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## Mentoring for American Indian/Alaska Native Youth Population

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# MENTORING FOR AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE YOUTH

## National Mentoring Resource Center Population Review

*Crystal Aschenbrener, Alverno College and Julia Pryce, Loyola University Chicago*

May 2019

### Summary

This review examines research on mentoring American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth. The review is organized around four questions:



1. What is the effectiveness of mentoring for American Indian and Alaska Native youth?
2. What factors influence the effectiveness of mentoring for American Indian and Alaska Native youth?
3. What pathways are most important in linking mentoring to outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native youth?
4. To what extent have mentoring initiatives for American Indian and Alaska Native youth reached and engaged the youth, been implemented with high quality, and been adopted and sustained?



The mentoring literature focused on American Indian and Alaska Native youth<sup>i</sup> is growing, and it is further informed by empirical work from other countries, such as Canada and New Zealand. Nevertheless, rigorous research remains limited in understanding the strengths and needs of this

<sup>i</sup> From this point forward, when discussing this population as a group, they will be referred to as “Native” or AI/AN youth.

group. Studies to date demonstrate some promise of mentoring as an intervention for Native youth. However, due to the risks, barriers, and challenges, often including geographic isolation, experienced by this population, it is important for researchers and program developers to carefully consider benefits and risks of formal and natural mentoring within this broader cultural context and experience. With this consideration as context, the existing evidence points toward several preliminary conclusions:

- Mentoring for American Indian and Alaska Native youth appears to have the potential to improve academic outcomes (e.g., academic performance, school attendance), health outcomes (e.g., mental health, obesity), interpersonal strengths (e.g., confidence, leadership), and social relationships among this group, although the experimental or well-controlled quasi-experimental designs needed to most rigorously assess possible benefits are lacking.
- Research supports the role of culture in all types of mentoring for Native youth, including traditional mentoring programs (such as Big Brothers Big Sisters) and informal or natural supports, such as those that may be provided through tribal elders and extended family and community members. Examples of ways of emphasizing culture in the programs studied can possibly include traditional storytelling and activities, giving back to the community, cultural dances and ceremonies, as well as reflecting on historical trauma and current hardships.

This review describes information to consider when developing and implementing mentoring programs for Native youth. Historically, many Native communities have been affected by assimilationist policies and programs that separated children from their families (e.g., boarding schools and foster care/adoption programs). As a result, programs should be aware of the potential for cultural mistrust, which could pose challenges to engaging in relationships with mentors who come from outside the community. Therefore, mentoring programs should carefully consider recruitment, engagement, and retention efforts that include incorporating the cultural perspective and family and community support, as well as collaborative relationships with existing and trusted agencies. Preparing mentors to understand the importance of building and maintaining trust, and operating from a strengths-based and culturally attuned perspective, may be critical elements of mentoring programs for this population. Native communities often place a strong value on inclusion of family and community members<sup>1</sup>, and programs may capitalize on this value as a means of engaging family and community members to serve as supportive role models and advisers for the youth, and/or to support mentor-mentee relationship of mentors drawn from outside the community. Other elements to consider include incorporating culturally related activities, such as traditional games and historical storytelling, which can advance the cultural identity of the youth and help teach them tools used to thrive within, and outside, their communities. In mentoring work with Native youth, it is critical to provide healthy, supportive role models, keeping in mind that the program context may be situated in an environment with overlapping social problems influenced by experience of historical trauma.

# INTRODUCTION

In 2017, there were 370 million indigenous people worldwide, equaling less than 5 percent of the world's population.<sup>2</sup> In 2015, there were 5.4 million people in the United States who identified as American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) composing 2 percent of the total population.<sup>3</sup> Individuals identify as AI/AN at varying levels in states across the United States. Of the five states with the greatest proportion of AI/AN residents, 19.4 percent of the total population of Alaska identified as AI/AN with 13.5 percent in Oklahoma, 10.4 percent in New Mexico, 10.1 percent in South Dakota, and 8.0 percent in Montana.<sup>3</sup> According to the National Congress of American Indians (2018)<sup>4</sup> "there are 573 federally recognized Indian Nations (variously called tribes, nations, bands, pueblos, communities, and native villages) in the United States."

Diversity of language, traditions, values, and strengths characterizes the different groups of people who identify as American Indian and Alaska Native. Generally, AI/AN people bring a variety of important strengths to their communities and to the broader society. The prominence of the role of elders as natural mentors is located within a larger set of cultural strengths that are characteristic across many, if not most, Native groups.<sup>5</sup> Other strengths often cited across multiple Native groups include a historical view, a collectivist value of community, the importance of spirituality,<sup>6</sup> and a holistic approach to health and well-being<sup>7</sup> as common themes. Native American worldviews attach sovereignty to "the people and the land, a world of stories rather than facts, a world in which the community rather than the person is central."<sup>8</sup> Many of these strengths coincide well with mentoring as a positive youth development model.

Alongside these strengths, **Native youth also are more likely** than other youth in the United States **to face risks** to their development. These include **poverty, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and high school drop out.**

Alongside these strengths, Native youth also are more likely than other youth in the United States to face risks to their development. These include poverty,<sup>3</sup> suicide,<sup>9</sup> alcohol and drug abuse,<sup>9</sup> teen pregnancy,<sup>10</sup> and high school dropout.<sup>11</sup> This is not an exhaustive list, but reflects many of the challenges encountered by today's Native youth. For example, exposure to poverty and unemployment can negatively influence mental health, including substance use and suicide attempts.<sup>12</sup>

In considering mentoring as an intervention for Native youth, it is necessary to consider the term "historical trauma," which has been and continues to be experienced by this population.<sup>13, 14</sup> Historical trauma has been exacerbated by assimilation programs practiced just a generation or two ago, including residential, military-style boarding schools and foster care/adoption programs where the Native child(ren) were placed in the homes of non-Native families. In these programs, many Native children experienced verbal, emotional, spiritual, physical, and sexual abuse<sup>15, 16</sup> and were often removed from their culture, including their people, language, religion, and customs.<sup>17</sup> Based on research by Mooradian and colleagues,<sup>18</sup> such experiences are likely to lead to long-term, negative effects on future relationships, including relationships with intimate partners, friends, parents, and tribal community members. A common theme in this study is that the Native participants expressed

fear of social services and mistrust of mainstream society as a result of these practices.<sup>18</sup> Consistent with these findings, other research has noted that assimilationist practices have negatively impacted the development of Native people, including education, employment and health insurance, homelessness, homeownership, household income, and need for public assistance.<sup>19</sup>

Responding to these intersecting challenges is complex, with mentoring playing one potential role. Providing access to trained mentors via a mentoring program can help reduce challenges, such as drug and alcohol abuse,<sup>20</sup> risk of suicide,<sup>21</sup> teen pregnancy,<sup>10</sup> geographic isolation, limited health care,<sup>20</sup> and high school dropout rates.<sup>22, 23, 11</sup> However, given the negative perception that some social service agencies have had with historical trauma, there may be a tendency for youth and their families in Native communities to be wary of entrusting their children to agency-sponsored mentors in the absence of a strong and trusted community-agency partnership.<sup>24</sup> This distrust is of particular importance to consider in developing and evaluating mentoring programs.

