partnership with the South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation

After launching the pilot internship with private sources of support, the Coalition realized that in order to ensure long-term sustainability for the program, it would be important to diversify funding and explore public sources of funding. In 2017, we began discussions with the South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation (DLR), looking at how we could partner to access federal Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Funds to support intern stipends. Through this partnership, DLR would provide funding for 25 hours each week for qualified interns, and the Coalition’s partner organizations would need to meet certain DLR requirements. While these requirements, including the program’s payment structure and mandated workmen’s compensation, initially posed barriers for the partnership with DLR, the Coalition is now poised to launch our formal partnership with the department. The Coalition and DLR plan to sign a Memorandum of Understanding in the spring of 2020, to begin supporting qualified interns in summer 2020. We plan to launch this partnership on the Pine Ridge Reservation, with the hope of expanding to additional tribal communities in the future. Beyond funding for stipends, this mutually-beneficial partnership will provide other valuable resources and support for interns, while assisting the Department in reaching qualified tribal members. According to Kendra Ringstmeyer, the Director of Workforce Training at the SD Department of Labor and Regulation:

The Department of Labor and Regulation is excited to partner with Lakota Funds and the SD Native Homeownership Coalition in the summer of 2020 to build an internship program offering young adults an opportunity to gain skills in the construction industry. Our Career Launch SD comprehensive program not only helps individuals learn construction skills, but will develop an employment plan, explore career options, build financial literacy, and fine tune job searching skills.



LESSONS LEARNED

IN OFFERING the program over the past three years, the Coalition has learned some important lessons, which will inform our work moving forward. These lessons include:

➤ **Initial outreach and information sharing are vital.**

Internship partners have learned that initial outreach is critical. Potential interns must have a real understanding of the program, how it operates, and its requirements. They also need to think through how they will address potential challenges, including transportation and childcare. This way, potential interns can make informed decisions about whether or not to apply to participate in the program.

➤ **Ensure sufficient staff capacity to provide intern support.**

In offering the internship for three years, we have seen the need to provide solid, on-going intern support. Beyond making initial placements and teaching financial education classes, partner organizations must ensure staff capacity to provide on-going intern support, on-site monitoring (visiting interns at their placement sites regularly) and trouble shooting. This on-going support leads to higher retention rates and more successful experiences for both interns and contractors.

➤ **Partnerships with tribal employment and training programs are very valuable.**

Over the past year, the Coalition began partnering with the Sisseton Wahpeton Employment and Training Program, as well as the Sicangu Nation Employment and Training Program. These partners, with their focus on workforce development, bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the internship. They may be able to support interns by purchasing work gear, providing financial education classes, and contributing to intern stipends.

➤ **Evaluation and data tracking are critical, and must begin early.**

Since the inception of the Construction Internship, program partners have recognized the importance of evaluation and data tracking, tracking each participant and conducting exit interviews with contractors and interns upon completion of the internship. As the program has expanded to additional tribal sites, partners have underscored the need to strengthen tracking and evaluation tools and metrics, and share these tools and metrics from the outset, before interns are placed on their sites.

ON THE HORIZON: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

AFTER THREE YEARS of operating the Construction Internship Program, partners are committed to continuing to provide the program for their community members in the future. In planning for the coming year, partners have agreed on the following elements of the program:

➤ **Use a broad definition of construction.**

While initial placements focused solely on home construction, based on needs and opportunities in our Native communities, we want to look at elements of homeownership more broadly. We want to consider placements with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, for example, to focus on the leasehold process, as well as placements with Indian Health Services, to focus on infrastructure development.

➤ **Broaden eligibility requirements beyond college students.**

After making college enrollment an eligibility requirement for the first three years of the program, program partners have recommended going beyond college students. They have noted that the internship can be life-changing, and provides valuable opportunities not typically found in tribal communities. In the words of one intern:

... I would recommend it [the internship] to people who need it – college students, people who have a hard time finding a job, people who don't have a lot of opportunities.

➤ **Expand partnerships with tribal employment and training programs.**

In the third year of the internship program, the Coalition partnered with tribal employment and training programs for the first time, on the Lake Traverse and Rosebud





Reservations. These programs, which traditionally focus on workforce development programming and supports, were valuable internship partners, and the Coalition seeks to expand these partnerships to additional tribal communities in the future.

➤ **Continue to provide financial education classes for interns.**

Interns repeatedly emphasize the value and importance of financial education classes, sharing how their financial behavior has changed as a result. Financial education is a critical component of the Construction Internship, which the Coalition is committed to expanding in the future.

➤ **Strengthen data tracking and evaluation systems.**

Program partners are committed to developing a more robust tracking system, revising evaluation instruments, and ensuring that each partner has a clear understanding of evaluation metrics from the outset.

