Informing Strategies to End Senior Hunger in Native Communities

19th Annual L.E.A.D. Conference
Pre-Session Convening Summary Report

First Nations Development Institute
Educating • Advocating • Capitalizing
Acknowledgments

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First Nations Development Institute (First Nations) hosted the 19th Annual Leadership, Entrepreneurial and Apprenticeship Development (L.E.A.D.) Conference on September 24-26, 2014, at the Tulalip Resort Casino in Tulalip, Washington. The L.E.A.D. Conference is designed to help emerging and existing leaders in Indian Country network, grow professionally, share ideas and learn new skills related to asset-building. A pre-conference session was held on September 24 that brought together nearly 40 tribal leaders and practitioners from across Indian Country to discuss emerging strategies for eliminating senior hunger in rural and reservation-based Native communities.

First Nations is deeply committed to assisting tribes and Native organizations in their ongoing efforts to end senior hunger. As of 2012, there were approximately 410,000 tribal elders age 65 and older in Indian Country. This number is expected to nearly triple between 2010 and 2050. As the Native senior population grows, so does the need for food and health services to protect and honor our tribal elders for their lifelong commitment to our communities.

Today, approximately one in seven seniors face the threat of hunger, the majority of whom are racial or ethnic minorities from lower incomes. Nearly 60 percent of Native American seniors have an annual income between $5,000 and $10,000, placing them below the national poverty level of $23,850. These statistics suggest that many of our tribal elders face an increasing threat of hunger and malnutrition.

In light of these dire statistics, First Nations launched the Native American Food Security Project to support tribes and Native organizations dedicated to eliminating food insecurity among Native seniors. First Nations, with generous support from AARP Foundation, has funded eight innovative grant projects that seek to eliminate senior hunger in Native communities.

Recently, First Nations hosted a special L.E.A.D. pre-session convening, “Informing Strategies to End Senior Hunger in Native Communities,” to provide a platform for leaders working in the area of senior hunger to have a dialogue regarding how senior hunger affects their communities. This special convening marked an important first step in working toward solutions to solving the complexities of senior hunger in Indian Country.

During the convening, participants were led through a facilitated session on issues related to senior hunger in Native communities. A full PowerPoint of the meeting is included in Appendix C. As an outcome of this session, the group identified six barriers and challenges that need to be addressed to implement effective, long-term solutions to eliminating senior hunger in their respective communities. In addition to identifying these barriers, participants also started to brainstorm possible solutions to these barriers:

- **Transportation** barriers impede Native seniors’ access to critical food and health services.
  - **Proposed Solution:** Develop transportation programs that make it easier for seniors to access these important services.

- **Communication** is key to coordinating effective food and health services for Native seniors.
  - **Proposed Solution:** Many tribes already offer health and wellness programs for children and families. Increase communications between tribal departments and programs to extend these services to Native seniors as well.

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• **Awareness** is a large component of combating senior hunger in Indian Country. Senior hunger is often an invisible problem, especially in rural and reservation-based Native communities.

  • *Proposed solution:* Collect and publish more research to increase awareness and better understand the complexities of senior hunger so that we can start developing sustainable solutions to this growing problem.

• **Senior Engagement** is critical to developing solutions to senior hunger. Many tribal elders possess the knowledge, wisdom and experience needed to reclaim traditional food systems and promote healthier diets. It is important to protect and utilize this knowledge.

  • *Proposed solution:* Establish mentorship programs that allow tribal elders to share their knowledge and wisdom with younger generations.

• **Accountability** of tribes and tribal governments to help honor and protect our tribal elders.

  • *Proposed solution:* Encourage more tribes and tribal governments to seek funding to establish programs that focus exclusively on Native senior hunger.

• **Evaluate** and analyze the effectiveness of current programs and projects that are intended to address the growing problem of senior hunger. Simply put, ask what does and does not work and what improvements can be made to more effectively meet the needs of Native seniors.

  • *Proposed solution:* Develop tools and/or systems to track and examine project outcomes and tailor future projects to be more effective to the needs of Native seniors. In addition to resources for building tools and systems, investment will also need to be made to build capacity in tribal communities to collect and control local data.

These challenges and solutions are merely a snapshot of the overall issues facing Native seniors when it comes to issues of hunger. We hope this report initiates a larger dialogue about issues of hunger and food security when it comes to seniors in Native communities. More importantly, we hope that it will inspire other tribes and Native organizations to take action and develop sustainable solutions to this growing concern.

### II. Introduction

Traditionally and at present, tribal elders retain a position of respect and reverence in many tribal nations. For example, many tribes have elders’ councils that are key decision makers when it comes to issues of governance, economy, culture and language. However, little is known of the struggles that elders – particularly those residing in rural communities – face on a daily basis, including struggles related to health, loneliness, isolation and even hunger.

In 2012, First Nations received a grant from AARP Foundation to launch a program that focuses on developing strategies to combat senior hunger in Native communities. The journey to understanding the complex truth about senior hunger has been revealing. Please consider the following statistics:

• As of 2012, there were approximately 410,000 tribal elders age 65 and older.

• This number is expected to double – nearly triple – between 2010 and 2050.

• One in seven seniors face the threat of hunger, the majority of these vulnerable seniors are racial or ethnic minorities from lower incomes.