The National Mentoring Resource Center defines mentoring as “relationships and activities that take place between youth (i.e., mentees) and older or more experienced persons (i.e., mentors) who are acting in a nonprofessional helping capacity, whether through a program or more informally, to provide support that benefits one or more areas of the young person’s development” (for further details, see *What is Mentoring?*).<sup>25</sup> Like other indigenous populations, there is a lengthy history of American Indian and Alaska Native communities emphasizing the centrality of family, which may include elders and community members, as a source of motivation and support. Community members include neighbors and members of tribal schools and community organizations. Extended family and community members are of particular interest to this mentoring review, given the importance that is customarily placed on these relationships within indigenous cultures.

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**Elders play a role within Native communities** that has elements in common with mentoring, in which an older and more experienced adult in the community **provides guidance and support to encourage positive development.**  
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Recognizing the potential for mistrust of social service agencies within Native communities, this review takes the position that, as an intervention built on relationships between adults and children, mentoring may represent a critical linkage between people who have historically been separated by assimilation practices. In many Native communities, elders play an important role in providing guidance to families and youth.<sup>5</sup> Although not synonymous with mentoring, elders play a role within Native communities that has elements in common with mentoring, in which an older and more experienced adult in the community provides guidance and support to encourage positive development among youth. Recognizing this intersection between the roles of elder and mentor can inform how relationships of youth with mentors from outside the community, or with elders within the community acting in the role of mentors, can play an important role in engaging and empowering Native youth.

The strengths perspective offers a framework for understanding the mechanisms underlying the role of mentoring in promoting positive development among Native youth,<sup>26, 27</sup> and we offer a brief



review of it here as it applies to this population. The strengths perspective is a holistic approach utilizing youths' positive attributes including "promise, strengths, assets, hopes, and dreams, as well as our own strengths, talents, assets, potential, hopes, and dreams."<sup>28</sup> Further, the strengths perspective focuses on natural supports in the youth's life, which often include support systems and resources within the surrounding environment. The strengths perspective recognizes that even distressed environments have strengths available. Focusing on strengths can also result in the seeking of additional support and services, thereby increasing supportive networks accessed by Native youth.<sup>25, 26</sup> This perspective is reflected by other theoretical frameworks, including resilience, positive youth development, and critical mentoring.

The strengths perspective can be directly applied to Native youth served by mentoring relationships. If a Native youth draws strength from spirituality, then spirituality can be a source of helping the youth develop a sense of purpose and serve as a means of connecting to others, including forming relationships.<sup>29</sup> The cultural views of wellness and healing are also strengths-grounded.<sup>30</sup> Culture values that include elders as mentors and view the culture and community as sources of support, resources, and skills are strengths-based.<sup>8</sup>

The focus of this review is to examine research on natural and program-based mentoring for promoting strengths in Native youth, and to explore what we know about the promise and potential concerns associated with mentoring Native youth 5 to 18 years of age. In particular, this review addresses the following questions:

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1. What is the effectiveness of mentoring for American Indian and Alaska Native youth?
  2. What factors influence the effectiveness of mentoring for American Indian and Alaska Native youth?
  3. What pathways are most important in linking mentoring to outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native youth?
  4. To what extent have mentoring initiatives for American Indian and Alaska Native youth reached and engaged the youth, been implemented with high quality, and been adopted and sustained?
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This review examines studies of mentoring from a variety of delivery methods, ranging from natural supports to formal mentorship programs, among American Indian and Alaska Native youth. While focusing primarily on implications for mentoring these two groups, this review will consider research on the broader population of Hawaiian Native and Native American youth generally in the United States. Because U.S.-based mentoring research on the populations is relatively nascent, the review will also draw on the richer body of research on indigenous populations in Canada, New Zealand, and other contexts where similar work is conducted. Such work conducted outside the United States can have direct or indirect implications for U.S. Native populations with regard to cultural comparability, as well as in considering barriers, challenges, and opportunities faced by youth in the United States

and other contexts. While U.S. Native youth are not the same as other groups in every respect, the experiences of Native groups in other regions have important commonalities and merit considering research on mentoring in other contexts, including how such research can inform understanding of and practice in Native communities.

When referring to “indigenous” populations, this review will draw on the World Health Organization (WHO) definition: “Indigenous populations are communities that live within, or are attached to, geographically distinct traditional habitats or ancestral territories, and who identify themselves as being part of a distinct cultural group, descended from groups present in the area before modern states were created and current borders defined.”<sup>31</sup>

A literature search was conducted to identify journal articles, book chapters, and other types of reports relevant to one or more of the principal questions for this review, including searches of PubMed, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, using an established set of keywords. When searching for Native American youth, keywords, such as Native American, American Indian, Alaska Native, First Nation, and Indigenous People, were used. Sources were gathered from the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. This search identified a total of nineteen articles/ reports/dissertations that met criteria for inclusion in this review.

## **1. What Is the Effectiveness of Mentoring for American Indian or Alaska Native Youth?**

### **BACKGROUND**

It is important to critically consider the available evidence, and to assess the mentoring role broadly enough to incorporate community-based resources, such as extended family and elders, who commonly serve in this role.<sup>32</sup> It is also critical to weigh important cautions in implementing mentorship interventions with this population. While mentoring maintains appeal in intervening and serving youth from this population, the hard work of committed mentors and programs cannot entirely address the systemic challenges faced by this group.

### **RESEARCH**

This section reviews evidence for effectiveness of mentoring for Native youth. Overall, the research reviewed is limited to formal mentoring programs, such as those provided by organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters. Other direct mentoring programs, such as Upward Bound, GEAR-UP and 4-H initiatives, as well as indirect mentoring programs, such as tribal schools and Out-of-School Time (after-school) programs, can be examples of important mentoring services focused on Native youth. However, research evidence of program effectiveness was not available for such programs. Due to the lack of research on Native youth, this review includes research from other populations (e.g., Hawaiian Native, indigenous groups in Canada and New Zealand). Further, the Native youth population is relatively small in number and because a requirement of this program review is that research be gathered from sources predominantly of Native youth, research is limited. This requirement

eliminated some research conducted in larger cities or urban areas on programs that included a small minority of Native youth that amount to too small of the percentage of the sample to allow relevant conclusions. As a result, although many Native youth in the United States live in urban areas, most of the research that qualified for this review comes predominantly from rural areas.

