

# Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children

## Strategic Plan 2016-2020

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**Report & Recommendations**  
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Report by:



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# Part I: Executive Summary

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## **Background**

For over 20 years, Tribal partners from across the State of Alaska have been collaborating with state child welfare leaders to better serve Alaska Native families and children. During that time, much has been accomplished, including the development of eleven Title IV-E Administration and Training Agreements and two Tribal Title IV-E Maintenance Agreements. These agreements have helped increase the capacity of Tribal governments to provide Tribal child welfare services autonomous from the State. In addition, many more collaborative efforts, pilots and processes have been implemented at the local and statewide level through government to government partnerships, grant funding and collaboration.

November, 2014 marked a new era in Alaska state government with the election of Governor Walker and Lt. Governor Mallott and the subsequent appointment of Valerie Davidson as Commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS). The priorities of this administration seek to improve the health and safety outcomes of Alaskans, and Commissioner Davidson quickly identified child welfare as one of the top priorities of the Department. Commissioner Davidson has voiced her desire for better outcomes for those served, particularly Alaska Native children who are significantly disproportionately represented in the total foster care population.

Commissioner Davidson participated on the U.S. Attorney General's Advisory Committee on American Indian / Alaska Native Children Exposed to Violence: Ending Violence so Children Can Thrive, which issued a final report on the findings in 2014. This report helped craft a number of recommendations for states to strategically address gaps or areas needing improvement within the state. In March 2015, First Alaskan's Institute facilitated the first meeting of key Tribal leaders, advocates, legal representatives, and child welfare representatives to begin a dialogue about changing the future of Alaska's child welfare system for the better. A follow-up meeting was held in May 2015 and included over 100 participants, including elders and Tribal partners from around the state. With the support and partnership of Casey Family Programs, a philanthropic entity, Clarus Consulting Group was hired to work with Alaska to build on this background to create a five-year strategic plan to transform outcomes for Alaska Native children.

## **Strategic Plan to Transform Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children**

The Strategic Plan presented in this report seeks to make transformative change to child welfare. This Plan reflects a paradigm shift in the approach to child welfare as it relates to Alaska Native children, based on the understanding that Tribes know best what is best for their children, as they have for centuries. This philosophy is evident throughout the Vision, Mission, Values, Goals, Objectives and Tactics of the Strategic Plan, which clearly reflects DHSS's respect for the inherent sovereignty of Tribes over the welfare of Alaska Native children.

The Strategic Plan was developed by over 40 representatives from Tribal leadership, DHSS's, the Office of Children's Services (OCS), and other child welfare partners, all of whom met for four days of planning held in January and March, 2016. With this Strategic Plan, members of the planning group are excited and hopeful about the future of Alaska's child welfare system. Participants in the planning process recognized the unique opportunity presented by the combination of years of collaborative work and an administration with an awareness of the importance of this work. The strategic planning group is focused on moving expeditiously to incorporate long term and sustainable change for the future.

The Strategic Plan is based on decades of thought and preparation and the input of many stakeholders with a variety of perspectives and expertise to contribute. The work of the Strategic Planning sessions distilled this background into an aligned strategy to transform outcomes for Alaska Native children in the child welfare system. While aligned, there are many moving parts that must be prioritized and integrated to achieve the transformation this Strategic Plan envisions. The Plan is long term and by its terms contemplates implementation over five years. At the same time, there is a sense of urgency to take advantage of the present opportunity to act.

Participants are confident that the elements for successful change are contained within this Strategic Plan. It will be essential that leadership be prepared to help all stakeholders bear in mind the long term nature of the Plan. Following initial enthusiasm, it will be necessary to stay the course while the hard work of building this transformation continues to build task by task.

The Strategic Plan is outlined below and also organized in a grid and supporting pages as presented on pages 7-13 of this report. This report includes Consultant Conclusions and Recommendations which can be found on pages 14- 19. It also concludes with summaries of both the January and March, 2016 strategic plan work sessions, which are included as **Attachments One** and **Two**, respectively.

# Part II: Strategic Plan

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## A. Vision, Mission, and Values

The Vision, Mission and Values statements are designed to communicate the fundamental purpose and focus of the strategic plan. These elements were developed by planning session attendees over the course of four planning days.

### 1. Vision

The comprehensive strategic plan works toward a single vision which clarifies the belief that was voiced in the planning sessions.

*Alaska Native culture keeps Alaska Native children safe.*

### 2. Mission

The mission clarifies the purpose of the strategic plan and communicates *how* and *why* DHSS, OCS, Tribes and the community will partner to best serve Alaska Native children and families:

*Alaska Native children, families and communities are thriving through respectful government-to-government collaboration, community leadership and aligned systems of care.*

### 3. Values

The strategic plan acknowledges and supports a set of values that serve as guiding principles for transforming child welfare outcomes for Alaska Native children.

- We believe Alaska Native families and communities are the best place for Alaska Native children to thrive.
- We believe Alaska Native children are the future of thriving Alaska Native cultures.
- We believe providing care for Alaska Native children as close to home as possible achieves better outcomes.
- We believe the values and spirit encompassed in the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) are in the best interest of Alaska Native children.
- We believe it is vital that all partners involved in the welfare of Alaska Native children commit to engage in courageous, transparent and forgiving conversations without fear of reprisal.
- We believe in the strength of partnership and collaboration, and our work will be conducted in coordination with the Tribal State Collaboration Group and other concurrent initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for Alaska Native children and families.
- We recognize the inherent right of Tribes to manage their own child welfare systems.

Each of the values will guide the work of partners in achieving the mission and outcomes of the Strategic Plan.

#### **4. Strategic Priorities and Goals**

The Strategic Priorities are the overarching areas of focus for the Strategic Plan for the planning period. Strategic Goals provide direction and purpose for planning efforts, and define the desired end result to be achieved for each strategic priority. The Strategic Plan is organized around six strategic priorities, listed below along with the goal statement for each.

1. **Respectful Government-to-Government Collaboration & Partnership.** Achieve formal, friendly and forever recognition of Tribes by the State.
2. **Self-Governance.** Tribes self-govern the welfare of their children, and have the resources to do so.
3. **Embrace and implement the spirit of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).** Embrace the spirit and values of ICWA to ensure Alaska Native children are with their families and community.
4. **State Government Alignment.** Ensure state government systems are aligned and services provided based on the values and spirit of ICWA.
5. **Community Engagement.** Alaska's child welfare system operates as a partnership among the community, Tribes, State and Federal governments to keep Alaska Native children with their family and culture.
6. **Culturally Specific Services and Supports.** Provide a continuum of culturally specific supports that ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of Alaska Native children.

#### **5. Objectives and Preliminary Tactics**

Objectives are the high-level activities and approaches used to achieve strategic goals. Tactics are the actions taken or tools used to achieve objectives and attain strategic goals. Objectives and Preliminary Tactics for the Strategic Plan are detailed on the following pages.

# TRANSFORMING CHILD WELFARE OUTCOMES FOR ALASKA NATIVE CHILDREN

## STRATEGIC PLAN: 2016-2020

**Vision:** Alaska Native culture keeps Alaska Native children safe.

**Mission:** Alaska Native children, families and communities are thriving through respectful government-to-government collaboration, community leadership, and aligned systems of care.

**Values:**

- We believe Alaska Native families and communities are the best place for Alaska Native children to thrive
- We believe Alaska Native children are the future of thriving Alaska Native cultures
- We believe providing care for Alaska Native children as close to home as possible achieves better outcomes
- We believe the values and spirit encompassed in the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) are in the best interest of Alaska Native children
- We believe it is vital that all partners involved in the welfare of Alaska Native children commit to engage in courageous, transparent and forgiving conversations without fear of reprisal
- We believe in the strength of partnership and collaboration, and our work will be conducted in coordination with the Tribal State Collaboration and other concurrent initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for Alaska Native children and families
- We recognize the inherent right of Tribes to manage their own child welfare systems

### STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Respectful Government-to-Government Collaboration & Partnership	Self-Governance	Embrace & Implement the Spirit of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)	State Government Alignment	Community Engagement	Culturally Specific Services and Supports
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### GOALS

<i>Achieve formal, friendly and forever recognition of Tribes by the State</i>	<i>Tribes self-govern the welfare of their children, and have the resources to do so</i>	<i>Embrace the spirit and values of ICWA to ensure Alaska Native children are with their families and community</i>	<i>Ensure state government systems are aligned and services provided are based on the values and spirit of ICWA</i>	<i>Alaska's child welfare system operates as a partnership among the community, Tribes, State and Federal governments to keep Alaska Native children with their family and culture</i>	<i>Provide a continuum of culturally specific supports that ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of Alaska Native children</i>
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### OBJECTIVES