• Many tribal elders in rural and reservation-based Native communities live in poverty. The Center for Rural Health estimates that nearly 60 percent of Native American seniors age 55 and older have an annual income between $5,000 and $10,000, placing them below the national poverty level of $23,850.

These statistics indicate that the Native senior population is growing rapidly and that they live on very fixed incomes. Larger research on issues of food insecurity tells us that poverty is highly correlated with

food insecurity and hunger. These data suggest that seniors in Native communities face an increasing threat of hunger and malnutrition.

As the Native senior population continues to grow, so does the need for food and health services to protect and honor our tribal elders for their lifelong commitment to our communities. In 2012, First Nations received a grant in the amount of $187,660 from AARP Foundation to fund four grant projects that focused on finding sustainable solutions for eliminating senior hunger in Indian Country. These four projects are highlighted below in Table 1.

**Table 1: 2012 Native American Food Security Grant Recipients**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grantee</th>
<th>Award</th>
<th>Grant Project Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pueblo of Nambé</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>The Pueblo of Nambé established a community farm that has helped revitalize traditional farming methods and produced more than 4,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables to help eliminate senior hunger on the reservation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>The Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma processed and distributed 2,000 pounds of healthy, chemical-free pork to improve the diet, nutrition and overall health of Native seniors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santo Domingo Pueblo</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>The Santo Domingo Pueblo designed a tribal elder-youth mentorship program to help preserve traditional farming methods. Together, tribal elders and youth planted, harvested and prepared more than 800 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables for Native seniors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sipaulovi Development Corporation</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>The Sipaulovi Development Corporation (Hopi Nation) established a community garden to help eliminate senior hunger. Despite severe winter weather conditions, the community garden produced enough food to feed 75 Native seniors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These four pioneering projects reveal innovative strategies and policies that are eliminating senior hunger, increasing access to healthy foods, creating jobs and income opportunities, and sparking community pride and revitalization. Together, these four grantees planted, harvested and donated more than **7,000 pounds** of fresh fruits, vegetables and meat to Native seniors living in their communities! The tremendous success of these first four projects resulted in a second grant from AARP Foundation in the amount of $250,000 to support an additional four projects:

**Table 2: 2014 Native American Food Security Grant Recipients**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grantee</th>
<th>Award</th>
<th>Grant Project Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College of Menominee Nation</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>This project seeks to expand the tribe’s existing senior health and wellness program by helping Native seniors grow healthy, fresh foods in their own yards with help from Native youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painted Desert Demonstration Project/The STAR School</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>This project seeks to link community-based farms with local schools and senior centers to enhance the health and well-being of Native youth and elders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pueblo of Tesuque</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>This project seeks to establish a mentorship program that connects Native youth and elders with the goal of reclaiming and revitalizing traditional food systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing Rock Sioux Tribe</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>This project seeks to expand the tribe’s existing senior nutrition program with such initiatives as a farmers’ market and community garden specifically for Native seniors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the findings First Nations has uncovered from these first two years of work is that there is generally a lack of data on issues of economic and food security in Native communities. As a first attempt to provide greater data on issues of food security, First Nations facilitated a consensus-based workshop, inviting service providers in the area of food and senior hunger from tribal communities throughout the country.

**III. “Informing Strategies to End Senior Hunger in Native Communities”**

On September 24, 2014, First Nations hosted a special convening, “Informing Strategies to End Senior Hunger in Native Communities,” at the Tulalip Resort Casino in Tulalip, Washington. This special convening focused on the successes, challenges and solutions to battling senior hunger in Native communities.

Table 3: Convening Participants by State and Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Attendees</th>
<th>Assigned Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>West/Northwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>West/Northwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>West/Northwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>West/Northwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>East/Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>East/Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>East/Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>East/Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>East/Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>East/Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>East/Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this special convening, First Nations invited nearly 40 tribal leaders and practitioners from across Indian Country to offer descriptions, suggestions and articulation of the policy needs in one central gathering place to begin the journey of intimately understanding senior hunger in Indian Country. This special convening marked an important first step toward solving the complexities of senior hunger and malnutrition.5

The 38 participants at this special convening represented Native leaders and practitioners from both reservation and non-reservation communities. Participants gathered from across 14 states. They represented approximately 26 tribes and tribal communities as well as three larger urban/intertribal organizations.

Additionally, these 38 participants worked for a number of different tribes and Native organizations.

Table 4: Participants by Type of Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tribe/Tribal Program or Department</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofits</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal Colleges</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First Nations issued a call for applications for attendees. Originally, this meeting was intended to have 20 participants. But after receiving 61 applications for attendance, we expanded the invitation list to nearly 40 invited individuals. For the invitation list, First Nations tried to select a wide range dispersion of participants from reservation communities across the United States. Moreover, since senior services are not only provided by tribal government programs but also nonprofits and, increasingly, tribal colleges, First Nations wanted to ensure adequate representation retention from both the government and nonprofit sectors. Overall geographic representation is highlighted in Table 3 and sector representation is highlighted in Table 4.

This special convening opened with a simple question: “Is senior hunger a priority in your community?” This question prompted a wide range of answers:

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5 Please see list of participants (Appendix A), agenda (Appendix B) and conversation facilitation materials (Appendix C).
• Representatives from programs with a mission to directly address senior hunger answered in the affirmative. These programs included Standing Rock Senior Nutrition Program, The Red Lake Elderly Nutrition Program, The United Kcetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma Senior Program, and The Washoe Tribe of Nevada.