### **Community-based one-on-one mentoring**

Research conducted within a traditional, Big Brothers Big Sisters community-based mentoring program in Canada suggests that mentoring as an intervention may have unique and important positive effects on the mental health of aboriginal youth living in large Canadian urban centers.<sup>33</sup> Mentoring experiences and mental health and behavioral outcomes were compared between Aboriginal (AB) youth and non-AB youth (i.e., those for whom services were sought but a mentoring relationship not established during the course of the study) who were ages 6 to 17. The authors did not report the racial/ethnic composition of matches but noted that less than 1 percent of the mentors in the study were themselves Aboriginal. “Mentored youth within the AB group demonstrated significant reductions in parent-rated emotional problems and symptoms of social anxiety not found among mentored non-AB youth” (p. 61).<sup>32</sup> The findings suggest that AB youth were much more likely than non-AB youth to indicate a high-quality and dependable mentoring relationship, and yet were less likely to be in a long-standing, on-going relationship with a mentor 18 months into the study.<sup>32</sup>

### **Group-based mentoring**

A strengths-based, peer mentoring intervention in Canada involved youth participants in a research project to examine the impact of the program in supporting student transition from elementary to high school.<sup>34, 35, 36</sup> The primary component is a weekly, group mentoring program for grade seven and eight students facilitated by two First Nations young adult mentors.<sup>34</sup> In addition, eighth grade students are invited to participate in two full-day conferences prior to transition to high school, and a three-day, intensive outdoor experiential program focused on leadership and healthy relationship skills is offered.<sup>34</sup> Finally, a peer mentoring program focuses on the development of healthy and positive relationships between junior (grade 9) mentees and senior (grades 10 through 12) mentors.<sup>34</sup> Across three studies, data suggest that student participants and educators perceived that the programming contributed to improved academic performance and school attendance, strengthened relationships, increased a sense of belonging, and increased confidence and leadership skills<sup>34</sup> following participation in the program. In a quantitative analysis over two years examining differences between mentored Native youth and youth not mentored,<sup>35</sup> mentored youth who participated for two years demonstrated stronger benefits in terms of cultural identity and mental health relative to those who received mentoring for one year or who did not receive mentoring. At baseline, these groups were similar in terms of gender, family economic status, and First Nations ancestry, but the mentored group was younger and more likely to come from a two-parent family.

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Data suggest that student participants and educators perceived that the programming contributed to **improved academic performance and school attendance, strengthened relationships, increased a sense of belonging, and increased confidence and leadership skills.**  
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Additionally, in a more in-depth, mixed-method case study of programs in 15 schools, elementary and secondary students, as well as educators and administrators, reported (via post-intervention surveys) an increase in student success in association with their program involvement. Furthermore, a survey of secondary students revealed an increased sense of belonging, peer connections, and skills in association with (but not necessarily due to) program involvement. Survey findings showed that 81 percent of participating youth felt more connected to their culture while at school.<sup>34</sup> An important role of culture was suggested by interview data as well. Process evaluation data reinforce the importance of culturally relevant experiences and role models as key to the success of the program.

Another group mentoring program used mixed methods to study Native youth within a rural tribal school. The data showed strong pre- to post-test increases in youths' preference for education and career advancement.<sup>36</sup> Significant change on various outcomes between pre- and post-data, as well as differences relative to the comparison group at post-test, provided evidence that the group mentorship partnership between two universities and one tribal school increased Native youth's academic skills to be more successful in school. Outcomes include increased notation of educational factors (stay in school, ask lots of questions, take the right classes, get involved in school activities), and such results were similar to or higher than in the comparison group. Further, post-survey results showed increased mean scores on educational and career perspectives as well as cultural identity from pre- to post-test, and means scores that were higher than those of the comparison group at post-test. In a comparison of this group relative to a non-Native, non-tribal, rural school youth group, findings further supported the positive influence of the intervention on seventh and eighth graders' educational perspectives.<sup>37</sup>

An evaluation of another group mentoring program used qualitative data from individual and small group interviews, as well as drawing activities, to construct a case study examining the influence of mentoring on Native youth attendance, engagement at school, and positive lifestyle choices in Australia.<sup>38</sup> Of the 126 participants, 55 were mentees and the remaining were mentors, parents/caregivers, elders, and school staff. Results provided support for the value of mentors as role models for education and career development.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Mentoring focused on domain-specific outcomes***

Mentoring programs focused on more specific content (e.g., STEM-related skills, business and entrepreneurship, health) also offer preliminary findings suggestive of effectiveness among Native youth. In a study of a STEM (i.e., Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) intervention geared toward Native third to eighth graders, mentoring was provided in the school during lunchtime every other week, and through six field trips focused on science education.<sup>39</sup> Of the 60 mentors in the program, half were Native, 15 were non-Native STEM professionals, and 15 were non-Native university students. Student mentees reported high levels of satisfaction, rating their mentors on items such as feeling excited, having fun, and enjoying activities, as well as trusting mentors' advice. In pre- and post-test surveys, students reported increased interest in having a career in science, increased enjoyment of science activities at school, and an appreciation of the importance of math and science for their future. Youth also self-reported an increasing sense of "doing well in math and science," increased encouragement by family to study science, and more frequent conversations with friends about science. Rates of school absenteeism among mentees decreased during the period of

program involvement relative to the year prior to enrollment.

A national study of Indigenous high school students within Canada<sup>40</sup> examined virtual mentoring (i.e., interaction with mentor and content of program primarily delivered virtually) provided to high schoolers (grades 10 to 12) through community-university partnerships across Canada. In addition to two in-person conferences, content was primarily focused on online group-based challenges used to help students explore aspects of business with support of their mentors. Data were gathered across program implementation and various outcomes, including self-determination and pursuit of personal career goals. A subgroup of parents and caregivers of youth were also interviewed. Although a comparison group was not used, youth and parent/caregiver participants' interviews reported improvements in learning and social and emotional development as a result of the program. Findings also suggest increased student engagement in school, the creation of strong mentorship bonds, and an increase in post-secondary enrollment for participants in twelfth grade.<sup>39</sup>

Weight gain can be a concern among Native youth populations. A quasi-experimental trial was conducted with 151 children living in a rural First Nation reservation over two academic school years focused on health outcomes among Native Youth (ages 9 to 10). The evaluation documented improvements in healthy dietary choices knowledge, and attributed these changes to improved self-efficacy.<sup>41</sup> Program participants also demonstrated significant decrease in BMI and waist circumference relative to those in the comparison group. Findings also indicate that youth participants reported improved body satisfaction relative to those in the comparison condition. In sum, data suggest promise of a peer-led approach to provide ongoing support around healthy lifestyle choices.