➤ **Expand and grow the program carefully.**

After piloting the program for one year in two tribal communities, partners determined that it would be best to continue in these two communities for an additional year, to strengthen and solidify the program. When we expanded to two additional communities in the third year, it was a significant lift for the Coalition. New communities greatly expanded the geography of the program, the distance between partners, and impacted partner communication and coordination. Looking forward, the Coalition plans to continue to work in these four communities for the next year, with the possibility of expanding to additional communities when the commitment, capacity, and infrastructure is in place.





Citi Foundation



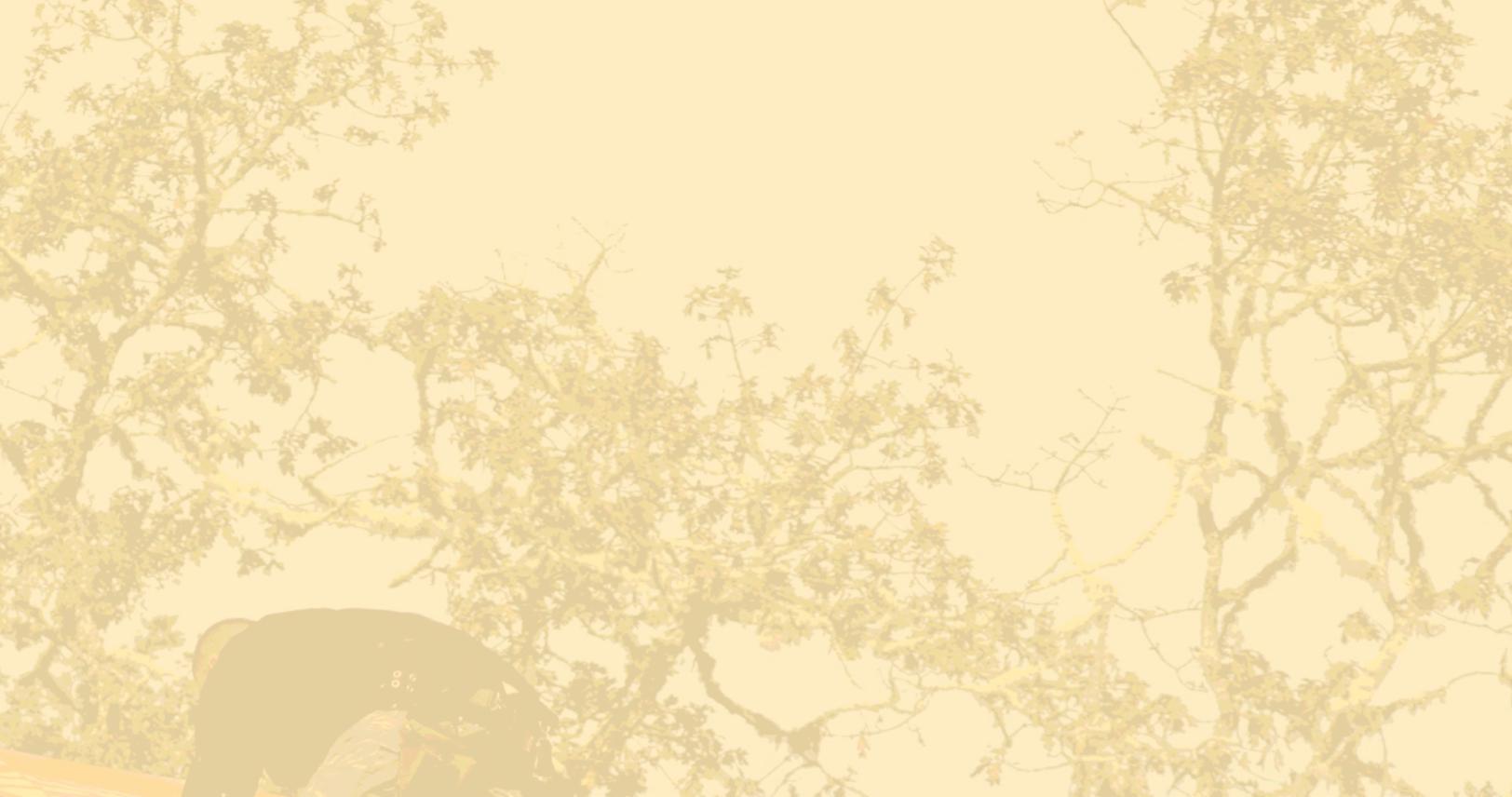
JOHNSON SCHOLARSHIP
Foundation



Northwest Area
Foundation

Wopila Tanka

The South Dakota Native Homeownership Coalition would like to acknowledge the Bush Foundation, Citi Foundation, Johnson Scholarship Foundation, and the Northwest Area Foundation for their funding support of our construction industry programming.





SOUTH DAKOTA
Native Homeownership
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