• Other programs whose primary focus is to broadly address issues of hunger also answered in the affirmative. These programs included representatives from the Absentee Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma City Indian Clinic, the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe SNAP Education Program, and the Tesuque Pueblo Farm Enterprise.

• Other programs such as nonprofit organizations that do not have a direct association with a tribal government, answered differently. One program stated the need for tribal governments to explicitly state that senior hunger is a priority in their communities. Another organization suggested they were unsure and suggested that we look at data on senior hunger at the tribal level to determine whether senior hunger is a priority.

• Other comments included that senior hunger is but one priority of many, and that other issues include the quality of food that senior populations receive, the effects of different foods on their senior health, and the need for increased education on the glycemic index.

Overall, these responses indicate that more data is needed regarding the status of hunger and senior citizens in Native communities. Group responses also highlight the need for more exploration into specific issues of senior hunger. Finally, these responses suggest that there may need to be greater attention focused on how tribal leaders identify senior hunger as a tribal government priority. Is senior hunger a priority because feeding programs exist, or does there need to be a strong policy (or service programming) available for senior hunger? These issues merit further consideration.
IV. Are Seniors in Your Community Hungry?

During this special session on senior hunger, all participants were shown a video on senior hunger. Given the widespread absence of public discussion on issues of senior hunger in Native communities, facilitators showed a video addressing issues of senior hunger in New York City. The video highlighted a recent local report in the New York City area that noted that one in three seniors struggle to access sufficient food. The video discusses how seniors rely on critical feeding programs in local communities and how seniors stretch and ration their food to last for meals not covered by feeding programs (such as on weekends). Following the video, participants were asked a number of questions including what looked familiar in the video and if issues of senior hunger as discussed in the video are familiar in their local communities.

Participants who worked for local feeding programs commented on the familiar nature of seniors rationing of food. They noted that in many instances Native seniors would only eat a portion of food and take food home, but the staff never made the connection that this may be related to issues of food insecurity. Participants commented that because senior hunger is not a topic readily discussed in Native communities, they never thought that seniors were actually taking food home to eat for dinner or because they may not have food to eat for other meals.

Other participants who witnessed food rationing by Native seniors noted that their seniors often rationed food to be able to take some home for others in their family, particularly their grandchildren. Participants commented that not only are some of their seniors food insecure, but entire families are food insecure. In fact, recent data suggests that 23 percent of American Indian households are food insecure. Many Native households do not represent conventional American households in that they are often multi-generational. In many instances, seniors may live with other family members and may even be the primary caregiver for their grandchildren.

For example, 48,000 Native grandparents report that they are the primary caregivers in their families. Furthermore, 34 percent of these grandparents report living below the poverty level. Participants noted that federal funding for senior feeding programs prevents local programs from providing meals to individuals that are not seniors. As such, they are not able to adequately address the food insecurity of all family members. Participants noted that this restriction placed on their programs from outside funding sources was in direct opposition to their cultures in which food is shared across families and the community.

Overall, participants noted that more open discussion needs to occur within Native communities to gauge the full range of senior hunger in their communities. Many Native seniors may feel too proud or embarrassed to openly discuss the very personal issue of senior hunger and food insecurity. But participants noted that these difficult conversations need to take place. Moreover, they noted that communities, especially those that are hit hard by instances of food insecurity, may need to explore feeding program options that are able to feed all members of families to curb food rationing in Native communities.

V. An Overview of Senior Hunger in Indian Country

The number of older adults is expected to increase exponentially over the next decade within the United States. In 2040, there will be over 79 million adults,

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6 This NBC news story, titled “1 in 3 Senior Citizens Struggles to Eat, Report Finds,” can be found at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsyHi-R2Mwo.


double the older adult population of 2000.\textsuperscript{10} The adult population over the age of 65 is also expected to become more diverse with a 125 percent increase of minorities compared to an increase of 54 percent of white adults over 65.\textsuperscript{11} The fastest population growth recorded in the 2012 census was the Native American population, which grew by 26.7 percent compared to the general population growth of 9.7 percent.\textsuperscript{12} Statistics indicate that the Native population may be younger than most, but over time programming will need to evolve to meet the aging population.

Life expectancy of Native Americans has grown rapidly in the span of 70 years. In 1940, Native Americans had a life expectancy of only 51 years (whereas the average life expectancy of whites was 64 years). Today, life expectancy of Native Americans has nearly “caught up” to the senior population in other segments of American society. Native Americans now have a life expectancy of nearly 77 years. These gains in the lifecycle of Native Americans are related to a number of factors, including increased access to healthcare and disease prevention. In addition to living longer, the National Indian Health Board speculates that between 1999 and 2009, the Native population age 55 and older has grown by 55 percent.\textsuperscript{13} Given that the Native senior population has grown considerably and Native seniors are living longer, the fundamental question is: have services in rural and isolated Native communities kept up with this growth?