The Talent Identification and Development in Education (TIDE) program was implemented in Canada through a focus on art, academics, vocational-technical, and interpersonal-social skills, in Canada.<sup>42</sup> The program used assigned workplace representatives as mentors who focused on serving high school youth who had dropped out of school. More than half of the 88 youth enrolled in the program returned to high school, entered postsecondary programs at a college, or gained employment.<sup>41</sup> As a result of this success, supplemental programs with similar goals have been developed to include more at-risk youth.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Evidence of program effectiveness is derived from studies conducted with Native Youth in the United States and internationally (particularly Canada and New Zealand); findings provide preliminary indication that mentoring programs for Native youth can promote gains in a range of outcomes, including educational achievement and engagement, health (i.e., mental health, physical health), and social relationships.
2. Programs do not show evidence of impact on addressing deeper systemic challenges, such as youth engagement in community or political activism, or indicators of community well-being (e.g., poverty rates) for participating youth; however, such outcomes to date have not been thoroughly examined.

## 2. What Factors Influence the Effectiveness of Mentoring for American Indian or Alaska Native Youth?

### BACKGROUND

Native American cultural values and practices are critical to the successful engagement of youth in relationships and with the broader society. Aboriginal views on youth success, including educational achievement, are holistic, rather than individualistic, by nature.<sup>43</sup> The inclusion of family and community in youth development programs, such as mentoring, is thought to facilitate the empowering of traditional values within the program itself. Learning through mentoring, therefore, should focus on perspectives and values in accordance with this worldview, such as respect for all living things and personal and communal responsibility.<sup>44</sup> This framing underlies considerations of what factors influence effectiveness of mentoring for this population.

Conceptual work with this population reinforces the value of cultural norms and practices as important to resilience and coping with adversity. Qualitative research suggests that a key role in high engagement in school and educational success is the quality of mentoring relationships.<sup>45</sup> Based on focus groups conducted with 20 Native adolescents, aimed at exploring their mentoring needs in achieving academic success in an American school system, insights emphasized the potential function that family, teachers, and peers can serve as mentors for this group. In conjunction with mentoring through a teacher-student relationship, participants highlighted the school environment, including presence of cultural values and connections to family, as critical to Native youth academic success. These findings suggest that it is important to prioritize engaging family members and elders in providing positive examples for their young people.<sup>46</sup>

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The **celebration of cultural values and tradition** has historically been a powerful component of Native cultures, and has served as a form of **resistance to historical trauma**. Indeed, a majority of the studies emphasize that **mentoring programs would do well to incorporate family, community, and cultural events and activities into programming** with Native peoples.

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The celebration of cultural values and tradition has historically been a powerful component of Native cultures, and has served as a form of resistance to historical trauma. Indeed, a majority of the studies emphasize that mentoring programs would do well to incorporate family, community, and cultural events and activities into programming with Native peoples. Specific strategies for doing so include the following:

- Focus on the development of quality and close mentor-mentee relationships.<sup>44, 47</sup>
- Incorporate traditional values to help foster a sense of giving back to the community, cultural identity, and pride in the culture.<sup>44, 47</sup>

- Participation of mentors and staff in purposeful training on the culture, such as the role of family and community involvement, language, traditions, and history as well as potential ongoing impact of historical trauma on participants.<sup>38</sup>
- Focus on the personal and cultural identity of youth, and include cultural components (via games and storytelling), as this has the potential to positively benefit other areas of their life, such as academics.<sup>56, 48</sup>

In sum, research emphasizes the importance of applying an approach to mentoring with Native youth that leverages cultural tradition as well as individual and community strengths.<sup>56</sup> For mentors, a focus on building a trusting, safe, and consistent relationship with their mentees<sup>46</sup> can be more important than sharing the mentee's race or ethnicity.<sup>37</sup> Through building positive relationships, Native youth can receive support in their personal, educational, and social development, which in turn can buttress healthy families and communities within this population.<sup>46</sup>

In this section, we review the research on factors that moderate the effectiveness of mentoring for Native youth. Although a few quantitative studies indicate this process, lessons are more commonly derived from qualitative work illustrating the importance of educational conditions, culturally attuned program characteristics, and attention to resources within the community in supporting youth outcomes.

## RESEARCH

### *Systematic review of mentoring*

A systematic review of mentoring focused on programs in New Zealand highlighted the importance of cultural appropriateness. Of the 26 studies that met the authors' criteria (i.e., demonstrated program effects of formal mentoring, and identified an explicit research design), there was a positive association between involvement of family/extended family and program effectiveness. Surprisingly, findings for Maori youth suggest a negative association between cultural sensitivity and program helpfulness, and findings for Pacifica youth, suggest no association.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to emphasizing the importance of incorporating family/extended family members into mentoring practices, this systematic review also emphasized three other considerations for addressing the complex task of incorporating cultural considerations into programming with Native youth. First, as mentioned earlier, Native youth come from many tribes, communities that each have unique cultural patterns. Thus, although some of the broader values of the Native culture are largely applicable across tribes, incorporating those aspects of culture most meaningful to those served is critical to understand and address. Second, cultural appropriateness is best captured by research that examines questions in a culturally sensitive way. Thus, if the research is drawn from values not shared by the Native culture, it is less likely to examine and perceive meaningful effectiveness for this group. Finally, mentoring programs that embed cultural values also must reflect culturally appropriate goals. According to the systematic review, the goals that are often most connected to effectiveness (e.g., interpersonal, psychological) may not be the focus of mentoring programs of Native youth.<sup>48</sup>

## ***Community-based one-on-one mentoring***

A study of Big Brothers Big Sisters community-based mentoring relationships suggests a variable effect of mentoring on Native, relative to non-Native, youth.<sup>33</sup> In a comparison of non-mentored and mentored Aboriginal (AB) youth participants, overall “findings suggest that one-on-one mentoring may have positive effects on the mental health of AB youth, and may in fact be more beneficial to AB than non-AB, particularly in regards to decreasing emotional and anxiety difficulties” (p. 63).<sup>33</sup>

## ***Educational and learning conditions***

Although the Native population has historically experienced abuse from the education system via boarding schools (as noted in the introduction with reference to historical trauma), contemporary elders see the value of the parental and adult role in supporting children through a holistic model of education that incorporates mentoring as critical to success.<sup>50</sup> Further, applied and engaged learning techniques are important in engaging Native youth through mentoring programs that involve an educational component. McCarthy and Benally<sup>51</sup> found such hands-on, interactive methods to learning were particularly helpful academically for Navajo youth.

