

# NAVIGATING ROUGH WATERS: LESSONS LEARNED & CHALLENGES TO AVOID WHEN PLANNING A TRIBAL CHILD WELFARE DATA SYSTEM

JOURNEY THROUGH THE RIVER OF DATA SERIES, FEBRUARY 2018

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

Data is a river that flows through all aspects of child welfare work, as well as through the community -- a key resource but one that can sometimes be challenging to navigate.

Developing data capacity can be like traveling from downstream to upstream. You may need someone who is further upstream to give you guidance on how to avoid rough waters or undercurrents that may throw you off course.



### The following list provides suggestions to consider when planning and implementing a data system:

- Develop your data system with a stakeholder team! Involve staff and others who can help decide what system best meets the programs needs (BIA, IV-B, IV-E, etc). Be sure to involve tribal leadership. Don't try to tackle this project alone.
- Vendors will know data systems but will not know the needs of each program -- only the stakeholder team referred to above can determine their program's unique needs (see "Planning for Your Data System", another document in this series).
- Seek out other tribes with data systems to learn from them.
- Consider a data system that can encompass other tribal programs beyond child welfare and develop data sharing agreements on common data elements. Examples of community partners include: Head Start/Early Head Start, Tribal TANF, etc.
- Before considering contracting with an external vendor, explore whether or not there are resources and personnel within the tribe who can do initial planning and implementation of the data system.
- Understand the costs of developing and maintaining a system. *Note: Tribes report spending up to twice what they originally budgeted!*
- Buying a data package from a vendor can be useful, but don't get talked into buying something unless it meets your needs, you can afford the costs, and your staff will use it.
- Only sign contracts with a vendor that have undergone tribal technical and legal review. Make sure any additional costs for adding modifications, training, updates, and data storage are clear. Remember to ask for timelines for completion of tasks.
- Have a performance agreement so payment is made after receiving and testing the product. Do not pay for everything upfront. An agreement can be included for the vendor to make modifications, if needed.
- Have a long-term plan and budget for maintaining and updating the data system.
- Develop an upfront plan and timeline to provide training -- both initial training to learn the system *and* training on system updates.

ABOUT "TOOLS FOR GROWTH" RESOURCES. The Capacity Building Center for Tribes' Tools for Growth resources are developed by a team of American Indian/Alaska Native/Indigenous child welfare professionals from across Indian Country who are dedicated to providing tribal communities with the tools they need to thrive and build their capacity to strengthen children, youth, families, and communities. The group works together to both establish a common vision of the resources needed and create content.