<p>A1: Develop and implement a Truth and Reconciliation processes</p> <p>A2: Achieve formal recognition of Tribes by the State</p> <p>A3: Institutionalize Tribal Consultation with mutual power, authority, and decision-making</p> <p>A4: Establish enforceable agreements built on true collaboration and mutual cooperation</p> <p>A5: Align systems so that Tribal processes are respected and interactions are conducted with mutual respect among sovereign leaders</p>	<p>B1: Clearly define the role and responsibilities of the Tribe, state and federal government as it relates to child welfare and align state agencies to support a smooth transition to self-governance</p> <p>B2: Ensure Tribes have the opportunity to design their own models for addressing the welfare of their children</p> <p>B3: Create a resource development plan to develop and maintain Tribal capacity and ensure parity of resources</p> <p>B4: Compact Child Welfare Services with Tribes</p> <p>B5: Resolve sovereign immunity issues</p>	<p>C1: End institutional racism</p> <p>C2: Educate and advocate for policy and practice changes to align the interpretation of ICWA with the original legislative intent</p> <p>C3: Create and implement processes that increase the number of children placed with family in their own communities</p> <p>C4: Improve awareness of the positive outcomes achieved as a result of Tribal participation in the judicial process</p>	<p>D1: Align agencies towards the shared value that protecting children is everyone's responsibility</p> <p>D2: Promote increased flexibility, coordination and collaboration across governments to ensure effective and efficient allocation of resources and delivery of services</p> <p>D3: Identify and reduce barriers to collaboration and alignment</p> <p>D4: Research mechanisms for providing improved access to services for children and families</p>	<p>E1: Foster a better understanding of each community's and partner's ability and responsibility to transform child welfare outcomes for Alaska Native children</p> <p>E2: Ensure communication among all partners is open, honest, and transparent</p> <p>E3: Help front-line workers meaningfully and respectfully engage with local Tribes</p> <p>E4: Solicit and incorporate feedback from the community</p> <p>E5: Provide continuity in engagement and interaction with families</p>	<p>F1: Collaboratively develop, implement and align individualized, culturally specific service plans</p> <p>F2: Support the availability and accessibility of a continuum of culturally specific services for children and families in their community, including focus on primary prevention and early intervention</p> <p>F3: Ensure systems, institutions and the OCS workforce are reflective of the culture and the community served</p> <p>F4: Address funding obstacles related to provision of culturally specific services</p>
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# Respectful Government-to-Government Collaboration & Partnership

## STRATEGIC GOAL

*Achieve formal, friendly and forever recognition of Tribes by the State*

## OBJECTIVES & TACTICS

### **A1: Develop and implement a Truth and Reconciliation process**

- A1a: Develop a phased process for Truth and Reconciliation including research, education, and other processes, culminating in implementation
- A1b: Research traditional Tribal methods of Truth and Reconciliation
- A1c: Benchmark successful processes
- A1d: Work with partners such as First Alaskans Institute (FAI) to educate the public on the importance of Truth and Reconciliation
- A1e: Identify stakeholders and key partners to lead and participate in Truth and Reconciliation process e.g. government entities, legislators, Attorney General, Chief Justice, Department of Law, Department of Education, etc.

### **A2: Achieve formal recognition of Tribes by the State**

- A2a: Benchmark legislation in Alaska and in other jurisdictions
- A2b: Secure sponsors for legislation
- A2c: Draft legislation
- A2d: Hold public hearings

### **A3: Institutionalize Tribal Consultation with mutual power, authority, and decision-making**

- A3a: Benchmark existing policies
- A3b: In cooperation with Tribes across the state, develop and implement state policy on Tribal Consultation
  - Use meetings of entities such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Alaska Federal of Natives (AFN) as venues for convening and discussing Tribal Consultation
  - Clarify use of Tribal Consultation before decisions are made vs. Tribal Consultation on existing decisions
- A3c: Develop mutually agreed upon consequences for decisions made without Tribal Consultation
- A3d: Develop specific strategies to assist Tribes who do not already have the opportunity to Consult

### **A4: Establish enforceable agreements built on true collaboration and mutual cooperation**

- A4a: Bring Tribes into cases at the onset, before Case Plans are determined
- A4b: Recognize the impact of Tribal sovereignty on agreements
  - Work to secure agreements that do not require waiving Tribal sovereignty or with limited waivers
  - Narrow the language of waivers and stop using waivers of sovereign immunity as an “easy out”
- A4c: Identify venues for legal action – Tribal vs. state court
- A4d: Identify Tribal resources for dispute resolution

### **A5: Align systems so that Tribal processes are respected and interactions are conducted with mutual respect among sovereign leaders**

- A5a: Identify and align federal and state regulations
- A5b: Ensure systems and processes address agenda setting and timelines of Tribes



## Self-Governance

### STRATEGIC GOAL

*Tribes self-govern the welfare of their children, and have the resources to do so*

### OBJECTIVES & TACTICS

**B1: Clearly define the role and responsibilities of the Tribe, state and federal governments as it relates to child welfare and align state agencies to support a smooth transition to self-governance**

- B1a: Convene parties to develop clear definition of roles and responsibilities of Tribes, state and federal government
- B1b: Determine what services will transition to Tribes as part of Self-Governance and when transitions will occur; identify potential gaps and mechanisms to bridge these gaps

**B2: Ensure Tribes have the opportunity to design their own models for addressing the welfare of their children**

- B2a: Tribes to self-assess readiness
- B2b: Identify and build on successful models such as Foster care, Rural social service grants, IV-E Maintenance Agreements, In-Home Service Models

**B3: Create a resource development plan to develop and maintain Tribal capacity and ensure parity of resources**

- B3a: Work collaboratively to leverage mutual resources and seek additional resources
- B3b: Propose alternative methods to Federal government for developing resource plans
- B3c: Assign prioritized value to programs, services, functions and activities and ensure funding, technical support, and other resources follow the item
- B3d: Evaluate funding and resources available vs. number of children to be served

**B4: Compact Child Welfare Services with Tribes**

- B4a: Pilot self-governance compact with OCS
- B4b: Educate partners about compacting, including the benefits of compacting

**B5: Resolve sovereign immunity issues**

- B5a: Elevate the sovereign immunity discussion to the Cabinet level
- B5b: Leverage Tribal IV-E Consultations to address sovereign immunity issues

## Embrace & Implement the Spirit of the Indian Child Welfare Act

### STRATEGIC GOAL

*Embrace the spirit and values of ICWA to ensure Alaska Native children are with their families and community*

### OBJECTIVES & TACTICS

#### **C1: End institutional racism**

- C1a: Differentiate institutional racism as it relates to child welfare
- C1b: Educate child welfare partners and the general public about institutional racism
  - Identify and leverage resources to assist with education efforts
- C1c: Create engaged dialogue leading to implementation and responsibility
- C1d: Train staff of OCS and child welfare partners to better assess institutional racism at the individual and institutional level
- C1e: Recognize the impact of the conflicting value systems of Western and Tribal cultures

#### **C2: Educate and advocate for policy and practice changes to align the interpretation of ICWA with the original legislative intent**

- C2a: Assess policy, procedure, and practice across DHSS Divisions as it relates to ICWA; update as needed to ensure consistency with the spirit and values of ICWA
- C2b: Ensure training aligns with embracing the spirit and values of ICWA
- C2c: Provide basic education for state agencies about ICWA and each agency's role in implementing the spirit and values of ICWA
- C2d: Ensure values of ICWA are evident in outcomes

#### **C3: Create and implement processes that increase the number of children placed with family in their own communities**

- C3a: Strengthen strategies to support family preservation, including providing Tribal family members with assistance such as child care, mental health care, etc.
- C3b: Implement Regional Tribal State Recruitment and Retention Plans
- C3c: Redefine important terms such as "risk" and "wellness" to include cultural values
- C3d: Review Team Decision Making (TDM) process to ensure it reflects / incorporates Tribal processes and culture
- C3e: Assess and improve staff awareness of personal bias in placement selections
- C3f: Review In-Home Service Plans generated by Tribes to identify and replicate best practice

#### **C4: Improve awareness of the positive outcomes achieved as a result of Tribal participation in the judicial process**

- C4a: Assess judicial process impacts
- C4b: Provide better training and resources to support Tribal participation and representation in the judicial process from the beginning to end of a case
- C4c: Involve the Court Improvement Program (CIP) in implementation