## ***Health and mental health benefits***

Research on the Cherokee Choices/REACH 2010 program explores the role of mentoring on wellness and health among this population,<sup>52</sup> particularly as it relates to level of exposure to mentors, or dosage, in moderating program outcomes. Elementary school youth were divided into two conditions: those who participated with mentors within school (i.e., through lesson plans in the classroom to enhance cultural pride, self-esteem, emotional wellness, conflict resolution, and health comprehension) and those received school-based mentoring and also participated in after-school programming (which included weekly meetings focused on stress-management techniques and coping skills, teamwork, and cultural awareness). One year after the intervention concluded, both groups of children expressed gains in self-reported interest in school, academic grades, learning, and interaction with friends. However, those who also participated in after-school programming reported greater improvement than those restricted to the school day. These findings suggest that more prolonged mentoring (i.e., during the day versus after school) may be a factor that conditions the effectiveness of mentoring.

## ***Community involvement attentive to the needs and strengths of rural settings***

Because some Native youth reside in rural and, at times, isolated areas, mentoring programs have to consider specific operational practices.<sup>46</sup> Due to the lack of resources, programs, and/or volunteers available in rural settings, forming partnerships with established community programs can be particularly helpful<sup>53</sup> in facilitating effectiveness of mentoring for Native youth. Using elders or community role models to help plan and develop such partnerships can also serve as resources.<sup>46</sup> Research in such isolated areas has demonstrated that through such partnerships, programs can successfully integrate volunteers and role models from surrounding communities. Recruitment practices can also be influenced by the rural environments. A more limited number of adult role



models may require accommodations in the application process. Group mentoring may also facilitate effectiveness when volunteers or resources are limited.<sup>52, 43</sup>

### ***Mentoring by families and community elders***

The importance of relationship with family members and community elders for programs serving Native youth is further emphasized through qualitative work focused on Native youth development. In a systematic review focused on mental health and risk of substance use among youth, 8 of the 474 articles identified focused on interventions for Native youth in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. Results suggested lack of research on mental health and substance use interventions for Native youth and emphasized the role of elders as role models<sup>31</sup> for this group. Interviews with twenty Alaska Native youth, ages 11 to 18, exploring the role of relationships in resilience among this group, also highlights how engagement in kinship and friendship relationships can foster a greater sense of responsibility, competence, and self-worth.<sup>54</sup> Participants reported greater success in core outcomes (i.e., grades, abstinence from alcohol and drugs, skill building) as a result of engagement in these relationships. Through a set of interviews with 23 elders, adults, and youth in Alaska,<sup>52</sup> these themes were reinforced through the sharing of cultural stories by elders and adults with youth. Through this storytelling, youth reflections were captured in digital stories. Youth emphasized the power of their culture in overcoming problems, and a greater appreciation of their culture and cultural identity as a result of the sharing of stories.<sup>40</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

1. Although limited primarily to qualitative studies, research suggests that effectiveness of mentoring for Native youth may be enhanced when programs actively engage family and community members. Such programs may provide greater opportunities for culturally attuned support and role modeling, as well as increased program engagement that, in turn, may be critical to youth outcomes of interest.

## **3. What Pathways Are Most Important in Linking Mentoring to Outcomes for American Indian or Alaska Native Youth?**

### **BACKGROUND**

There are several concepts specific to mentoring with Native youth that are important to consider in evaluating pathways that link mentoring to outcomes for Native youth. Many qualitative studies have explored these processes and have highlighted culturally attuned components that are important for three (primary) reasons. First, culturally attuned components can benefit youth by strengthening their cultural identity and pride. Second, they utilize strengths available in rural environments, which may lack the resources necessary to host traditional mentorship programs. Third, they help strengthen a culture that is striving to overcome historical trauma and intersecting risks and challenges.

## RESEARCH

Research that explicitly measures the pathways that link outcomes to Native youth is only beginning to emerge. Much of the work has been qualitative or focused on program evaluation, approaches which in many ways are more consistent with the larger philosophy underlying Native culture.

The most common pathway to link mentoring to outcomes for Native youth is to holistically incorporate the culture into the program. For example, programs that include elders<sup>31, 49</sup> and the culture<sup>32</sup> result in youth gaining a greater sense of connection to their culture, family, and community, greater sense of pride in being Native,<sup>36</sup> and these changes in turn contribute to better academic achievement and attitudes toward school.

As examples of this process, two studies are featured. First, Wexler and colleagues<sup>53</sup> focused on ways by which elders and kinship members teaching and sharing their culture with youth can foster resilience. The life history interviews served as a form of mentorship as the elder taught and processed resilience and relatedness discussions.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Stevens and colleagues<sup>38</sup> embedded Native culture into their STEM intervention by inviting mentees' families to join them on the STEM-related field trips. The program is geared toward third to eighth graders, yet included parents and siblings to join in activities, which then had a ripple effect in facilitating sibling interest. Further, program facilitation during the school day provided an indirect yet important impact, as school absenteeism significantly decreased.<sup>38</sup>

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## CONCLUSION

1. The primary pathway that has been studied linking mentoring to outcomes for Native youth is through intentional and community-based incorporation of Native culture into programming. This includes culture, traditions, practices, and community resources as tools that can facilitate youth and community engagement and resilience. At present, however, the incorporation of Native cultural elements has not been equally evaluated as a predictor of mentoring effectiveness.

## 4. To What Extent Have Mentoring Initiatives for American Indian or Alaska Native Youth Reached and Engaged the Youth, Been Implemented with High Quality, and Been Adopted and Sustained?

### BACKGROUND

The definition and philosophy that underlie mentoring provide a strong, and in some ways natural, fit with the perspectives and values that characterize Native American cultures. Yet, there is little published and empirically supported research of such work. This section of the program review will briefly discuss some of the challenges to conducting research in this area.

There are significant factors influencing the lack of research, including:

- The relatively small, yet geographically dispersed, population of Native youth.<sup>2, 3</sup>
- The intensity of risks and historical trauma experienced by this group, and the related high risk of harm to Native youth, families, and communities that can be exacerbated by research or interventions that are not culturally attuned and strength-based.<sup>31, 55</sup>
- Challenges to trust and relationships development due to historical trauma.<sup>33, 56</sup>
- Often isolated geographic locations of many Native youth communities,<sup>38</sup> which can translate to lack of instrumental resources (i.e., transportation, funding, volunteers) as well as community programs and social services.<sup>33, 50</sup>
- The value that the Native culture places on connections to kin. Yet family members may benefit from additional supports in order to be able to serve as positive role models given the sustained cultural and historical trauma that has affected many Native communities.<sup>28, 45</sup>

Drawing upon the strengths-based approach and the assets inherent to the Native culture can together make it possible to address the factors listed above. Several programs have successfully addressed these factors and achieved positive outcomes, as well as successfully shared their work through publication.