During this special convening, participants focused on elder population growth and services that address the elder population. One participant mentioned that once the elder population increases, there will be a greater need for care centers on reservations if traditional mechanisms such as extended family and clan systems fail. Another participant reiterated that their senior feeding program is already stretched budget-wise, and an increase in participation with more elders would be devastating to their already small budget.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (2012). \textit{A Profile of Older Americans}: 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{11} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (2012). \textit{A Profile of Older Americans}: 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{12} U.S. Census Bureau, \textit{Profile of America Facts for Features}. American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month: November 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{13} National Indian Health Board, \textit{An Overview of Long-Term Care in Indian Country}. Washington, D.C.: National Indian Health Board.
\end{itemize}
Senior Hunger Programs

There are few programs that focus on hunger in tribal nations. The two major food programs are Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Food Distribution on Indian Reservation Programs (FDPIR). FDPIR is a tribal-specific program. However, seniors or elderly households are least likely to receive SNAP despite the fact that age is not a consideration in benefits and the elder household population is growing faster than other age groups.\(^\text{14}\) In an analysis of FDPIR program participants, the principal investigators state, “One conclusion drawn from the survey data is that 38.9 percent of FDPIR households included elderly persons, half (49.6 percent) of these same households included only elderly persons, and the great majority of these households were persons living alone.\(^\text{15}\)

Perhaps one of the most revealing points made during this special convening was information on the programs available to address senior hunger. While senior hunger was not specifically named in traditional, community-based food programs, many grassroots programs focused on giving to elder populations as a program value. For example:

- Northwest tribes often include the gifting of fish to elders and head start programs during fishing seasons.

- The Seneca Diabetes Foundation is focused on creating gardens – maintained by the elderly and youth – to increase traditional food consumption by elder and youth populations.

- The Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma often disperses harvest between elder and young child populations.

- The STAR School invites families to participate in its meal program, which has increased the number of elders who participate.

These programs emphasize that the spirit of giving to seniors remains a strong component of Native communities. However, programs that are focused on traditional giving practices, such as those mentioned above, are rarely accounted for through mainstream methods of program accountability. Nevertheless, they are a mainstay in many tribal nations and have made great strides in addressing senior hunger issues. These findings suggest that traditional values and practices, which often emphasize respect for tribal elders, play an important role in the fight against senior hunger and malnutrition.

VI. Potential Strategies for Ending Senior Hunger in Native Communities

As the Native senior population grows, so does the need for food and health services to protect and honor our tribal elders. During this special convening session, participants were asked: “What is blocking your organization or tribe’s ability to end senior hunger in your community?” Participants identified the following six barriers and challenges:

1. Transportation
2. Communication
3. Awareness
4. Senior Engagement
5. Accountability
6. Evaluation

These six barriers, as well as potential solutions developed by the group, are explained in more detail below.

Transportation barriers impede Native seniors’ access to critical food and health services.

Participants acknowledged that transportation systems in Indian Country are often inadequate or nonexistent. Because many tribal nations are in isolated and rural areas, transportation to stores, markets and programs is critical in addressing access to food for senior tribal members. Few tribes have public transit systems that would allow senior tribal members to access fresh food. Many programs and tribes relied on “Good Samaritans” and family members to transport seniors to markets, stores and programs.

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- **Proposed Solution:** Identify transportation gaps and increase transportation programs that make it easier for seniors to access important services. These programs can include public transportation networks, senior medical transportation, meals-on-wheels programs or incorporating senior ride planning into tribal transportation plans.

**Communication is key to coordinating effective food and health services for Native seniors.**

Many participants identified the need to coordinate with other tribal programs and the need for both intra-tribal and inter-tribal cooperation. While many programs share the same building or operate within one tribe, many tribal programs are grant-specific and tribes and/or programs do not always share resources. Participants also expressed the need to share information with stakeholders upon initiation of programming.

- **Proposed Solution:** Many tribes already offer health and wellness programs for children and families. These services should also reach Native seniors as well. To effectively implement this solution, participants suggest updating, sharing and leveraging resources between tribes and across tribal departments. This can also include bundling service delivery across service programs.

**Awareness is a large component of combating senior hunger in Indian Country.** Senior hunger is often an invisible problem, especially in rural and reservation-based Native communities.

Participants identified the critical need to actually capture community needs through data and research. Some participants suggested conducting community food assessments that would include senior hunger issues and data. This tribal-wide food assessment could be used to increase resources directed at senior hunger without actually identifying individuals as prospective clients, which may attach a stigma to those identified and lead some seniors to underreport hunger issues. Data on senior hunger would be useful in articulating and formalizing the issues in order to educate stakeholders such as tribal and state governments, tribal leadership and funders.
Proposed solution: Collect and publish more research to increase awareness and better understand the complexities of senior hunger so that we can start developing sustainable solutions to this growing problem. In particular, participants discussed the benefit of conducting a community food assessment that includes Native seniors.

Senior Engagement is critical to developing solutions to senior hunger. Many tribal elders possess the knowledge, wisdom and experience needed to reclamation traditional food systems. It is important to protect and utilize this knowledge.

Participants identified the need to include elders in the discussions about senior hunger. These discussions would potentially focus upon asking elders about issues preventing seniors from accessing adequate food in their communities and their solutions for reducing senior hunger, developing elder councils, and reconnecting elders with tribal food systems. Elder knowledge was identified as a critical asset in the formation of any and all tribal programs, not just programs to address senior hunger. Several participants articulated the need to be sensitive to word choice as not to hurt the pride of seniors who may be hungry.