## State Government Alignment

### STRATEGIC GOAL

*Ensure state government systems are aligned and services provided are based on the values and spirit of ICWA*

### OBJECTIVES & TACTICS

#### **D1: Align agencies towards the shared value that protecting children is everyone's responsibility**

- D1a: Ensure leadership at DHSS is aligned around shared values of ICWA
- D1b: Assess DHSS organizational structure to determine how it can be improved to best serve Alaska Native children and families
- D1c: Communicate Strategic Plan to all stakeholders including providers, court system, etc.
- D1d: Ensure all child welfare related agencies are involved in strategic plan implementation
- D1e: Hold regularly scheduled, joint meetings among state government staff; make attendance at these meetings a priority
- D1f: Leverage the Court Improvement Program (CIP) as a vehicle for aligning agencies towards shared values

#### **D2: Promote increased flexibility, coordination and collaboration across governments to ensure effective and efficient allocation of resources and delivery of services**

- D2a: Analyze information flow to determine and enhance what information can be shared among agencies
- D2b: Evaluate funding streams and develop mechanisms to better leverage available funds
- D2c: Improve coordination across agencies to get more citizens enrolled in Medicaid
- D2d: Educate staff regarding formal and informal resources available; train staff on how to access these resources
- D2e: Develop more public / private demonstration projects that foster innovation and creativity

#### **D3: Identify and reduce barriers to collaboration and alignment**

- D3a: Conduct assessments with staff to assess and address barriers to collaboration and engagement
- D3b: Develop quarterly innovation recognition awards for employees and/or divisions
- D3c: Develop accountability process to ensure collaboration is a priority for staff

#### **D4: Research mechanisms for providing improved access to services for children and families**

- D4a: Research effectiveness and efficiency of a "single point of entry" system for clients to access state services
- D4b: Analyze current case flow
- D4c: Research what has worked well in other States

## Community Engagement

### STRATEGIC GOAL

*Alaska's child welfare system operates as a partnership among the community, Tribes, State and Federal governments to keep Alaska Native children with their family and culture*

### OBJECTIVES & TACTICS

#### **E1: Foster a better understanding of each community's and partner's ability and responsibility to transform child welfare outcomes for Alaska Native children**

- E1a: Institutionalize strategic priorities by presenting strategic plan to policy leaders, funders, and groups such as the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) and the Council for the Advancement of Alaska Natives (CAAN)
- E1b: Develop and implement joint statewide campaigns to increase awareness of child welfare issues and to educate the public about the strengths and successes of Alaska Native culture
- E1c: Implement *Knowing Who You Are* in school districts to embed importance of cultural identity
- E1d: Improve understanding of organizational structure of OCS and its child welfare partners
- E1e: Celebrate successes and highlight programs and initiatives that work well

#### **E2: Ensure communication among all partners is open, honest, and transparent**

- E2a: Model open, honest communication among child welfare partners
- E2b: Evaluate and modify as needed current systems of communication, which assume "western" ways of communicating
- E2c: Mutually agree what information can be shared among groups so children's needs are better met
  - Ensure communication does not violate confidentiality; create Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with Tribes to allow sharing of information
- E2d: Continue and expand OCS-led community conversations with stakeholders such as parents and foster parents
- E2e: Conduct an assessment with OCS frontline staff to identify and address barriers to engagement with the community
- E2f: DHSS and Tribes will develop strategies to promote relationship building e.g. potlucks to welcome new OCS workers
- E2g: Develop strategies to hold each other accountable to community engagement activities
- E2h: Develop shared calendars

#### **E3: Help frontline workers meaningfully and respectfully engage with local Tribes**

- E3a: Identify and build on existing models of successful community engagement
- E3b: Improve understanding among OCS staff of importance of relationship-building with Tribes
- E3c: Ensure all state employees understand the value of traditional activities
- E3d: Conduct periodic staff meetings to share successes and challenges; translate these across agencies
- E3e: Increase job shadows of Tribal staff

#### **E4: Solicit and incorporate feedback from the community**

- E4a: Solicit the expertise and guidance of Tribal and community leaders regarding transformation of the child welfare system
- E4b: Develop mechanisms to track and follow-up on ideas generated by partners and the community
- E4c: Develop specific strategies for engaging foster parents and youth who have aged out of the system

#### **E5: Provide continuity in engagement and interaction with families**

- E5a: Identify single point-of-contact for families
- E5b: Consider team case management system including OCS and Tribal / village representatives

# Continuum of Culturally Specific Services and Supports

## STRATEGIC GOAL

*Provide a continuum of culturally specific supports that ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of Alaska Native children*

## OBJECTIVES & TACTICS

### **F1: Collaboratively develop, implement and align individualized, culturally specific service plans**

- F1a: Equip child welfare workers with the tools needed to determine and define culturally specific services for each family and Tribe
- F1b: Expand the meaning of service to include informal community resources
- F1c: Involve more Tribal elders in the process of identifying cultural practices that enhance resiliency and reduce trauma

### **F2: Support the availability and accessibility of a continuum of culturally specific services for children and families in their community, including focus on primary prevention and early intervention**

- F2a: Ensure OCS policy and training is supportive of culturally specific service delivery
- F2b: Inventory services and resources provided by OCS, providers and Tribes (formal and informal)
- F2c: Formalize referral processes for services across agencies / Tribes / state
- F2d: Expand training to Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) to provide more culturally specific services
- F2e: Cross-walk available culturally specific services to billable codes
- F2f: Improve coordination across systems as it relates to early intervention
  - o Inventory and build on existing models of successful early intervention programs (e.g. Fatherhood is Sacred, Health Families, etc.)

### **F3: Ensure systems, institutions and the OCS workforce are reflective of the culture and the community served**

- F3a: Improve efforts to recruit Alaska Native employees to OCS
- F3b: Evaluate how OCS jobs are posted and modify as needed so postings are more inclusive and easier to access

### **F4: Address funding obstacles related to provision of culturally specific services**

- F4a: Explore options to leverage and expand resources
- F4b: Ensure Tribal representation in Medicaid Section 1115 Waiver process
- F4c: Gather resources on resiliency (e.g. Sealaska and Heritage)

# Part III: Consultant Conclusions & Recommendations

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Participants in the Strategic Planning process built on over two decades of dialogue and collaboration to create a Strategic Plan with a vision that is both bold and considered. The signature accomplishment of this Plan is the organization of key elements into a comprehensible whole under the direction of the vision that *Alaska Native culture keeps Alaska Native children safe*. Participants left the planning sessions with a sense of excitement and urgency, while at the same time cognizant of the work that lies ahead. Further good news is that many of the elements of the Strategic Plan have already begun, and many foundational elements have been identified and can be replicated as best practices.

## Some Thoughts about Implementation

The challenge for implementing this Strategic Plan will be the number of initiatives proceeding along parallel paths. In managing the Plan, it may be helpful to think of specific tasks contemplated under the Plan in the following categories:

1. **Operational:** Some elements of the Plan are changes to operations and can be managed by the entity or entities who own these operational responsibilities in consultation with appropriate partners.
2. **Legal Process:** A number of tasks relate to legal status of Tribes, the legal means for intergovernmental relationships, or to the forum or process by which legal processes are conducted. These matters will require the participation of legal consultants.
3. **Organizational Culture Change:** Other aspects of the Plan contemplate changes in the organizational culture around service delivery, intergovernmental relations, and public understanding and attitudes. These organizational culture change initiatives are likely to be longer term efforts and will require dedicated resources.

Another challenge will be in answering the question “Who Owns this Strategic Plan?” This question has been the subject of many discussions, both before and during the planning process. It has been a challenging question to answer for the simple reason that Plan implementation is designed to be a true collaboration. To begin, the Tribes are at the center of this Strategic Plan. DHSS, OCS, the state courts, sister agencies all have roles within the Plan. Some activities contemplate addressing legal issues within the province of the State Legislature, the Governor’s Office and the State Courts. Federal laws and agencies also are impacted by the Plan. Advocacy groups have roles as well.