### RESEARCH

#### ***Reached and engaged Native youth***

The material used for this review provides evidence of successfully reaching and engaging Native youth. In an effort to do so, even mainstream programs, such as Boys & Girls Clubs of America and Big Brothers Big Sisters<sup>26</sup> have incorporated cultural values into elements of their programming, including the development of the program, selection of mentors, and program implementation. This process involved drawing on the values, traditions, language, and strengths of the local area. As

tribes vary, so does their culture; thus, programs may need to holistically include the culture of the particular area to best serve their Native youth.

### ***Implemented with high quality***

By using qualitative research, the programs were able to use one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and other artifacts, such as youths' artwork, to assess the quality of the mentoring programs. It was clear that the studies were able to gain youth-centered results, which appeared to be associated with advancing their individual program and sharing their results with others. Often the research appeared to be a method of further advancing the goals of the program, fostering relationship development, and advancing the culture (i.e., action research). This method of collecting data seemed to work well for the studies in this review as they appeared to be youth-centered, culturally sensitive, strengths-based, and future-driven.

### ***Adopted and sustained***

Even though studies highlighted through this review were typically based on one particular program or case study, themes can be generalized from these findings to considerations for adopting or sustaining programs with Native youth. For example, there was a common message of partnership and collaboration between the program developers and the tribal community. Also, successful programs demonstrate a strong understanding of the barriers challenging the youth served. For example, due to their presence in remote and isolated areas, programs have to consider transportation barriers, which may result in locating the program at the youth's school.<sup>33, 35</sup> As another example, cultural attunement, as demonstrated by incorporating the family unit into the youth program, resulted in indirect support to the family, which translated to interest by younger siblings in the program going forward.<sup>35</sup> Existing programs, such as Boys & Girls Clubs, Upward Bound, 4-H, GEAR UP, and tribal schools, are other possible examples of broad-reaching programs that have incorporated culture into their existing programming and have been adopted and sustained.

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There was a common message of **partnership and collaboration** between the **program developers** and the **tribal community**. Also, successful programs demonstrate a **strong understanding of the barriers** challenging the youth served.

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In addition to building partnerships between Native communities and external agencies that offer mentoring programs, another approach to promoting adoption and sustainability is to build mentoring initiatives from within Native communities. For example, an experimental study of entrepreneurship education, as supported by adult mentors from within a Native community, has also shown potential for youth development across psychosocial, behavioral health, educational, and economic outcomes.<sup>57</sup> "Arrowhead Business Group" was cocreated through a tribal-university partnership targeting known protective factors for substance use and suicide at individual, peer, and community levels.<sup>56</sup> This initiative provides a 16-lesson curriculum made up of discussions, games, hands-on learning, and multimedia, which targeted Native adolescents ages 13 to 16 years

who were currently enrolled in high school. Over an eight-month period, the program focused on entrepreneurship and business development, life skills, self-efficacy, and finance. Using a repeated measures design with 400 adolescents in the intervention arm and 200 youth in the control arm, participants were administered a survey at baseline, immediately post-intervention, and 6, 12, and 24 months following the program. Although outcome data are not yet available, process evaluation data, including attendance records, suggest that locating such an initiative in a tribal-owned site supports engagement and participation and may facilitate desired impact.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Although there are many reasons why mentoring may be an excellent resource for Native youth, research is lacking on how to reach and engage youth and on how to sustain programs over time; however, programs that incorporate the Native culture appear to be more accepted and have more perceived value by the youth and their communities.
2. Consideration of context (i.e., rural and remote settings) in which Native youth often reside may require creative program practices to provide mentoring benefits.



# IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

*(Mike Garringer, MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership and Christian Weaver, formerly of Boys & Girls Clubs of America)*

As noted in the main evidence review on mentoring for American Indian and Alaska Native youth, tribal communities, both on and off of tribal lands, have a long and successful history of weaving natural mentoring relationships into the kinship structure of their culture and in the elevated role that elders have as teachers, problem solvers, and sources of wisdom and guidance for their communities, especially for young people. Thus, any discussion about providing additional, programmatic mentoring for tribal youth must begin with a recognition of these natural mentoring traditions and serious thought about how to honor these existing ties, tribal traditions, and indigenous ways of knowing more broadly in the delivery of services.

This review also notes that, beyond the positive presence of elders and natural mentors, tribal youth may also benefit in myriad ways from additional mentoring provided through a program. Programmatic mentors, whether from within the Native community or from outside it, can play a vital role in helping connect these youth to educational opportunities, support the transition to the world of work, allow youth to work through traumas and personal setbacks, and provide additional or targeted support in overcoming serious challenges, such as reducing juvenile justice involvement or bolstering mental health services. While the traditional networks of supportive adults can never be replaced or duplicated in the lives of Native youth, the evidence reviewed in the previous pages makes a compelling case for also offering programmatic mentors to their lives as needed, regardless of whether those mentors are from within the tribal community.

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**Programmatic mentors**, whether from within the Native community or from outside it, **can play a vital role in helping connect these youth to educational opportunities**, support the transition to the world of work, allow youth to **work through traumas** and personal setbacks, and provide additional or targeted **support in overcoming serious challenges**, such as reducing juvenile justice involvement or bolstering mental health services.

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But the review also notes that effectively integrating mentoring services into Native communities can present challenges, particularly when those developing and implementing the services come from outside the community. In these instances, program staff and mentors must work diligently to meet indigenous communities where they are, and ensure that the programming offered is aligned with community values, culture, goals, and institutions. Strategies are provided later in this section.

The recommendations offered to practitioners here draw on the research review itself, and practitioner experience, most notably from the work of Boys & Girls Clubs of America Native Services, which offers mentoring and other integrated services at nearly 200 Clubs in Native communities, and recently celebrated 25 years of supporting Native youth. We hope these recommendations will help staff and mentors more effectively meet the needs of Native youth, both in and out of indigenous communities, although our emphasis here is on services offered within communities on reservations or in schools or other settings with large numbers of Native youth and adults.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAFF AND MENTORS IN WORKING WITH NATIVE YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Regardless of whether staff and mentors come from within the tribal community, there are several considerations to keep in mind that will ensure that mentoring relationships are meaningful, safe, and culturally relevant and responsive for Native American youth:

- **Create a safe space within the program and the relationship.** Because Native youth have so commonly experienced trauma and challenging circumstances, or are being cared for by adults who have, it is important to ensure a safe and nurturing mentoring relationship. This history of trauma is thoroughly discussed in the main sections of this review and can include both historical traumas and events from the mentees' own lives. All mentors for AI/AN youth should think carefully about how the activities they engage in might affect or be perceived by youth or their families and ensure that they don't deepen or add to trauma already experienced. Mentors must also be willing to engage with the circumstances of the young person's life without judgment or without inadvertently disrespecting the community's values or sovereignty (this is most critical to mentors coming from outside the youth's specific tribal community). Youth must feel like the program and the relationships it provides are safe places where they can share their feelings and emotions, process prior traumas, and feel unconditional love and support. One practice that might help both staff and mentors who are external to the community with creating this environment is to partake in cultural competence training that uncovers their biases. Such training can raise awareness of how personal values might come across negatively or be perceived as judgmental, condescending, or antithetical to the youth's culture, ways of knowing, or family structures. Such training can also teach mentors, especially non-Native mentors, about subtleties of nonverbal communication, such as eye contact, touching, and pauses or silence in conversations. These things may be perceived very differently in tribal cultures. Perhaps the best things a mentor can do to support a young person is to approach the relationship with humility and self-awareness and be open to the idea that they have a responsibility to be vigilant about not sending the wrong message or adding to traumas already experienced.