Proposed solution: Invite elders to define issues around accessing adequate food in their communities and articulate potential solutions to senior hunger. Often, tribal elders possess the knowledge, wisdom and experience to reclamation healthy, traditional food systems. Therefore, establish mentorship programs that allow tribal elders to share their knowledge and wisdom with younger generations.

Accountability of tribes and tribal leaders to help honor and protect our tribal elders.

Some participants discussed the need of accountability from program staff and also tribal leadership. While many programs are established and supported by tribal governments, tribal politics, leadership disagreements and human resource issues and often dilute the effectiveness of tribal programs trying to address senior hunger. A re-evaluation of tribal government-specific issues is often needed in order to create and sustain effective programs.

Proposed solution: Encourage more tribes and Native organizations to establish programs that focus exclusively on Native senior hunger. Also, review tribal policies to ensure transparency and financial accountability.

Evaluate and analyze the effectiveness of programs and projects that are intended to address the growing problem of senior hunger. Briefly stated, ask what worked and what did not work during the project cycle. The process of data collection and analysis can be very costly and time intensive. However, data collection and analysis is crucial to eliminating senior hunger in Indian Country. Furthermore, data collection allows tribal leaders and practitioners to evaluate the success and limitations of their program.

Proposed solution: Develop tools and/or systems to track and examine project outcomes and tailor future projects to be more effective to the needs of Native seniors. In addition to resources for building tools and systems, investment will also need to be made to build capacity in tribal communities to collect and control local data.

Although there are a number of barriers to eliminating senior hunger in Native communities, the innovative solutions brainstormed by the participants at this special convening reiterate that tribes and Native organizations have the potential to use their own knowledge, skills and resources to strengthen and improve their own communities. We hope that other tribes and Native organizations will find these suggestions and insights meaningful as they develop and implement their own sustainable solutions for eliminating senior hunger in Indian Country.

VII. Additional Recommendations for Improving Senior Health

First Nations would also like to add the following suggestions to eliminate senior hunger and improve the overall health and well-being of Native seniors in our communities. These suggestions are based upon the lessons that we have learned over the past two years from the eight grantees funded through First Nations’ Native American Food Security Project as well as many of our other grant initiatives that directly and/or indirectly impact the Native senior population.
**Recommendation 1: Support Anchor Institutions as Focal Points for Access to Benefits and Bundled Services**

One of the fundamental lessons learned from First Nations’ existing work in the space of aging is that Native elders are an active and resourceful population, and when collectively engaged, they are ready and willing to make demands and raise awareness related to their well-being and safety needs. Moreover, places like Native elder/community centers remain community hubs for elder engagement. Though Native elder/community centers are still hubs for engaging elders, in many instances they have become resource-strapped service providers for Native elders. Native elder/community centers not only provide Native seniors with meals and recreational activities, but they also serve as informal outlets for benefit questions on healthcare, income-driven benefits, housing and financial management.

Given that Native elder/community centers have become local (albeit informal) focal points for elders’ benefits, First Nations proposes to expand Native elder/community centers (or other spaces of senior engagement) to offer more coordinated service delivery related to elders health, well-being and safety.

One of the new trends in service delivery and newly supported by philanthropy leans toward examining how institutions can coordinate and integrate programs, services, awareness and information to better serve vulnerable populations. For example, in the Pacific Northwest, First Nations worked with local reservation-based institutions to pilot several bundled service programs. Under this model, First Nations has been working with anchor institutions (that is, strong and healthy institutions in Native communities) including Native community development financial institutions (CDFIs) and tribal colleges where low-income student parents are connected with larger benefits that they may qualify for and utilize. For example, we worked with Chief Dull Knife College and helped them to expand their Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program to offer a benefits screening program where individuals could learn about additional benefits they qualified for or financial empowerment programs they could access.

First Nations is one of the first Native organizations to pilot this idea of bundled services in rural and remote Native communities and among a narrow segment of the population. We are still uncovering the uniqueness of services needed and how to connect these institutions to broader reservation and state-wide service providers. Building on our existing innovations, First Nations proposes to pilot senior-focused bundled-service programs in Native communities. Much like our other extremely successful programs, this project seeks to have Native communities design concepts related to providing bundled services in their communities.

From our existing knowledge and networks and our preliminary scan, some possible ideas include linking Native elder/community center meal programs to SNAP benefits, local community supported agriculture programs, and health and nutrition classes; linking Native elder/community center recreational activities to youth programming for intergenerational learning and health and fitness promotion and/or examine formation of an elder council dedicated to the creation of bundled-service program delivery; providing VITA services and benefits screening at Native elder/community centers; and providing elders with a greater voice in politics and pushing for tribal legislation such as anti-elder abuse policies.

**Recommendation 2: Tribal Elders Possess the Knowledge and Wisdom to Strengthen and Empower Their Communities**

The experience, knowledge and wisdom of tribal elders have the potential to improve the health and well-being of tribal communities. In 2012, the Pueblo of Nambé launched an innovative project to demonstrate its respect and appreciation for their tribal elders’ lifelong contributions to the tribe. It established a community farm that has helped revitalize traditional farming methods and produced more than 4,000 pounds of food to help eliminate senior hunger on the reservation.