Thus, in order to be successful, the Strategic Plan must be managed collaboratively. A small Steering Committee should guide the implementation process. Many strategies will require the participation of multiple entities. At the same time, some strategies contained within the Strategic Plan have a natural

home for implementation. In prioritizing activities and developing an implementation structure, the Steering Committee might consider the following questions as a guide to decision making:

1. **Who has authority?** Where an activity falls within the purview of an entity, that entity or entities must have a key role respecting its authority and responsibilities. When authority overlaps, the respective entities will need to work out an agreement about how to proceed.
2. **Who has the capacity to act?** This is an issue of both authority to take action and ability to act based on capacity and resources. Some decisions about priorities will be dictated by the capacity of an entity to take on more tasks. For example, OCS will have to choose carefully among multiple priorities in order to not overburden staff. Tribes will assess their willingness and readiness to assume specific responsibilities over time.
3. **Who can advocate and/or influence?** Several key aspects of the Strategic Plan contemplate actions that require decisions or actions on the part of entities that have authority beyond the scope of participants. While the Strategic Plan in no way contemplates actions beyond the authority or responsibility of its participants, it does contemplate the need to advocate for change and to influence decision makers. It will be necessary to recognize and align stakeholders who can are willing to work together to advocate for change.

## Recommendations

With all of this in mind, the following is a high level outline of recommendations to support long term Strategic Plan Implementation:

### A. Plan Completion and Strategic Plan Implementation

While the initial Strategic Plan is close to completion with elements including a Vision, Mission, Values, Goals and Objectives and Preliminary Tactics, additional work is needed to finalize the Plan and build a structure for successful implementation. Recommendations for Plan completion and implementation are detailed below. Following each recommendation is a suggested timeline defined as short-term (0-6 months) intermediate (6-18 months) or ongoing.

- I. **Finalize Strategic Plan:** A small Working Group is needed to review the current draft of the Strategic Plan Grid and finalize the wording of the Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, Goals, Objectives and Preliminary Tactics. (**Short-term**)
- II. **Implementation Structure:** Even when the Strategic Plan Grid is complete, it is not finished, nor should it be. The Strategic Plan Grid serves as the foundational document to guide decision-making and future work. However, implementation of the Strategic Plan requires on-going tracking and prioritization of tactics, development of timelines and metrics, and assignment of persons responsible for each tactic. A recommended implementation structure is:

- **Project Manager:** We strongly recommend identifying a Project Manager with experience in managing complex projects, communications skills and broad political sensitivity to oversee implementation of the strategic plan and coordinate the work of the Steering Committee and Working Groups. **(Short-term)**
  - **Steering Committee:** Convene a small (8-10 person) Steering Committee to oversee Plan Implementation. The first task of the steering committee will be to prioritize the launch of various initiatives. **(Short-term)**
  - **Working Groups:** Appoint a Working Group for each Strategic Priority to finalize, prioritize and oversee implementation of tactics, develop timelines and metrics, and assign persons responsible for each tactic. Working Groups will function until their work is absorbed into a sustainable structure or otherwise completed. It can be helpful to look for existing infrastructures that are natural home for the work of the strategic plan long-term. For example, the Court Improvement Project was identified as the appropriate location for several projects related to review of judicial processes. In this way, the Plan will take advantage of and support existing infrastructure, leading to ease of integration and sustainability. **(Short-term for initial prioritization; then ongoing)**
- III. **Train Managers:** OCS managers as well as Tribal child welfare managers will be trained to manage in the context of the Plan. **(Intermediate)**
- IV. **Alignment of Management Teams:** There will be a number of leadership teams across departments, across agencies and organizations who will work in alignment on plan implementation. An investment in relationship building among management teams will support ease of implementation. **(Intermediate and ongoing)**
- V. **Build on Successes:** Participants agreed that the success of the Plan is dependent on identifying and communicating wins, especially early wins. **(Intermediate and ongoing)**
- VI. **Pilot Projects:** Participants likewise identified pilot projects as an important implementation mechanism. In addition to piloting new projects, there is much to be gained by identifying successful existing projects and incorporating them into the Plan. Alignment of existing resources is at least as important as building new ones. **(Short-term to identify and catalog; then ongoing)**
- VII. **Periodically Assess Progress:** The Steering Committee should regularly assess Strategic Plan outcomes and consider a) are we making meaningful progress moving towards achievement of our goals b) are we practicing the values to which we committed, and c) what adjustments, if any, are needed? **(Ongoing)**

## **B. Strategic Communications Plan**

While every Strategic Plan requires thoughtful communication to achieve success, the highly collaborative nature of this Strategic Plan requires a launch through a fully developed communications



strategy. There are a large number of stakeholders to align, and they hold widely varied understandings of the issues that underlie the development of the Plan. Stakeholders also have a range of potential responsibilities under the Plan, and it will be essential for each of them to understand the value of the Strategic Plan and their respective roles in supporting it. Recommended elements of a comprehensive strategic communications plan include:

- I. **Key Messages, Vehicles, and Messengers**: Develop a strategic communications plan outlining communications goals and objectives, as well as key messages, and identification of audiences, vehicles and messengers. The strategic communications plan should include specific strategies for both internal and external audiences. **(Short-term)**
  
- II. **Communication Strategies**: Staff and partners working to implement the Strategic Plan needs to be oriented to the Plan, its rationale, and their roles within it. This begins with DHSS and OCS staff and also includes staff in other agencies and within Tribal organizations. Ideas for communicating the Strategic Plan throughout DHSS, OCS and partner organizations might include:
  - **Train Managers**: Capacity building within DHSS, OCS, other agencies and Tribes will be supported by an orderly rollout of the Strategic Plan to supervisors, who in turn participate in rolling the Plan out to their staff. **(Short-term)**
  - **Frontline staff**: There was much discussion about the critical role of frontline staff in understanding and implementing policy and practice in accordance with the sense of the Plan. Engaging staff with the “*WHY?*” of the strategic plan will be essential to gaining their support. **(Short-term)**
  - **Ongoing Communication**: Ongoing communication to staff and partners about the direction and progress of the Plan is critical. Staff and partners need to hear regular updates about leadership commitment to the plan as well as examples of successes. **(Ongoing)**
  - **Presentations & Listening Sessions**: Create a presentation that can be used consistently for rollout of the strategic plan. While the focus and emphasis may vary by audience, everyone should receive the same basic message in a consistently branded presentation. **(Short-term)**
  - **Brochure**: Develop a simple, straightforward brochure that outlines the Strategic Plan including Vision, Mission, Values, Strategic Priorities, Goals and Objectives, as well as mechanisms for getting involved in Plan implementation. **(Short-term)**
  - **Talking Points and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**: Consider developing a master set of Talking Points that can be revised appropriately for roles and distributed leaders responsible for rolling out the Strategic Plan. **(Short-term)**
  - **Website**: Consider developing website for interested parties to learn about the Strategic Plan. The website could be linked by stakeholders and could also include a high level dashboard to keep stakeholders apprised of implementation progress. **(Intermediate)**
  - **Videos**: Videos can be a useful adjunct to live presentations and online and printed materials. A master introduction by Commissioner Davidson can be available to support rollout meetings. Videos of Tribal leaders, state officials and others who support the Plan will also be invaluable.

Finally, short videos about successful projects will encourage participation and model best practices. **(Short-term)**

- **Providers and Advocacy Groups:** In addition to governmental entities, other significant stakeholders are essential to the success of the Plan and can contribute to supporting not only substantive aspects of the Plan but also to process components such as stakeholder and community engagement. Specific strategies for communicating and engaging these groups will be needed. **(Short-term and ongoing)**
- **Educating Public Audiences:** Public education and understanding is needed surrounding some of the matters addressed in the Strategic Plan. Taking the time to educate and engage key audiences will pay long term dividends in successful implementation of the Strategic Plan. **(Short-term and ongoing)**

### C. Partnership and Collaboration

As is clear from the Strategic Priorities of the Plan, participants contemplate that much of the work will be carried out through robust partnerships working toward the Plan's vision, allocating existing resources in accordance with the Plan, and working together to identify new resources. There are already effective collaborations in place, such as the Statewide and Regional Tribal State Collaboration Groups. Leaders supporting the Strategic Plan will need to build capacity in collaboration and hold their organizations accountable for effective partnership.