One resource that might help mentors (especially those from outside the community) with their cultural competency in serving indigenous youth is *A Critical Orientation for Supporting and Inspiring Native Youth*, an online learning module also developed by the National Mentoring Resource Center. This self-paced learning opportunity includes critical information about native culture and traditions, as well as a section that helps mentors explore their own cultural identity and key topics such as structural racism, unconscious bias, and cultural appropriation. This resource can be found on the NMRC website at: <https://www.mentoring.org/program-resources/mentor-resourcesand-publications/supporting-and-inspiring-native-youth>. It is worth noting that even mentors from within Native American communities can have viewpoints or differences in experiences (especially across different tribal histories) that can leave them vulnerable to creating "unsafe" or culturally insensitive moments in these relationships. Thus, this awareness of trauma and commitment to safety within the relationship is something all mentors for these youth should strive for.

- **Get to know the specific challenges that each mentee is facing and the strengths they bring to the relationship.** One of the common missteps of mentoring programs generally is to treat youth from similar demographic backgrounds as being fairly homogenous in terms of their circumstances and needs. The reality is that all mentees bring their own mix of personality and history to the relationship. Mentors and staff members need to take the time to get to know each individual young person—their story, their strengths, challenges, and hopes for the future. Mentors should pay attention to the intersectionality that resides within Native youth, where their status as an indigenous person is also wrapped up with other identities and personal circumstances that define who they are and where they want to go in life. It can be particularly helpful for mentors, but especially those from outside the tribal community, to work with the young person to map out their web of supportive adult relationships. This can help mentors identify elders and other adult community members who can identify the youth's strengths, assets, and challenges and who can work collaboratively with the mentor and program to support the young person's growth.
- **Use a variety of strategies for integrating indigenous culture into mentoring activities.** While ideally the program as a whole will offer activities that build on or integrate Native culture, mentors should also remember that they have a personal obligation to integrate Native traditions, language, skills, ways of knowing, and arts into mentoring activities and reflections each time they meet with their mentee. While this may seem like advice mostly for mentors from outside the tribal community, the reality is that even indigenous mentors can be so caught up in helping tribal youth succeed in the broader world that they de-emphasize the value that can come from reinforcing Native identity and honoring historical practices and ways of knowing. Building indigenous culture into the match can be done in overt ways, such as working on traditional arts or crafts together or by participating together in cultural events, such as a powwow. But it can often be done in subtle ways, such as integrating indigenous knowledge into work on school assignments or thinking about traditional tribal roles and responsibilities when engaging in career exploration. As noted throughout the evidence review, this integration of culture can build positive ethnic identity and racial self-regard for the young person, which serve as powerful resilience factors that can boost confidence and esteem and negate the harm of stereotype threat. Non-Native mentors can also share their culture and traditions with mentees so that young people are exposed to a variety of values and ways of thinking—provided that it is done in a mutually respectful and positive way. Mentors may want to let the youth take the lead in sharing their culture—especially if the mentor is from outside the indigenous community—but programs are wise to be mindful of not placing the youth in a position of being an “ambassador” of their entire culture to outside adults, as that may make them uncomfortable or seem intrusive or disrespectful.
- **Provide exposure to new experiences and opportunities.** Even when integrating indigenous culture in mentoring activities, there can be tremendous value, especially in programs in geographically isolated tribal communities, in exposing Native youth to the broader world and offering new experiences. All rural youth, but especially Native youth, struggle to engage in new activities outside of their community. Such experiences might include job shadows or other opportunities to see careers that are rare locally in action, tours of college campuses, or exposure to arts or culture that is uncommon to their local communities (e.g., trying Thai

food, spending the day at a science museum, or attending a symphony performance). Mentors should keep in mind, however, that there might be a fine line between efforts to expand youths' horizons and a perception that mentoring activities work to negate the youth's culture and community. As noted above, even Native American mentors can fall into a trap of sending the inadvertent message that tribal traditions and values are antiquated. Mentors must ensure that these types of activities are, once again, safe, supportive, and reaffirming of indigenous culture.

As noted in the review, the concept of mentoring is closely aligned with Native cultural conceptions of the role of elders and the broader adult community in explicitly teaching and supporting youth through collective relationship structures. Native cultures have been mentoring youth intentionally far longer than modern non-Native society seems to recognize. Western notions of one mentor guiding one youth must be tempered and adapted to communities where the "we" is far more important than the "me" and where young people are cared for in different ways. But as the review authors note, mentoring programs have tremendous potential to not only address community needs but to also elevate Native strengths, traditions, and culture in ways that empower Native youth and strengthen the web of support surrounding each young person.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Keeping Native strengths and traditions at the center of the mentoring program can be a struggle for program developers and those who run programs on the ground; this is especially critical to do when those developers come from outside the tribal community. Even when programs are developed by those within tribal communities, there can be challenges integrating what can be a Westernized notion of mentoring if not appropriately implemented as noted above given a Native cultural context that is almost the polar opposite of that approach.

We begin here with some steps that program developers from outside tribal communities can take to ensure that the implementation of their services will be well-received:

- **Recognize that each Native community is unique and develop strategies that honor and integrate this unique cultural context.** According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, there are 573 federally recognized Indian tribes, bands, nations, pueblos, rancherias, communities, and Native villages in the United States (229 are located in Alaska with the remaining located in 33 other states). There is great diversity among AI/AN communities and tribes, with each having very different histories, values, strengths, and ways of supporting members of the community, including youth. Thus, the first step to designing a mentoring program that will resonate with the community is to set aside preconceived notions and learn about the nuances and traditions that make the community in question unique and special.
- **Community leadership, understanding, and buy-in is critical to success.** As mentioned in the introduction, Native communities wrestle with the historical legacy of trauma and victimization at the hands of the U.S. government and other state and regional institutions—a trauma that unfortunately continues to this day. As such, tribal communities may be especially wary of services brought to the community from the outside and are often reluctant to support new

programming without a clear understanding of the motives and goals of the effort. External developers can address this by approaching tribal government, elders, and other authoritative stakeholders in the community from a position of true collaboration and by listening intently to what these leaders have to say about the history, strengths, and values of their community, as well as the needs.

