

Proceedings of the Tribal Economic Development Summit



The Tribal Economic Development & Nation-Building Summit convened on October 27, 2008 at Cher-Ae Heights, Trinidad Rancheria, and October 28, 2008 at HSU's Native American Forum. Keynote speaker Eric Ramos, President of Business Operations at Blue Lake Rancheria, provided an inspiring opening address on "The Importance of Tribal Economic Development." Emphasizing his respect for the resilience, determination, and hard work of Tribal peoples, his presentation focused on the increasing capacity and improving economic development opportunities available

to Tribes today: access to higher education, business capital (sometimes generated by casinos), and regional markets; sophisticated Tribal organizations and management systems that support the operation of business enterprises separately from governing/political activities; using Tribal enterprises to support private Indian entrepreneurs as vendors (achieving optimum economic multiplier effects), and working together to strengthen and improve the overall well-being of Indian/Tribal communities. Mr. Ramos noted that neither the federal government nor casinos are recession-proof, cautioning against over-reliance on these two sources of Tribal support. He encouraged Tribes to support their members in pursuing postsecondary education, including trades, and in pursuing their own dreams of business ownership.

Additional first-day Tribal presenters covered a broad range of topics, including the following:

Challenges and Successes in Indian Country. Members of this panel discussed their Tribes' mixed experiences in developing, financing, and/or operating a variety of enterprises (e.g., forest fuels reduction, firefighting, and development of a regional arts center using innovative small-diameter pole construction; a fishing-related resort/RV park, fish processing plant, and fuel mart; and a hotel/restaurant and health club/spa. They also discussed longstanding challenges, including isolation in remote rural communities, limited access to postsecondary education and capital for business startups, and the delicate balance between the need for strong Tribal leadership to support economic development and micromanagement of Tribal enterprises.

Role of Gaming in Tribal Nation-Building. Panelists discussed gaming within the larger context of Tribal sovereignty and the legal limits, influence, and pressure continually imposed by federal and state regulators of Indian gaming. With persistence, as well as strategic planning and management, Indian gaming has proved to be a means to land acquisition, essential community infrastructure development, job creation, and organizational capacity-building, particularly capacity for further enterprise development. One Tribal presenter discussed the important role of gaming in supporting cultural education (to strengthen Tribal identity and prevent assimilation), as well as making it possible for geographically dispersed Tribal members to return to their ancestral homelands. Gaming revenues also can be utilized to support education and youth leadership development,

pension funds for Tribal members (beginning at birth), small business loans, and reacquisition of cultural objects and resources.

Partnering Across Jurisdiction—When and Why It Works. Members of this panel discussed the myths and realities of sovereignty for Tribes as domestic sovereign nations, and the pros and cons of using limited waivers of sovereign immunity to achieve economic development goals. Some Tribes have used limited waivers (under advisement of attorneys specializing in federal Indian law) to facilitate beneficial business partnerships that, at the same time, help to inform non-Indian communities and entities about Tribal governments and peoples. This also facilitates essential trust-building for mutually beneficial cross-jurisdictional collaborations in economic development. Examples of cross-jurisdictional Tribal partnerships included recreational/resort facilities, roads, ocean harbor use planning, and the Red Cross hazard mitigation program.

The second day of the Tribal Economic Development (TED) Summit featured panelists from a host of northern California resource agencies; e.g., HSU’s Center for Indian Community (CICD), Office for Economic and Community Development (OECD), and Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Lead Center, community-based foundations, non-profit economic development organizations, Tribal CDFIs and loan funds, and county, state, and federal agencies. Each presenter described training, technical assistance, data, and/or funding available to Tribes. As part of this day, OECD staff provided a special Power-Point presentation on the overall purpose and objectives of the 2009 RBOG-supported Sustainable Tribal Economic Development project.

In addition to meeting our objectives-based targets for success, the late-October TED Summit exceeded our expectations for facilitating Tribal networking and needs assessments. Ten of 12 targeted Tribes were represented. Of 80 total participants, Tribes were the largest group (31), followed by students (21), resource agencies (13), HSU personnel (12), and others (3).

Table 1. 2008 TED Summit by Affiliation

Group	Total Attendance
Tribes (10 of targeted 12 represented)	31
Resource Agencies (12 represented)	13
HSU Administrators, faculty, and staff	12
HSU Students	21
Other (Business, Non-Profit Org., Volunteer)	3
Total	80

Fourteen Tribal representatives also comprised the majority, or 57%, of the 24 responses to TED Summit feedback forms, followed by resource agency representatives (33%) and others (10%).

Although many participants were unable to attend the full two days, feedback was very positive:

- 100% of respondents thought more TED Summits should be convened;
- 95.8% of respondents found the Summit useful and indicated they had sufficient time for networking;
- 95.5% of respondents indicated that, if a Tribal Economic Development Network (TED-Net) were formed, they would participate;
- 85.7% of respondents planned to contact resource agency representatives they met at the Summit within the next year; and
- 71.4% of respondents planned to contact Tribal representatives they met at the Summit within the next year.

The TED Summit participants also provided valuable feedback on desirable speakers and topics for the next Summit and future TED-Net meetings, as well as suggestions about the frequency of such gatherings (quarterly) and new venues (Tribal rotations). Thus the desired Summit outcome –facilitating the formation of a northern California TED-Net—is on track, and OECD staff now is planning the 1st quarterly meeting of the emerging TED-Net for February 2009.

Finally, the TED Summit provided an opportunity to survey northern California Tribes regarding their training and technical assistance needs and priorities. Twelve of 31 (38.7%) Tribal representatives returned HSU-OECD Surveys in which they prioritized their technical assistance needs. As predicted at the time of our RBOG application, the vast majority (nearly 3 out of 4 Tribal representatives) indicated their highest priority need is technical assistance in economic development planning—this is consistent with activities planned for the balance of the grant period.

OECD staff members now are preparing curricular materials for training and technical assistance in performing comprehensive Tribal community needs assessments. A consultant has been retained to develop a curriculum for training and technical assistance in the preparation of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) documents. Recently retired from the EDA, this consultant has a lifetime career of experience working with northern California communities, including Tribes, as their EDA field representative based in Portland, Oregon.

Table 2. Technical Assistance Needs Ranked as the *Highest Priority*

Top 7: Highest Priority	
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (aka Overall Economic Development Planning)	72.7%
Risk Management/Safety/Security	58.3%
Managerial/technical assistance to Tribal enterprises	41.7%
Fund development/Grant writing	41.7%
Organizational structure and staffing	41.7%
Land Use Planning or Zoning	36.4%
Analyze local business opportunities	36.4%

Taken together, the combined rankings of “Highest Priority” and “High Priority” technical assistance needs identified by Tribes were as follows:

1. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (aka Overall Economic Development Planning)
2. Risk Management/Safety/Security
3. Small Business Incubator AND Financing a new business start-up
4. Managerial/technical assistance to Tribal enterprises AND Fund development/Grant writing
5. Community Needs Assessment Survey
6. Legal/Political powers of tribes
7. Land Use Planning or Zoning
8. Managerial/technical assistance to entrepreneurs