- I. **Tribal Representation:** At the core of the Strategic Plan is the intent that Tribes ultimately maintain decision making and responsibility for the well-being of their children and families. During the planning sessions, there was much discussion of how to obtain Tribal participation beginning with agenda setting, that is, Tribes should be included in *How* to proceed as well as in deciding *What* to do. There was interest in exploring methods based on Tribal process rather than assuming state or federal processes as a default. There was also discussion that choice of forum or process can be outcome determinative. Many participants voiced their view that recovering Tribal processes for decision making and adjudication will be essential to a successful transition. **(Intermediate)**
- II. **State Agencies:** Participants discussed the possibility for an interagency working group to address how to align and streamline services consistent with the spirit of ICWA and the intent of the Strategic Plan. For example, there was a suggestion that the Court Improvement Project might undertake a review of judicial processes. **(Intermediate)**

### D. Prioritization of Activities

In addition to outcomes that can be achieved quickly in accordance with participants' sense of urgency, there are some outcomes that will benefit from longer consideration. The Steering Committee should prioritize which outcomes are readily achievable based on existing resources. The Committee should also identify which activities may suffer from being executed prematurely. Several factors in favor of a phased approach include:

- I. **Benchmarking**: In the case of some activities, for example, Truth and Reconciliation processes, there are effective models available. Researching these models will not only suggest which processes are best for Alaska, but also may serve to build public confidence and acceptance. **(Intermediate)**
  
- II. **Clarifying Legal Foundations**: There were a number of matters for which clarity is needed about legal status. Some of those include the status of Tribal recognition, Tribal sovereignty and waiver of sovereign immunity, and processes for Tribal Compacts. There is also a benchmarking opportunity here, comparing statutes in other jurisdictions and their effectiveness. Along with legal experts currently involved with child welfare, there could be both law school and law firm resources available pro bono. **(Intermediate)**

# Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children

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**Strategic Planning Summary Report**  
**Planning Session I: January 12-14, 2016**

Report by:



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## The Spirit of Fish Camp

My smokehouse smiles in the summer.  
You taught me to cut fish and make brine.  
Each year my skills are honed. I learn a new role,  
preparing myself to teach my grandchildren.  
The children run here and there, learning, helping, doing.  
Strong and healthy and getting things done,  
working together in appreciation and having fun.

Everyone has a role  
where everyone works together  
one with nature and time.  
The camp is full of hope, belief and excitement  
to reach our common goal.  
Mending our nets, preparing for the season  
undeniable connections between land, water, fish  
place and people.

The coming together of children, youth & elders . . .  
fun, laughter, learning and yummy fish!  
Red fish, pink fish, white fish. Ah, so good!  
Sockeye, Coho, Chinook, our salmon are off the hook!  
Food to sustain, food to subsist.

Watching patiently as the fish dries,  
learning the essence of reward of our work.  
Urgency. Inclusion. Roles. Teaching.  
A sustaining end product that all benefit from.  
To dream of hope—hope will make our dream real.  
Alaska Native children, families, and communities, Tribes  
are thriving and leading their aspirations.

The real work involves getting dirty.  
Getting blood, guts and slime on your hands.  
Feels so good to be sweaty,  
pull together  
use the right hooks.  
Progress from guts.  
Fresh? Yeah, fresh!

*This poem was written by participants at the planning session. Each participant was asked to contribute one line of a yet unwritten poem titled, "The Spirit of Fish Camp." Participants' contributions were arranged in the above poem, which participants agreed is a moving tribute to the work of transforming child welfare outcomes for Alaska Native children.*

## Executive Summary

A steering committee comprised of stakeholders from Tribal governments, the Tribal State Advisory Team, First Alaskans Institute, the Alaska Native community, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Office of Children's Services (OCS), in partnership with Casey Family Programs and Clarus Consulting Group, launched a planning process in January of 2016 that will result in the development of a strategic plan to fully implement ICWA and transform child welfare outcomes for Alaska Native children. A list of Planning Session participants can be found in [Attachment One](#).

This report serves as a summary of work accomplished and outcomes achieved during the first of two planning sessions that will be part of the strategic planning process. The purpose of the first planning session, held January 12, 14, 2016 was to:

- Review the collaborative work accomplished by the Tribal State Advisory Team and the "Alaska Native Conversations that Matter" convenings
- Discuss foundational elements of the strategic plan including vision and mission
- Identify strategic priorities and goals
- Begin to identify objectives and tactics to achieve strategic goals

One of the key outcomes from the January planning session was clarity around a shared desire to move child welfare, not through incremental progress, but to transform the delivery system to a platform of mutual engagement and appropriately shared responsibility. Upon reviewing the good planning work already accomplished, the steering committee concluded that the individual elements of the emerging strategic plan must be held in a structure that aligns all participants around addressing the needs of Alaska Native children through their own cultures. With this foundational perspective, the identified strategic priorities fell into place and created a sense of purpose and promise.

This report contains a preliminary strategic plan grid and detailed outline of the vision, mission, and strategic priorities, which are presented on pages 5-8. The report also documents the important discussions that contributed to the development of the draft strategic plan grid; these discussions are outlined in pages 9-17.

**TRANSFORMING CHILD WELFARE OUTCOMES FOR ALASKA NATIVE CHILDREN  
STRATEGIC PLAN: 2016-2020**

**Vision: Alaska Native culture keeps Alaska Native children safe.**

**Mission: Alaska Native children, families and communities are thriving through respectful government-to-government collaboration, community leadership, and aligned systems of care.**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

Continuum of Culturally Appropriate Services	Community Engagement	Respectful Government-to-Government Collaboration & Partnership	Embrace & Implement the Spirit of ICWA	Self-Governance	State Agency Alignment
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**STRATEGIC GOALS**

<i>Provide a continuum of culturally appropriate services that ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of Alaska Native children</i>	<i>Strengthen community involvement and inclusion in the child welfare system through increased engagement with Tribes, villages, and the community at large</i>	<i>Promote formal, friendly and forever recognition of Tribes by the State</i>	<i>Embrace the spirit and values of ICWA to ensure Alaska Native children are with their families and community</i>	<i>Strengthen the understanding that Tribes know best what is best for their children, and every Alaska Tribe has the opportunity to assume control of the welfare of their children</i>	<i>Ensure state agencies are aligned based on the values and spirit of ICWA</i>
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**PRELIMINARY OBJECTIVES**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide culturally appropriate service plans</li> <li>Ensure the availability and accessibility of a full range of supportive, culturally appropriate services to children in their community</li> <li>Ensure systems, institutions and the OCS workforce are reflective of the culture and the community served</li> <li>Help front-line workers understand how to meaningfully engage and be part of the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foster a better understanding of how everyone can contribute to transforming child welfare outcomes for Alaska Native children</li> <li>Ensure transparent, open and honest communication between OCS and the community</li> <li>Promote engagement at the village / Tribal level including dialogue with formal and informal leaders to learn about their experiences and ideas for transforming and healing the child welfare system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish meaningful agreements built on collaboration and cooperation</li> <li>Institutionalize Tribal consultation with power, authority, and decision-making</li> <li>Ensure systems are aligned and working effectively and efficiently</li> <li>Support the Truth and Reconciliation processes</li> <li>Promote ongoing dialogue</li> <li>Seek increased federal funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foster buy-in to values of ICWA and promote understanding that ICWA is in the best interest of Alaska Native children</li> <li>Promote understanding that Tribes are leading and owning ICWA outcomes through self-governance</li> <li>Ensure values of ICWA are evident in outcomes</li> <li>Promote greater understanding of racism</li> <li>Increase number of children placed with family in their own communities; ensure out of preference placements are the exception</li> <li>Support reunification</li> <li>Push the difference to Tribes when working with state cases</li> <li>Work to reconcile world view and conflicting value systems of Western and Tribal cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure Tribes have the opportunity to design their own models and choose how they address child welfare for their children</li> <li>Create a resource development plan to ensure state and Tribes work together to develop and maintain Tribal capacity, including resources and training needs</li> <li>Clearly define the role and responsibilities of the Tribe, state and federal government</li> <li>Address sovereign immunity issues</li> <li>Increase recognition that providing care for children as close to home as possible achieves better outcomes</li> <li>Develop trust and understanding that the services delivered by Tribes may be different than those delivered by the State, but mutually agreed upon outcomes will be measured</li> <li>Assign value to programs, services, functions and activities and ensure funding, technical support, and other resources follow the item</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the understanding that protecting vulnerable children is a shared responsibility and everyone's top priority</li> <li>Clarify and improve alignment of agencies towards shared goals</li> <li>Align agencies to support smooth transition to self-governance</li> <li>Create and embrace processes that allow children to be served in their own community</li> <li>Clearly define the role and responsibilities of state agencies as it relates to child welfare</li> <li>Promote increased coordination and collaboration among agencies to ensure effective and efficient allocation of resources and delivery of services</li> <li>Foster flexibility in the system</li> <li>Identify and reduce barriers to collaboration and alignment</li> </ul>
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PRELIMINARY TACTICS

- Provide OCS policy and training is supportive of culturally appropriate service delivery and community engagement by OCS staff