First Nations supported this innovative project with two grants through its broad Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative (NAFSI). The first $25,000 grant was awarded in 2012 and was underwritten by AARP Foundation as part of First Nations’ Native American Food Security Project. It was intended to identify a sustainable solution to hunger for seniors.
Funding by AARP Foundation motivated the Pueblo to conduct a food assessment to examine the needs of their tribal community. This assessment revealed a gap in healthy food access for seniors. The Pueblo addressed this gap by launching a community farm and food-distribution program that ensured that tribal elders had easy access to traditional and healthy local foods both at home and at the senior center. Additionally, the Pueblo hosted a harvest party in the fall to honor their elders with a traditional feast that included fresh bison and fruits and vegetables from the community garden. The hope is that the Pueblo can use the second grant to tackle food insecurity on the reservation, sell surplus fruits and vegetables to stores and restaurants off the reservation, and stimulate tribal economic growth and development by hiring tribal youth to assist in these efforts.

The success of this community-wide initiative inspired the Pueblo of Nambe to apply for a second grant in 2013 to lease additional land and hire more hands to cultivate the community garden. The hope is that the Pueblo can use the second grant to tackle food insecurity on the reservation, sell surplus fruits and vegetables to stores and restaurants off the reservation, and stimulate tribal economic growth and development by hiring tribal youth to assist in these efforts.

This model reiterates that tribal elders are an important asset to tribal communities. Tribes can use the knowledge and wisdom of their elders to develop sustainable solutions to eliminate senior hunger.

**Recommendation 3: “Mentor Up” – Engaging Youth to Give Back to Tribal Elders**

Tribal colleges have become focal points for community development in Native communities. Beyond providing a quality college education to students in Native communities, tribal colleges and universities have become drivers of community activity. The Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) has created a “mentor up” program whereby tribal college students are trained in areas of financial education and management and, in turn, provide financial education and capability workshops in Native communities and elders centers in New Mexico. These workshops are tailored to the financial situation of Native elders and also address issues of financial abuse, estate planning and other relevant yet-little-talked-about issues in Native communities. In our conversations with other tribal colleges, faculty expressed interest in developing similar programs related to training accounting and business students as qualified tax preparers to create VITA sites in Native communities. In all, this model will provide Native elders with the necessary services and skills to improve well-being, and also provide needed training to Native students attending tribal colleges and universities and developing students’ spirit of reciprocity and giving back.

In addition to increasing financial security, these type of mentorship programs have also been used to increase food security. For example, the Santo Domingo Pueblo designed a tribal elder-youth mentorship program to help preserve traditional farming methods and develop a sustainable solution to senior hunger. Approximately, 60 tribal elders and 80 tribal youth met weekly to participate in a variety of one-hour classes and workshops focused upon agriculture, language and traditional songs and ceremonies. Together, tribal elders and youth planted, harvested and prepared more than 800 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables that were eventually turned into 150 hot, nutritious meals that were distributed to tribal elders at the local senior center.

The success of this project inspired the Santo Domingo Pueblo to continue holding weekly mentorship meetings even after their grant expired. Additionally, strong interest in the program compelled project organizers to design their own curriculum so that these efforts can be replicated in the future. This curriculum, which is tailored to specifically meet the needs of the Santo Domingo Pueblo, is still in the process of being finalized.

**Recommendation 4: Reach Beyond Reservation Borders: Linking Reservation Services to Urban Elders**

The most recent census data suggests that over 50 percent of Native Americans live away from their home reservation communities and in urban areas. Historically, the major flight to urban areas by Native Americans was driven by the lack of economic and educational
opportunities present in Native communities. Moreover, a major shift in urbanization occurred in the 1950s when the federal government launched the Urban Relocation Program as a means to take Native Americans off of Native reservations, relocating them to urban areas. Over time, many, if not most, of the individuals that were relocated from their reservation communities in the 1950s continued to have strong connections to their home communities, traveling home to be connected to tribal lifeways.

Today, those who were relocated in the 1950s are over age 50 and in need of services. In First Nations’ conversations with reservation-based programs, we have noted that there has been a growing demand by elders living in urban areas traveling back to the reservation for services including healthcare, food and housing assistance. Our partners interviewed in the past few months have noted that reservation programs need to be collaborative with those in urban areas for service delivery to Native elders. This could take the form of reservation communities acting as access points for service referrals in urban areas or providing urban area Natives with resources to limit barriers to access on the reservation.

In all, the under-resourced Native communities and programs are currently taxed with individuals from urban areas traveling to reservation-based service providers. Thus, tribal communities need to start looking at models for collaboration and also providing more encompassing services to Native elders in urban areas.

The four recommendations in this report highlight both the strengths and needs of the Native senior population. Ultimately, the recommendations recognize and reiterate the importance of senior knowledge to tribal communities and the importance of their participation in community development. While many tribal communities have complex and thoughtful ways of integrating the senior population within the community, they are having to articulate and re-evaluate the role of the elder population in modern, changing times, and they have already begun the process of addressing senior issues such as hunger as identified in this report.

