

Digital Pathways
Best Practices in Distance Education for American Indians

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Presented by:

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Next Steps



DIGITAL PATHWAYS
BEST PRACTICES IN DISTANCE
EDUCATION FOR AMERICAN INDIANS

Next Steps

After successfully meeting conference goals and outcomes (see Conference Executive Summary) through two days of best practices discussions and strategic planning, the path was laid for future action in the upcoming year in order to come nearer to realizing improved educational opportunity in American Indian communities through distance education. Three areas of action were identified with specific goals detailed in each:

Planning

- Compile and distribute *Digital Pathways* conference proceedings
- Present results to individual tribes to facilitate buy-in
- Present results during government-to-government meetings
- Survey tribal needs/priorities in infrastructure and programming
- Identify existing and needed resources for tribes and universities
- Identify tribal and university costs
- Identify personnel needs
- Identify and secure funding sources
- Develop phased approach to distance learning
- Form articulation agreements
- Obtain long-term commitment from tribal communities and universities

Building Awareness and Support

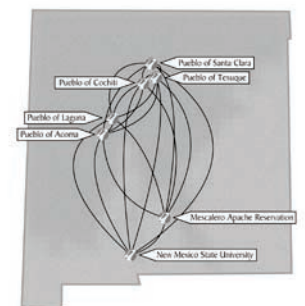
- Identify spokespersons from existing distance education programs
- Conduct hands-on demonstrations for tribal leaders and communities

Coordinating Efforts

- Guide group to develop collaborative mechanisms
- Identify stakeholder representatives with leadership and decision authority
- Create communication methods (listservs, protocols, methods, et al.)
- Coordinate needs assessment efforts
- Facilitate a distance education meeting at American Indian Program Council: showcase distance education for leaders
- Align priorities between stakeholders

Committees formed during strategic planning sessions at the conference are responsible to carry out actions to fulfill the goals as outlined above. Significant work is currently underway to identify and secure funding sources, a goal listed in the *Planning* category. Two separate funding proposals have been submitted through a collaborative effort between university and tribal representatives to obtain funds for the development of infrastructure to facilitate distance education delivery into tribal communities.

The first funding proposal was submitted April 30, 2004 to the United States Rural Utilities Services (RUS), an agency that works to improve the electricity, water, and telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas. The proposal was submitted in response to the RUS Request for Funding Proposals in the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program. Funding, if approved, will provide the software and equipment to bring much-needed health education programs into the participating Pueblo and reservation communities of Laguna, Acoma, Cochiti, Santa Clara, Tesuque, and Mescalero Apache.



New Mexico State University
Rural Utilities Service
Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program

Figure 25.

The second funding proposal, submitted on June 1, 2004 to the United States Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education, seeks funding for the development of community technology centers to be located in the same communities participating in the RUS Distance Learning and Telemedicine program (with the exception of the Mescalero Apache reservation which already has a community technology center). These centers will not only be able to facilitate delivery for a wider student audience in the telemedicine program, but also a wider selection of existing and new degree programs from New Mexico State University and other institutions of higher education. If funding is approved for both grant proposals, this will serve to further meet *Digital Pathways* goals in the areas of infrastructure development and programming to meet local tribal needs.

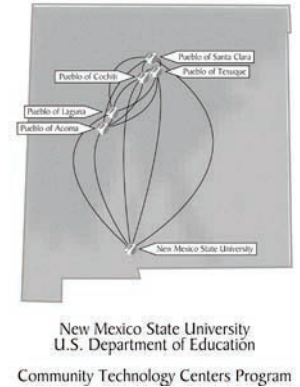


Figure 26.

In addition to the funding search efforts above, action plan committee members are also working to identify additional stakeholders to join the *Digital Pathways* mission, enable greater communication between these stakeholders, and plan for distance education familiarization events in tribal communities.

Finally, the compilation, publication, and distribution of these proceedings meets another important objective of the *Digital Pathways* conference: to disseminate knowledge of best practices and strategic planning results collected during the event and to promote the facilitation of similar activities by other American Indian communities and their citizens.

In conclusion, *Digital Pathways: Best Practices in Distance Education for American Indians* has been very successful in establishing the process of communication and collaboration to achieve a primary conference goal: to support successful delivery of distance education courses and programs into American Indian communities. *Digital Pathways* members are now focused and committed to seeing that results and plans for action are followed through in a timely and highly effective manner in order to assure that distance education opportunities are broadened to an eagerly awaiting American Indian student population in need.