- Ensure engagement does not violate confidentiality; create MOUs with Tribes to allow sharing of information
- Institutionalize strategic priorities by presenting strategic plan to AFN, CAAN, ACT and similar groups
- Educate policy leaders and funders on strategic priorities and goals

- 

- Redefine important terms such as “risk” and “wellness” to include cultural values
- Provide support to assist Tribal family members with ability to take in children (child care, mental health care, etc.)
- Implement Regional Tribal State Recruitment and Retention Plans

- Utilize / build from successful models that have worked in the past e.g. Rural Child Welfare Grant process

- Ensure all child welfare related agencies are included in strategic planning and implementation efforts



## Vision & Mission

### Working Vision Statement

*Alaska Native culture keeps Alaska Native children safe.*

### Working Mission Statement

*Alaska Native children, families, and communities are thriving through respectful Government-to-Government collaboration, community leadership, and aligned systems of care*

## Strategic Priorities

With previous planning work conducted by the Tribal State Advisory Team and the “Alaska Native Conversations That Matter” dialogue serving as the foundation, participants discussed and developed consensus around the following six strategic priorities for the strategic plan:

1. Continuum of Culturally Appropriate Services
2. Community Engagement
3. Respectful Government-to-Government Collaboration and Partnership
4. Embrace and Implement the Spirit of ICWA
5. Self-Governance
6. State Agency Alignment

### Description of Priorities

Following the identification of the six strategic priorities, participants discussed the following question/prompt for each of the priority areas: *What is the desired end-result for each Strategic Priority? What are we trying to accomplish?* Key points for the discussion from each priority area are included in the “Strategic Priority Exercise” charts included as **Attachment Two** of this report. Based on this discussion participants drafted goal statements for each strategic priority, as presented below.

#### Continuum of Culturally Appropriate Services

- Provide a continuum of culturally appropriate services that ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of Alaska Native children.

#### Community Engagement

- Strengthen community involvement and inclusion in the child welfare system through increased engagement with Tribes, villages, and the community at large.

#### Respectful Government-to-Government Collaboration & Partnership

- Promote formal, friendly, and forever recognition of Tribes by the State.

#### Embrace and Implement the Spirit of ICWA

- Embrace the spirit and values of ICWA to ensure Alaska Native children are with their families and community.

### Self-Governance

- Strengthen the understanding that every Alaska Tribe has the opportunity to assume control of child welfare matters for their children because Tribes know best what is best for their children.

### State Agency Alignment

- Ensure state agencies are aligned based on the values and spirit of ICWA.

## Planning Session Discussion

The planning session began with participants offering a one-word description for what they hoped to achieve with the planning process. Responses included:

- Transformation
- Rejuvenated
- Excited
- Plan
- Kenka
- Proactive
- Promise
- Woocheen
- Relevant
- Relationship
- 
- Creative
- Ditto
- Insight
- Results
- Collaboration
- #realtalk
- Momentum
- Focus
- Connection
- Practical
- Inclusion
- Movement
- Cemented
- Acceleration
- Eager
- Specifics
- Partnerships
- Hope
- Trust
- Onward
- Kitaki

Participants then divided into breakout groups to discuss the following prompt: ***What should be the shape / spirit / elements of the strategic plan?*** Responses to this question were wide-ranging and are captured in full in **Attachment Three**. At a high-level, responses reflected the fundamental vision that Alaska Native culture keeps Alaska Native children safe. Participants also discussed the importance of collaboration and communication among stakeholders and noted that additional partners (public assistance, public health, mental health, court system, etc.) should be included in the planning process. Self-governance was another key concept mentioned by many meeting participants, as was the need to embrace the “spirit” of ICWA to achieve more than mere compliance.

The group engaged in a robust discussion of the concept of compliance versus a values driven structure. Participants felt that, while ICWA compliance is essential to all aspects of the strategic plan, it is fundamentally the spirit and values that infuse ICWA which should energize the plan and its shared implementation. Clarus noted that compliance is an external driver, while shared values create an internal motivation. The distinction between compliance and values infuses most culture change initiatives and even a total commitment to compliance—*100% compliance 100% of the time*—falls short of creating the buy-that drives passion for the work, innovation, creativity, and a continuous quality improvement mindset. Clarus presented the following framework to help guide the discussion:



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## Conclusion & Next Steps

The January strategic planning session was extremely productive, with outcomes including draft vision and mission statements, identification of strategic priorities, and development of preliminary strategic goals and objectives.

At the close of the retreat, participants decided additional stakeholders should be included in the next planning session, specifically stakeholders directly involved with child welfare such as public defenders and representatives from public health, public assistance, and mental health. The group discussed the importance on-boarding new participants prior to the second planning session. The next session was scheduled for March 2-4 in Juneau, AK.

## Attachment One Planning Session Participants

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Banke, Melanie	Kawerak
Bentz, Paula	ACF Region 10
Bolles, Tim	OCS
Childress, Sara	OCS
Crow Medicine, Liz	First Alaskans Institute
Davidson, Valerie	DHSS
Dougherty, Erin	Native American Rights Fund
Eddy-Jones, Francine	Central Council of Tlingit and Haide Tribes of Alaska
Erickson, Carla	Department of Law
Erickson, Travis	OCS
Escarate, Ozzy	Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association
Fleming, Sharon	OCS
Forrest, Karen	DHSS
Gardner, Fennisha	OCS
Gatti, Heather	First Alaskans Institute
Gorman, Gloria	Bureau of Indian Affairs
Groat, Casey	OCS
Handler, Holly	Alaska Legal Services
Johnson, Lou	Bristol Bay Native Association
Johnson, Mary	Tanana Chiefs Conference
Lawton, Christy	OCS
Murray, Barb	Division of Juvenile Justice
Offt, Cheryl	Association of Village Council Presidents
Paoli, Jorie	First Alaskans Institute
Polley, Bob	Court Improvement Project
Sanders, Andrea	First Alaskans Institute
Shircel, Don	Tanana Chiefs Conference
Spartz Campbell, Tracy	OCS
Swanson, Kristie	OCS
Trigg, Darlene	First Alaskans Institute
Wood, Rob	Division of Juvenile Justice

Attachment Two  
Strategic Priority Exercise

Strategic Priority	What is the desired end result for this Strategic Priority?
<b>Continuum of Culturally Appropriate Service Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children receive culturally appropriate service delivery</li> <li>• Ensure systems and institutions reflect the culture and community</li> <li>• Alaska Native culture keeps Alaska Native children safe</li> <li>• Ensure availability and accessibility of continuum / range of culturally appropriate services to children in their community</li> <li>• Help front-line workers understand how to engage and be part of the community</li> <li>• Ensure workforce is reflective of population served</li> <li>• Policy and training supportive of culturally appropriate services and community engagement by OCS staff (support language classes, time to attend events like Celebration)</li> </ul>
<b>Community Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community to inform the plan</li> <li>• Transparency (data, processes, services, Q&amp;A) (GAP meeting example)</li> <li>• Engagement at the village / Tribal level</li> <li>• How to engage without violating confidentiality – MOU with Tribes to allow sharing of information</li> <li>• Go to communities, including formal and informal leaders, to hear about their experiences and inform what healthy system looks like and best ways to transform and heal child welfare system; as part of Truth &amp; Reconciliation (Wellness Gathering as model)</li> <li>• Share Strategic Plan with Tribes; foster understanding of how everyone can contribute to achieving strategic priorities</li> <li>• Acknowledge system hasn't worked historically; embracing new approach</li> <li>• Identify and promote dialogue about erroneous assumptions / ideas</li> <li>• Institutionalize priorities by going to AFN and CAAN, ACT similar groups to present strategic plan</li> <li>• Educate policy leaders and funders on priorities and goals</li> </ul>
<b>Respectful Government-to-Government Collaboration and Partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and families require that Tribes are formally recognized by the State; recognition is friendly and forever</li> <li>• Win-win outcomes</li> <li>• Collaboration and cooperative agreements; how to do this; meaningful agreements</li> <li>• Truth and reconciliation</li> <li>• On-going dialogue</li> <li>• Institutionalize Tribal consultation e.g. consultation means power, authority and decision-making</li> <li>• Effective use of resources</li> <li>• Generate federal funding</li> </ul>