Respecting tribal sovereignty and autonomy is essential to building these relationships and getting this dialogue started on the right foot. A mentoring program, in general, should always be presented in any community as an effort to build on community strengths and integrate with *existing* youth–adult relationships and structures, not as something only needed to “fix” deficits. In the early stages of program development, practitioners should ask the community what they would like to see in terms of outcomes or experiences for the youth served, codeveloping program goals and recognizing when certain aspects of the program are simply not aligned with local values or traditions. In a world that increasingly emphasizes rigid fidelity to “evidence-based” practices, it can be hard for practitioners to deviate from a set program model or intervention strategy. But the reality is that when programs do not find that common ground with Native community leaders and honor the history of negative experiences, they are destined to fail. Practitioners should also note that their relationship with tribal leadership needs to be maintained over time, not just at the initial stages of program development. Frequent communication with the community’s leadership can help avoid misunderstandings and correct future missteps.

There are also a few things for program developers of all types, including those from within tribal communities, to keep in mind as they develop services:

- **Recognize the challenges that rural isolation can also bring and choose partnerships accordingly.** As noted in the review, many Native communities are located in geographically isolated communities on reservations or other land far from large population centers. In these contexts the resources available to start and maintain a program, as well as the types of activities that mentors and youth can engage in may be constrained. While this isolation will not be news to individuals who live in those communities, it does mean that the program they ultimately develop will, by necessity, be less of a “solo” effort than it might be otherwise. The evidence review here suggests partnering with existing services and institutions in the community in an effort to maximize resources and integrate the mentoring into other services and supports that are working in the community. Practitioners may have to get even more creative in how they structure mentor-mentee interactions and in how they schedule program activities in order to overcome some of the challenges of rural isolation. This includes carefully thinking through transportation and other logistical considerations. Programs will want to ensure that mentors can meet frequently and consistently so that youth get the mentoring experience they deserve and don’t experience feelings of abandonment or disrespect from mentors skipping meeting times.

At the other end of the geographic isolation spectrum are mentoring programs that are developed from from tribal communities or reservations, where Native American youth are integrated into mentoring programs serving a general student body or are offered a discrete



mentoring program within a larger non-Native school or community context. In these instances, youth are still geographically isolated, but in this case isolated from a larger community of supportive adults and services who already understand who they are and how to serve them in culturally relevant ways. In such cases, program developers may have to partner with external Native American organizations to create that tribal community and give youth access to more Native mentors and easier ways to integrate cultural traditions. Almost every urban area in the United States will have Native American community groups who bring indigenous members of the community together for cultural events, ceremonies, arts exploration, and other activities grounded in tribal traditions. These organizations make excellent partners for programs serving tribal youth outside of reservation communities and can be an excellent source of both Native mentors and elders who can support the work of non-Native mentors. So whether it's a program working in an isolated tribal community or one serving tribal youth isolated within an urban environment, program developers will need to make specific partnerships and connections to other services so that youth and mentors can meet as intended and effectively integrate tribal culture when they do.

- **Structure match activities so that they can build on traditions and existing relationships within the tribal community.** As noted above, each Native community will have its own knowledge, skills, traditions, and ways of finding meaning that can be incorporated into a mentoring program. Integrating cultural nuances into program activities, even in models where mentors and mentees largely meet out on their own, can increase the relevance of the program to youth (and demonstrate its value to perhaps skeptical elders and tribal adults). Each Native community will also have unique ways of thinking about, and definitions around, relationships, something that external service providers may not know and that internal providers may fail to fully maximize. This tapestry of relationships includes the relationships of youth with elders and other community members (note that in some indigenous communities, everyone who is not an elder may be considered a “youth,” which can sometimes complicate ideas about program delivery). Also included are the relationships between men and women, generally, and among parents, their children, and the rest of the community. Learning about the ways the community defines and, in turn, facilitates nurturing relationships can help a program figure out how to best position mentors to have a positive impact and work effectively with these other relationships and their dynamics. For example, these programs might find it much more common to have elders or other adults accompany the mentor and youth on outings or to integrate the perspective and roles of other adults into how to best support a youth in wrestling with a specific problem. These programs might also engage in more group activities, or offer secondary services to parents or other adults in the youth's life. Regardless of the tribal community being served, and whether the developers came from within or from outside that community, chances are these programs might benefit from more group activities, a greater involvement of other adults in the match, and more emphasis on teaching or relearning tribal traditions or skills than one might expect from a more traditional “Western” mentoring program where the mentor alone may be viewed more as the agent of positive change. Practitioners serving tribal youth should consider a collectivist approach that fits the feeling of community already inherent in the lives of these youth.

# RESOURCES AND ADDITIONAL READING

For practitioners who are looking for even more nuanced guidance in this area, we suggest these two resources, generously provided by Boys & Girls Clubs of America Native Services, available for download on the National Mentoring Resource Center (NRMC) website:

- [BGCA Best Practices: Mentoring Native Youth](#)
- [National Native American Mentoring Program Guide](#)

And, as noted above, the following e-learning module developed by the NRMC will also help both staff and mentors deliver mentoring relationships that are safe, purposeful, and culturally relevant.

- [A Critical Orientation for Supporting and Inspiring Native Youth](#)

Practitioners might also find value in these online resources:

- [Assessing Results of 4-H Mentoring with Native American First-Generation 4-H Youths](#) (published by the Journal of Extension)
- [Considerations for Mentoring Indigenous Children and Youth](#) (published by Alberta Mentoring Partnership)
- [Crossing the Bridge: Tribal-State-Local Collaboration](#) (published by the Bureau of Justice Assistance)
- [National Museum of the American Indian. Native Knowledge 360°: Framework for Essential Understandings About American Indians](#) (published by the Smithsonian)
- [National Museum of the American Indian \(2018\). Native Knowledge 360°: Lessons and Resources](#) (published by the Smithsonian)
  - [Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians](#)
  - [Essential Understandings for Colorado Indian Education Curriculum](#)
  - [Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State](#)
  - [Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards \(South Dakota\)](#)
  - [North Dakota Native American Essential Understandings](#)
- [Native American Cultural Practices for Youth Mentoring Programs: Lessons from the Field](#) (NMRC webinar)
- [A New Mentorship Model: The Perceptions of Educational Futures for Native American Youth at a Rural Tribal School](#) (authored by Crystal Aschenbrener, lead author of this review)
- [OJJDP's Tribal Youth Program Training and Technical Assistance Center](#)

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