

State-Tribal Collaboration in Home Visiting: Lessons Learned for Improving Data Collection and Utilization

Brief

Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation

February 2021

Collaboration between state and tribal governments is fundamental to supporting the health and well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children and families, many of whom are afforded the rights and benefits of citizenship by both their tribal nations and the states where they live. Effective coordination of services across governments is particularly important given the disparate health and education outcomes among AI/AN families.¹ However, levels of coordination vary widely across states and tribes. Such variations, coupled with past inadequate consideration of tribal interests by state governments, can present roadblocks for respectful, effective collaboration.

The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program, administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration in collaboration with the Administration for Children and Families, presents an opportunity to strengthen state-tribal collaboration while implementing evidence-based home visiting services in tribal communities. The federal program funds states, territories, jurisdictions, or nonprofits, which then typically contract with local implementing agencies (LIAs) to deliver home visiting services. Awardees may decide to work alongside tribal communities to provide home visiting services and comply with legislated requirements of collecting and reporting performance data. A collaborative focus on data collection, management, and reporting can help tribal nations safeguard the privacy of their citizens while ensuring states and tribes can effectively use data to improve home visiting services and sustain programming.

This brief describes three principles to guide collaborative data practice by drawing on technical assistance (TA) providers' experiences supporting tribal communities, MIECHV awardee reflections shared through a State-Tribal LIA

The Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation (DOHVE) project helps state MIECHV awardees better partner with tribal LIAs serving AI/AN families through data collection, sharing, ownership, management, and reporting.



Collaboration Community of Practice (CoP),ⁱ and existing resources, such as *A Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation in Tribal Communities*.² The brief includes implementation strategies, case studies, and additional resources to support collaboration.

Guiding Principles

Many state MIECHV awardees and tribal LIAs use the following three principles to strengthen their collaboration around data practices:

- » Transparency
- » Ongoing communication
- » Reciprocal relationships

Although not meant as a comprehensive list, these principles can foster successful state-tribal LIA collaboration. Below, each principle is described in this context, followed by general strategies to implement the principle and examples from states.

Transparency

A transparent relationship is one with visibility and accessibility of information and expectations. Transparent relationships between awardees and tribal LIAs allow both parties to develop a shared understanding of their interactions. This includes a clear description of the home visiting program's goals and expectations, for both the awardee and tribal LIA, in supporting program implementation and data collaboration. Both parties should understand how program data are collected, stored, interpreted, and reported.²

State MIECHV awardees can promote transparency by partnering with tribal LIAs to establish formal agreements—memoranda of understanding (MOU) or contracts. These agreements should clearly outline the purpose of the relationship, including which party is responsible for each aspect of program implementation. Formal agreements should also detail data processes, including—

- » Consent and privacy considerations related to data collection, storage, and use
- » Entities responsible for collecting, storing, and reporting data
- » The frequency at which data activities should occur

Awardees may have formal agreements with multiple entities. For example, a state awardee may have a formal agreement with a local community organization for implementing MIECHV in a tribal community and another with a tribal nation for obtaining child maltreatment data for performance reporting.

ⁱ For 3 years, the CoP supported awardees in building relationships with tribal LIAs to promote successful data practices. Attendees participated in peer-to-peer dialogues, and facilitators provided resources and suggested promising practices.

Awardee Spotlight: South Dakota

Two of **South Dakota's** local MIECHV programs have served tribal communities. The South Dakota MIECHV team developed an MOU with each tribal nation's child protective services agency to obtain child maltreatment data for annual performance reporting. The team's strategies for developing transparent agreements included—

- ‖ Making the agreement short and straightforward
- ‖ Outlining the specific data the state would request
- ‖ Specifying how the data would be analyzed and reported
- ‖ Specifying how the two agencies would transfer data

Agreements were successfully executed when the awardee team developed personal relationships with agency staff. For example, state MIECHV staff visited agencies to introduce themselves and discuss the goals of the home visiting program before developing an agreement.

Ongoing Communication

Communication between awardees and tribal LIAs should be open, continuous, and authentic. To support authentic communication, it may be helpful to establish boundaries and ground rules so that participants can safely express honest views and opinions during discussions. Awardees should also focus on listening and not centering the conversation around their own agenda. Tribal LIAs may have a preferred communication method that awardees should consider. For example, some tribal communities hold oral communication through storytelling in higher regard than written communication. Awardees and tribal LIAs can demonstrate the value of frequent communication by holding recurring meetings with few cancellations. Over time, this type of communication builds trusting relationships between awardees and tribal LIAs.^{2, 3}

Frequently sharing data and discussing the results can help promote ongoing, authentic communication between state MIECHV awardees and tribal LIAs. Tribal LIAs send performance data to awardees, who should then analyze the data and share the results with LIAs to inform discussions about data quality, program performance, and quality improvement efforts. This process creates a space for examining the flow of data and identifying opportunities for improvement. Communicating about the results also allows states and tribal LIAs to discuss how data represent the home visiting program and community. Communicating with tribal LIAs about their data can strengthen data quality, identify opportunities for improvement, ground data collection and analysis in community contexts, and convey program impact.