Strategic Priority	What is the desired end result for this Strategic Priority?
<b>Embrace and Implement the Spirit of ICWA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alaska Native children are with family in their communities</li> <li>• Tribal viewpoint will prevail when there is a conflict between OCS and Tribes in specific cases</li> <li>• Values of ICWA are evident in outcomes</li> <li>• Increase number of children placed with family in their communities</li> <li>• Out of preference placements are the exception</li> <li>• Create a model for early identification of relatives and placement support; everyone involved has responsibility to help identify relatives</li> <li>• Provide support to assist family members in ability to take in children (child care, mental health care, etc.)</li> <li>• Through self-governance, Tribes are caring for and responsible for their own children</li> <li>• Tribes are authentic partners with OCS in case planning and case management</li> <li>• Implement Regional Tribal State Recruitment and Retention Plans</li> <li>• Preventing removal</li> <li>• Supporting reunification</li> <li>• Foster belief in ICWA; develop buy-in to values of ICWA</li> <li>• Redefine important terms such as “risk” and “wellness” to include cultural values</li> <li>• Promote better understanding of racism</li> <li>• Reconcile world view / conflicting value systems of western and Tribal cultures; build workforce that lives the values</li> <li>• Shifting from strategic plan to treatment plan to address and enhance a healthy child welfare system; system needs treatment plan and families need strategic plans</li> <li>• ICWA promotes the best interests of the child</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alaska Native Culture keeps Alaska Native Children safe; shared understanding that Tribes know best what is best for their children</li> <li>• Alaska Tribes have ownership and control of child welfare (well-being)—i.e. the opportunity to choose who they want to do it and vehicle (e.g. regional Tribal organizations)--expands range of options</li> <li>• Tribe, state and federal government have clearly defined roles</li> <li>• Address sovereign immunity issue</li> <li>• Local ownership of the problem; ownership of the solution: If Tribe isn't ready, build capacity</li> <li>• Tribes design their model</li> <li>• Measure outcomes not process</li> <li>• Define programs, services, functions and activities and assign value; funding, technical support and other resources follows the item</li> <li>• Recognition that providing care as close to home as possible achieves better outcomes</li> <li>• Embrace the values of the Tribe through dynamic win/win process</li> <li>• Create models that work to share—look for models that are working to carve out e.g. Rural Child Welfare Grant process—broaden that type process, e.g. 638 process; YKHC process toward self-governance</li> </ul>

Strategic Priority	What is the desired end result for this Strategic Priority?
State Agency Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values and spirit of ICWA permeate all state agencies</li> <li>• Concerted effort to include agencies in child welfare e.g. DBH, Public Assistance, SDS, Court system, GAL, PDs, law enforcement, education, Dept. of Law, Licensing, child support, health care services, mental health trust, Dept. of Education and Early Development, DJJ</li> <li>• Coordination and proper allocation of resources</li> <li>• Clear roles and responsibilities of state agencies</li> <li>• Protecting vulnerable children everyone’s top priority; shared responsibility</li> <li>• Foster flexibility in the system</li> <li>• Examine and reduce barriers</li> <li>• Acknowledgment across agencies that Alaska Native culture keeps Alaska Native children safe</li> <li>• Clarify shared goals; improved alignment towards shared goals so Tribes and families aren’t “stuck in the middle”</li> <li>• Working collaboratively; breaking down silos</li> <li>• Create and embrace processes that allow children to be served in their own community</li> <li>• Improve outcomes for Alaska Native children</li> <li>• Align state to support smooth transition to self-governance</li> </ul>



## Attachment Three

### Question Responses: What should be the shape/spirit/elements of the strategic plan?

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#### Table 1:

- Need to include partners in planning process who are actively involved in child welfare e.g. FFCA, DBH, Public Health, Public Assistance
- Formal, friendly and forever recognition of tribal sovereignty in all areas; trust, understanding and accountability
- Self-Governance (Indian Health Model); tribal infrastructure; compacting
- Cultural indicators of risk and wellness
- Prevention starts at the top
- Acknowledging innovative Tribal ways of doing the work
- Addressing historical trauma
- ICWA as a model for all children
- Service coordination between Tribe and State
- Look at barriers with new eyes
- Create cemented lines of communication and sharing information and data freely
- Service "recipient" consults
- Learning from healthy communities taking care of their children
- Collective message / inspiration – consistent and non-judgmental

#### Table 2:

- Inclusive of many value systems
- Training / ongoing relationship building
- State cannot do things alone; ownership needs to be everyone's responsibility
- Engaging Tribes as sovereign entities
- Communication strategy: how will this look?
- Keep children in their communities
- What are the inputs? Native values. What are all the things that go in?
- What are the outputs: Leadership, Advocacy, Staffing, Technology, Facility, Financial Business Operation, Quality Assurance, Partnerships? End result = Strong, Healthy Families
- The Strategic Plan for the Tribes!! Asking for consultation – how do we get Tribes at the table

#### Table 3:

- Reach out to the public / community
- Publicize the work we do e.g. Tribal / State; need key talking points
- Commitment by State to its children
- Get key folks to the table
- Flexibility to account for local practices / culture
- PR spokesperson
- Compacting services
- Spirit of Fish Camp
- History of child protection

- Message is it's not perfect, we're in it together
- Work in process
- Truth and Reconciliation

Table 4:

- System that works for EVERYONE
- ICWA is the floor for what is required; many states have higher standards; we shouldn't aim for compliance but for higher standards
- We all have same focus – healthy, happy children. Different accountability – Tribe / children; State / Gov/ Systems
- Opportunity to introduce changes re: institutional racism; address these and make changes e.g. Tribal vs. State Foster homes
- System accountable to regulations and system accountable to children
- Build a system compatible with regulations that is accountable to children
- Need to hold ourselves accountable
- Build tribal infrastructure and capacity
- What are road blocks that have been built over time? Our families did this successfully for thousands of years
- Trust, collaboration; continuous rather than divided. Remove obstacles that are unnecessary e.g. Tribal / State Foster Home licensure requirements
- Different views of “successful” families / placements
- Need shared vision of what success is re: families / placements
- Longer strategic plan – 5 years with refreshments
- Understanding of importance of being in home village / town
- Therapeutic foster homes – children in system “needing” therapeutic foster homes in rural communities. What defines therapeutic homes?
- Having behavioral health at the table is important because issues are so intertwined understanding of the whole system is needed
- Train families / relatives to be therapeutic

Additional thought all groups:

- Need to make sure outcomes are aligned
- Ensure process consults and uses tribal input in a meaningful way
- Not just a plan – a MOVEMENT that can be sustained even through leadership changes, etc.
- Ensure decision-making bodies / meetings / etc. reflect the community served
- Ensure clarity on how strategic plan fits within other OCS plans and initiatives
- Need integrated service delivery
- Need to consider how deep can we go with planning without engagement from other partners
- Build a model that can be replicated in other communities

# Transforming Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children

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**Strategic Planning Summary Report**  
**Planning Session II: March 3-4, 2016**

Report by:



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## Executive Summary

On March 3-4, 2016 approximately thirty-eight stakeholders involved in Alaska's child welfare system gathered to continue development of a strategic plan to "Transform Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children". The March planning session built on work accomplished during the initial planning session conducted in January, 2016. In an effort to strengthen the strategic planning process, the network of experts and partners involved in the planning process was expanded for the March session, as reflected in the list of Planning Session participants found in **Attachment One**.

This report serves as a summary of work accomplished and outcomes achieved during the March, 2016 session. The purpose of this session was to:

- Review and affirm the Vision, Mission, Strategic Priorities and Goals developed at the first session;
- Identify Objectives and preliminary Tactics to achieve strategic goals;
- Discuss the process for finalization and roll-out / communication of the strategic plan; and,
- Begin discussion of resources and processes needed for successful implementation of the strategic plan.