VIII. Conclusion

As the Native senior population grows, so does the need for food and health services to protect and honor our tribal elders for their lifelong commitment to our communities. The 38 Native leaders and practitioners who participated in this special convening suggest that many tribes and Native organizations are committed to finding sustainable solutions to eliminating senior hunger in their communities. They have launched a number of innovative programs and projects that are dedicated to spreading awareness about the rapidly growing concern of senior hunger in Indian Country, increasing access to services for Native seniors, and most importantly, engaging Native seniors to help develop culturally-appropriate solutions to food insecurity – an issue that unfortunately affects several different generations in rural and reservation-based Native communities.

The solutions outlined in this report suggest that many tribes and Native organizations are currently taking important problem-solving steps, and using their tribal land and resources to develop homegrown solutions to eliminating senior hunger in Indian Country. It is essential for funders and donors to continue nurturing these innovative programs and projects through stable and consistent funding and support. This support will enable tribes and Native organizations to launch new projects and programs that will have a positive and long-lasting effect on the health and well-being of Native seniors and their communities.

We would like to thank the nearly 40 participants who attended this special convening, “Strategies for Eliminating Senior Hunger in Native Communities” for their commitment and dedication to eliminating senior hunger in rural and reservation-based Native communities. We hope the contents and recommendations included in this report will serve as a resource in Indian Country that will encourage other tribes and Native organizations to begin looking to one another to share ideas, models and best practices that will eventually help eliminate senior hunger in rural and reservation-based Native communities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amber Crotty</td>
<td>Diné Policy Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber Marlow</td>
<td>Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barbara Dills</td>
<td>REDCO (Rosebud Economic Development Corporation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill Edwards</td>
<td>Tolani Lake Enterprises Inc.</td>
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<td>Bridge McKye</td>
<td>Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bryce Washington</td>
<td>Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carmella Quam</td>
<td>Santa Fe Indian School Leadership Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dalene Coriz</td>
<td>Santa Fe Indian School Leadership Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dawn Briner</td>
<td>Otoe-Missouria Tribe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deb Echo-Hawk</td>
<td>Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Debby Carlson</td>
<td>Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eddie Brokeshoulder</td>
<td>Absentee Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emigdio Ballon</td>
<td>Pueblo of Tesuque</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gailey Morgan</td>
<td>Pueblo of Tesuque</td>
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<tr>
<td>George Toya</td>
<td>Pueblo of Nambe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Griselda Roberts</td>
<td>Ute Mountain Ute Tribe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jessie Barber</td>
<td>Standing Rock Sioux Tribe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joanne Mulbah</td>
<td>Minnesota Chippewa Tribe SNAP Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Teller</td>
<td>College of Menominee Nation</td>
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<td>Kathryn O'Donnell</td>
<td>Bay Mills Community College</td>
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<td>Katy Soper</td>
<td>Oklahoma City Indian Clinic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ken Parker</td>
<td>Seneca Diabetes Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Les Brown</td>
<td>Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa Johnson</td>
<td>Red Lake Tribe - Elderly Nutrition Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luella Harrison</td>
<td>Standing Rock Sioux Tribe</td>
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<td>Marie Faye Ortega</td>
<td>Cocopah Indian Tribe</td>
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<td>Mark Sorensen</td>
<td>STAR School</td>
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<td>Megan Martin</td>
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<td>Nicole Charley</td>
<td>Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission</td>
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<td>Pati Martinson</td>
<td>Taos Country Economic Development Corporation/ Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patsy Brooks</td>
<td>Seneca Nation of Indians Gardening Project</td>
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<td>Pete Buffalo Head</td>
<td>Ponea Tribe of Oklahoma</td>
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<td>Randy Ross</td>
<td>Ponea Tribe of Oklahoma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rebecca Dreadfulwater</td>
<td>United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shannon Francis</td>
<td>Denver Indian Center / Denver Indian Family Resource Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terri Bad Hand</td>
<td>Taos Country Economic Development Corporation/ Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance</td>
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<td>Tomoe Natori</td>
<td>Ute Mountain Ute Tribe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trudy Billy</td>
<td>St. Jude Food Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilmer Noganosh</td>
<td>Bay Mills Community College</td>
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Session Purpose: Statistics document that Native Americans continue to experience high rates of poverty, contributing to significant food insecurity in many Native American communities. According to the most recent American Community Survey, about 26% of American Indians live at or below the poverty line. The same survey indicates that roughly 12% of all Native Americans living in poverty are age 55 and older. Other studies conducted by the National Resource Center on Native American Aging note that Native American seniors suffer from higher rates of obesity, diabetes and other negative health indicators when compared to other senior groups in the United States. How do Native nations begin to develop strategies to increase food security for Native seniors and increase their access to fresh and healthy foods? The purpose of this session is to have a facilitated discussion with an overall goal of enriching the discussion on senior hunger in Native communities and increase networking and sharing information on strategy development.