Awardee Spotlights: Montana and Mississippi

The **Montana** MIECHV team has supported several tribal LIAs and other LIAs that primarily serve native families. Montana’s in-depth subrecipient monitoring process included monthly coaching calls with LIAs to share state and local data, typically focusing on different measures each month. The calls fostered strong relationships, allowing the awardee a deeper understanding of the LIA’s data and an opportunity to connect with LIA staff about what the data meant to them. Focusing on families served also helped “put a face” to the data. The team believes tribal LIAs passed along the trust built during monthly calls to families participating in home visiting.

The **Mississippi** MIECHV team also used its subrecipient monitoring process to foster strong communication with the tribal community by discussing performance data during monitoring calls. Awardee staff also worked to break down barriers by being physically present in the community—attending meetings with community leaders, visiting regional hospitals where women from the reservation give birth, and connecting with other local family service programs. They also attended community events, such as powwows, drum circles, and fairs. The team believes these activities helped build a deep, trusting relationship with the community that allowed for open communication about data during monitoring calls.

Reciprocal Relationships

Built on shared goals, reciprocal relationships are mutually beneficial to awardees and tribal LIAs. Shared goals can lead to buy-in and collaboration because both parties are valued as equal and interdependent partners. Awardees and tribal LIAs can teach and learn from each other in reciprocal relationships. They can also work toward a mutual understanding of community issues, furthering the development of shared goals.^{3,4} When awardees collaborate with tribal LIAs to interpret performance data, their relationship becomes more reciprocal.

Similarly, bringing in tribal community members (e.g., tribal leaders, family service providers, families) to help interpret and understand performance data can help ensure that findings are locally relevant and credible. The community can add local or historical context critical to interpreting data that only they—community members—can contribute. Including both tribal LIA staff and community members when interpreting data may provide new ideas about the strengths and opportunities of their community. A shared understanding of the data allows the tribal LIA and awardee to work together to best meet the needs of families in the community.

Awardee Spotlight: Washington

The **Washington** MIECHV team has contracted with multiple LIAs serving native families, including an urban Indian organization. The awardee worked for over a decade to develop trust with each tribal LIA by regularly sharing performance data. To foster reciprocity, the awardee shared data with each tribal LIA at least quarterly and engaged in discussions to ensure mutual understanding and connect data and practice. The goal was to have each tribal LIA use its performance data to engage stakeholders, identify families' needs, and determine how to meet their needs. The LIA also shared state data on family engagement with community stakeholders to determine meaningful ways to connect safely with families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Resources

[Supporting State-Tribal Local Implementing Agency Collaboration for Improved Data Practices](#). Provides state home visiting leadership with resources to support improved collaboration with tribal LIA home visiting service providers. The guide describes and links to briefs, articles, curricula, websites, and other materials across a range of topics relevant to supporting state-tribal collaboration within MIECHV.

[A Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation in Tribal Communities](#). Describes the values, knowledge, and skills necessary for “building a new narrative” in evaluation with tribal communities. The resource was developed with a focus on child welfare but has broad relevance for those interested in supporting tribal evaluation efforts in other service areas.

[Tribal-State Relations: Issue Brief](#). Provides a succinct overview of tribal-state interaction in child welfare and offers best practices and key components of successful tribal-state collaborations.

[Tribes and States Working Together: A Guide to Tribal-State Child Care Coordination](#). Describes the principles of tribal sovereignty and government-to-government interaction between tribal nations and state governments. The report also includes examples of successful childcare partnerships.

References

¹ Sarche, M., & Spicer, P. (2008). Poverty and health disparities for American Indian and Alaska native children: Current knowledge and future prospects. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1136, 126–136.

² Tribal Evaluation Workgroup. (2013). *A roadmap for collaborative and effective evaluation in tribal communities*. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/tribal_roadmap.pdf

³ NCAI Policy Research Center and MSU Center for Native Health Partnerships. (2012). *Walk softly and listen carefully: Building research relationships with tribal communities*. http://www.ncai.org/attachments/PolicyPaper_SpMCHTcixRRjMEjDnPmesENPziHTwhOIOWxIWOIWdSr ykJuQggG_NCAI-WalkSoftly.pdf

⁴ Ross, Á. (2017). *Powering health equity action with online data tools: 10 design principles*. Policy Link and Ecotrust. <https://nationalequityatlas.org/sites/default/files/10-Design-Principles-For-Online-Data-Tools.pdf>

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Pooja Gupta Curtin and Nicole Denmark, Project Officers
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
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For more information about the contents of this brief, contact the DOHVE team:
Susan Zaid, Project Director
James Bell Associates
3033 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 650
Arlington, VA 22201
szaid@jbassoc.com

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