## Accomplishments as a Result of the Strategic Plan

As an opening exercise, planning session participants were asked to respond to the following question:

*What is one thing you hope will be accomplished as a result of the Strategic Plan to "Transform Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children". Responses are listed below:*

- 50% of Alaska Native children in foster care are placed in Native homes
- Alaska Native children are placed with Alaska Native families
- Better outcomes for Alaska Native children
- Stronger, healthier families and communities
- Advance wellness and healing in Alaska Native communities
- Decrease of 10% for number of children removed in emergency situations; identify and provide supports for crisis intervention
- Significant reduction of children in care
- Timely, personal Case plans are developed and resources provided to support these plans
- Have ability to provide services in-state for therapeutic foster care
- Provide more direct, targeted training
- Other State Departments look to this partnership as a model
- Children and families are able to get help immediately
- More emphasis from OCS and others on family preservation
- Reduction of custody; emphasis on prevention and preservation
- Kids more involved in their own care plans
- Families have access to supports needed
- Educate the public and child welfare partners regarding disproportionality

- Tribes have resources to assume jurisdiction over their children
- Tribes are fully engaged and making decisions for their children
- More Tribes have executed IV-E Waiver Maintenance Agreements
- Tribes have In-home services and resources to provide these services
- Expansion of successful models for how children and families can best be served (e.g. Tlingit and Haide Tribes of Alaska)
- Compacting is achieved
- Normalized and established communication between Tribes and State courts
- True sovereignty recognized; systemic change
- Licensing regulations change to recognize Tribally licensed foster homes
- System are strengthened to provide better assistance with Medicaid claiming
- Supervisors and frontline workers have strong value set for working with Native children

## Vision & Values

Participants then discussed the following draft Vision statement:

*Alaska Native culture keeps Alaska Native children safe*

Discussion centered on concern by some participants regarding the word “safe”, with the suggestion that other words be considered such as “healthy” or “thriving”. After considerable discussion, consensus formed around keeping the vision statement as originally drafted. However, the group agreed that values statements and/or a preamble should be included in the finalized strategic plan to address some of the broader issues and concepts which emerged from the vision discussion. To this end, Values statements were developed and included in the Strategic Plan presented on page 7 of the Report and Recommendations.

## Strategic Priorities & Goals

Participants worked in breakout groups to review and refine the six Strategic Priorities and Goals. Based on these discussions, slight revisions were made to the wording of the Priorities and Goals, as reflected below:

**Respectful Government-to-Government Collaboration & Partnership**

Achieve formal, friendly and forever recognition of Tribes by the State

**Self-Governance**

Tribes self-govern the welfare of their children, and have the resources to do so

**Embrace & Implement the Spirit and Values of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)**

Embrace the spirit and values of ICWA to ensure Alaska Native children are with their families and community

**State Government Alignment**

Ensure state government systems are aligned and services provided based on the values and spirit of ICWA

### **Community Engagement**

Alaska’s child welfare system operates as a partnership among the community, Tribes, State and Federal government to keep Alaska Native children in their family and culture

### **Culturally Specific Services and Supports**

Provide a continuum of culturally specific supports that ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of Alaska Native children.

## **Objectives**

Participants continued to work in small groups to develop the strategic plan objectives (high-level activities / approaches to achieve strategic goals) and tactics (actions or tools used to achieve objectives and attain strategic goals). The result of these discussions is captured in the strategic plan presented on pages 8-13 of the Report and Recommendations.

## **Conclusion & Next Steps**

At the close of the planning session, participants discussed the importance of communicating the results of the strategic plan work sessions. Talking points were developed by the group as a tool to help guide conversations with stakeholders. A copy of the Talking Points can be found in **Attachment Two**.

Attachment One  
 Planning Session II Participants

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1	Allen, Richard "Rick"	Office of Public Advocacy
2	Alves, Anita	Office of Public Advocacy
3	Banke, Melanie	Kawerak
4	Beecher, Linda	Public Defender's Office
5	Bentz, Paula	ACF Region 10
6	Biggs, Lynn	Casey Family Programs
7	Bolles, Tim	OCS
8	Borromeo, Nicole	Alaska Federation of Natives
9	Childress, Sara	OCS
10	Crow Medicine, Liz	First Alaskans Institute
11	Eddy-Jones, Francine	Central Council of Tlingit and Haide Tribes of Alaska
12	Erickson, Carla	Department of Law
13	Erickson, Travis	OCS
14	Escarate, Ozzy	Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association
15	Fleming, Sharon	OCS
16	Gardner, Fennisha	OCS
17	Gatti, Heather	First Alaskans Institute
18	Gayhart, Renee	DHSS
19	Gorman, Gloria	Bureau of Indian Affairs
20	Groat, Casey	OCS
21	Handler, Holly	Alaska Legal Services
22	Johnson, Mary	Tanana Chiefs Conference
23	Lawton, Christy	OCS
24	Munson, Myra	Sonosky Law Office
25	Murray, Barb	Division of Juvenile Justice
26	Northberg, Deborah	Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc.
27	O'Brien, Sean	Division of Public Assistance
28	Polley, Bob	Court Improvement Project
29	Sanders, Andrea	First Alaskans Institute
30	Shircel, Don	Tanana Chiefs Conference
31	Spartz Campbell, Tracy	OCS
32	Swanson, Kristie	OCS
33	Sweet, Kim	Kenaitze Indian Tribe
34	Tarzwell, Sydney	Alaska Legal Services
35	Turner, Coleen	OCS
36	Willer, Cristy	Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc.
37	Wood, Rob	Division of Juvenile Justice
38	Westing, Penny	Chickaloon Indian Tribe



**STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020**

**Talking Points about the DHSS Strategic Plan to "Transform Child Welfare Outcomes for Alaska Native Children"**



# TALKING POINTS ABOUT THE DHSS STRATEGIC PLAN TO "TRANSFORM CHILD WELFARE OUTCOMES FOR ALASKA NATIVE CHILDREN"

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020

For the last 20 years, Tribal partners from across the state have been collaborating with state child welfare leaders to better serve Alaska Native families and children. During that time, much has been accomplished, including the development of 11 Title IV-E Administration and Training Agreements and 2 Tribal Title IV-E maintenance agreements. These agreements have helped increase the capacity of Tribal governments to provide Tribal child welfare services autonomous from that of the State. In addition, many more collaborative efforts, pilots and processes have been implemented at local and statewide levels through government to government partnerships, grant funding and collaboration on a federal demonstration project.

November 2015 marked a new era in state government with Governor Walker and Lt. Governor Mallett taking office and subsequently appointing Valerie Davidson as Commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services. The priorities of this administration seek to improve the health and safety outcomes for Alaskans. Commissioner Davidson was quick to identify child welfare as a top priority and voiced her desire for better outcomes for those served, particularly for Alaska Native children who are significantly disproportionately represented in the total foster care population.

Commissioner Davidson participated on the Attorney General's Advisory Committee on American Indian/Alaska Native Children Exposed to Violence: Ending Violence so Children can Thrive. This study helped craft a number of recommendations for states and an entire chapter specific to Alaska. One such recommendation was the creation of a task force to strategically address gaps or areas needing improvement within the state. In March 2015, First Alaskan's Institute facilitated the first meeting of key

Tribal leaders, advocates, legal representatives, and child welfare representatives to begin a

dialogue about how we can change the future of Alaska's child welfare system for the better. A follow meeting was held in May 2015 in Anchorage and included over 100 participants including elders and Tribal partners from around the State. Through the aid and partnership of Casey Family Programs, a philanthropic entity, the Clarus Consulting firm was hired to work with Alaska to create a five-year strategic plan.

This Strategic Plan seeks to make transformative changes to child welfare in an expedited fashion in order to affect the greatest degree of change during Governor Walker's term such that changes will be well embedded and difficult to modify should the administration turn over during the next gubernatorial election. Over 40 representatives from Tribal leadership, OCS, DHSS and other child welfare partners met in Juneau last week to continue work and finalize a Strategic Plan to transform child welfare outcomes for Alaska Native children. The plan includes the following six priorities:

1. Continuum of Culturally Specific Services Community Engagement
2. Community Engagement
3. Respectful Government-to-Government Collaboration and Partnership
4. Embrace and Implement the Spirit of ICWA
5. Self-Governance
6. State Agency Alignment

With this Strategic Plan, members of the planning group are excited and hopeful about the future of Alaska's child welfare system. The draft plan reflects a paradigm shift in the approach to child welfare as it relates to Alaska Native children, based on the understanding that Tribes know best what is best for their children and have for centuries. This philosophy will be evident throughout the objectives and action items of the plan, and will respect the authority and sovereignty for the welfare of Alaska Native children that inherently resides with their Tribal government.

#### Next Steps:

The strategic planning committee is working to finalize the plan within the next two months so that public and intergovernmental messaging and outreach can begin, with implementation beginning as quickly as possible.

The draft Strategic Plan will be reviewed by the Tribal State Collaboration Group, the planning group members and the DHSS leadership and subsequently will be formally rolled out to a wide array of stakeholders.

There will be many opportunities for continued collaboration as workgroups are formed and action plans are designed. We will be reaching out to those that have volunteered to help on specific priorities and others who may be needed to aid in our efforts.

Regular updates will be sent via email as this evolves and workgroups are formed. Please contact OCS Director Christy Lawton at 465-3011 or [Christy.Lawton@alaska.gov](mailto:Christy.Lawton@alaska.gov) for questions or concerns.