Facilitators:
Catherine Bryan  
Jackie Francke  
Raymond Foxworth  
A-daе Romero

Generously Sponsored by:
AARP  
Supporting the hunger solutions of AARP Foundation.  
DrivetoEndHunger.org
**Informing Strategies to End Senior Hunger in Native Communities**

**Wednesday, September 24, 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 – 8:45 am</td>
<td>Registration and Breakfast</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:45 – 9:30 am</td>
<td>Blessing, Welcome, and Introductions</td>
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<td>First Nations Development Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30 – 10:30 am</td>
<td>Opening: A Conversation to Understand The Landscape of Senior Hunger in Native Communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:30 – 10:45 am</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:45 – 12:00 pm</td>
<td>Understanding Services, Allies and Successes in Native Senior Hunger</td>
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<td>12:00 – 1:15 pm</td>
<td>Lunch Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:15 – 2:45 pm</td>
<td>Workshop: What’s Blocking Your Ability To Eliminate Senior Hunger In Your Community?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:45 – 3:00 pm</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:00 – 4:00 pm</td>
<td>Continue Workshop: What’s Blocking Your Ability To Eliminate Senior Hunger In Your Community?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00 – 5:00 pm</td>
<td>Wrap up and Concluding Remarks</td>
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</table>
X. Appendix C: PowerPoint “Informing Strategies to End Senior Hunger in Native Communities”
Informing Strategies to End Senior Hunger in Native Communities

Facilitators:
Catherine Bryan  First Nations
Raymond Foxworth  First Nations
Jackie Francke  First Nations
A-dae Romero

Backdrop:
26% AI/AN Live Below Poverty Line
12% of AI/AN Living in Poverty
55+
Backdrop

Higher Rates of Poverty
Higher Rates of Diabetes, Obesity
Higher rates of Food Insecurity
Higher Rates of Hunger

Pre-Conference Purpose:

» Support discussion on Senior hunger in Native communities
» Increase networking and sharing information on strategy development
» Inform a report on the issue of Senior hunger in Indian Country
Introductions (30 Seconds Each)

» Name
» Tribal Affiliation (if applicable)
» Tribe or Organization you represent
» Is senior hunger a priority in your community?

Informing Strategies to End Senior Hunger in Native Communities

A Conversation to Understand The Landscape of Senior Hunger in Native Communities

Catherine Bryan, Senior Program Officer, FNDI
Seniors Going Hungry in Indian Country?

What Do You Think?

Participants were shown this news story, titled “One in Three Seniors Struggle to Eat,” from NBC News, New York City.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsyHi-R2Mwo
WHAT STRUCK YOU AS FAMILIAR?
WHERE DO YOU SEE THIS IN YOUR FAMILY OR COMMUNITY?

HOW COMMON DO YOU THINK THIS IS IN YOUR COMMUNITY, NATIONS, INDIAN COUNTRY?
WHAT INDICATORS TELL YOU THIS?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN YOUR COMMUNITIES THAT IS WORKING OR HELPING?

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OR HURDLES YOU SEE IN YOUR FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND INDIAN COUNTRY?
WHAT ARE SOME OF THE UNUSED/UNTAPPED ASSETS/RESOURCES THAT COULD BE MOBILIZED AND DEVELOPED IN PRACTICAL AND MEANINGFUL WAYS IN YOUR COMMUNITIES? INSIDE INDIAN COUNTRY? OUTSIDE INDIAN COUNTRY?

WHERE ARE YOU MOTIVATED AND READY TO JUMP IN TO MOVE THIS WORK AND CONVERSATION FORWARD?
Thank you!

15 Minute Break
Refreshments Outside

When We Return:
Understanding Services, Allies and Successes in Native Senior Hunger

Informing Strategies to End Senior Hunger in Native Communities

Understanding Services, Allies and Successes in Native Senior Hunger
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<td>1</td>
<td>• Divide up into teams of 3 people.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>• Introduce yourself to your small group.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>• Identify a note taker who will record group answers on each flip chart.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>• As a small group, move through the line of 5 questions (5-6 minutes/question).</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>• Please stay in your region after finished.</td>
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**Informing Strategies to End Senior Hunger in Native Communities**

**Workshop: What’s Blocking Your Ability To Eliminate Senior Hunger In Your Community?**
FOCUS QUESTION:
What’s Blocking Your Organization or Tribe’s Ability to Eliminate Senior Hunger in Your Community?

Rule 1:
3-5 Words Per Card
Rule 2: Write Big
Like This

Rule 3: One Idea
Per Card
Rule 4: LACK OF
XI. Notes from Brainstorming Session: What’s blocking your organization or tribe’s ability to end senior hunger in your community?

Transportation
- Problem(s): Geographic isolation; Increase senior mobility to access foods
- Solution(s): Initiate effective transportation; coordinate transportation addressing food needs

Communication
- Problem(s): Initiate communication and cooperation between all tribal departments and programs
- Solution(s): Coordinate and collaborate between (and within) existing departments and programs; orientation for stakeholders; update/share marketing resources
- Problem(s): Research, identify, and create awareness of issues and needs
- Solution(s): Create and implement community specific food assessments and other surveys; determine hunger needs without damaging pride; formalize data-collection process
- Problem(s): Honor and strengthen tribal elders
- Solution(s): Invite elders to articulate solutions; develop elder councils; preserve elder knowledge; determine hunger needs without damaging pride
- Problem(s): Mismanagement of funds
- Solution(s): Promote transparency and accountability; take ownership and responsibility; review tribal policies.

Evaluation
- Problem(s): Data collection and analysis is often perceived as overwhelming
- Solution(s): Develop evaluation methods and act on results
- Big Picture: Empowerment and Sustainability
- Food sovereignty = tribal sovereignty
- Develop food sovereignty action plan
- Support for farms and farmers
- Visualize long-term solutions