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Case Studies on Collaboration Series

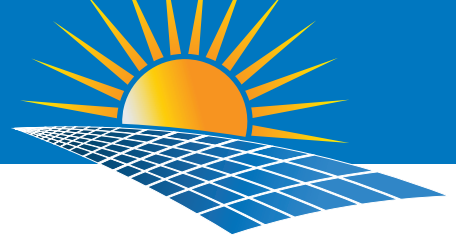
Tribal-State Collaboration on Sustainability and Solar Development

A Case Study of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe



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About this Report

This case study was developed as part of the Clean Energy States Alliance's (CESA) Solar with Justice: Connecting States and Communities project. The Solar with Justice project aims to bring together state energy agencies (SEAs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) developing solar for environmental justice (EJ) communities to create opportunities for dialogue and collaboration. This case study is the last of six case studies being published by CESA under the Solar with Justice project. Eugene Strowbridge, the Sustainability Coordinator for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, wrote this case study.



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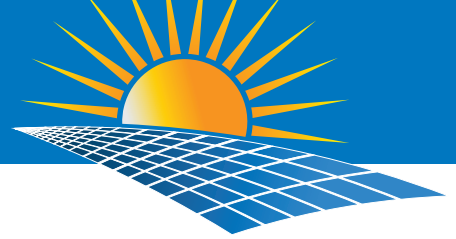
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All photos provided by the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

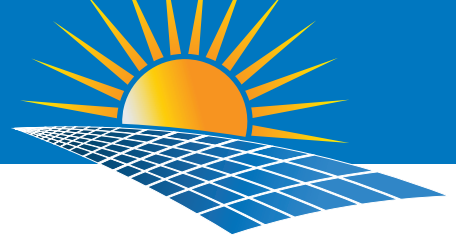


Introduction

Tribal and State governments have a unique and often misunderstood relationship. Tribal Governments are sovereign—meaning that they have an inherent right to govern themselves and make decisions affecting the health and wellbeing of their people. They have a government-to-government relationship with the US Federal Government, which means that Tribes are to be accorded the same respect and autonomy as other recognized governments that the United States deals with. If a decision by the US government would affect a Tribe, the US is obligated to coordinate with the Tribe and deliberate through a formalized consultation process. Tribal governments are considered “parallel” to the US Government and analogous to Nation States. Due in part to a long and troubled history of misunderstanding and jurisdictional grievances, Tribes have a comparatively limited track record of collaborating with individual US States. This case study explores the Tribal-State relationship through the experiences of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, and it makes recommendations for how other Tribes and States can work together collaboratively and effectively.



One of five solar arrays that make up the Band's Community Solar Garden



The Tribal-State Relationship

For Tribal governments, coordinating with state-level officials can feel like surrendering sovereignty or jurisdictional control when compared to making unilateral decisions at the Federal level without concern for the State. State government employees are often not aware that Tribes are sovereign entities and not subject to their laws, regulations, or processes on Tribal lands. A report entitled *Government to Government Models of Cooperation Between States and Tribes* released by the National Conference of State Legislatures in 2009 notes that “Public education does not teach that Tribes are governments, and many adults—including state legislators—perceive Tribes and Tribal members as minorities or special interest groups.”¹

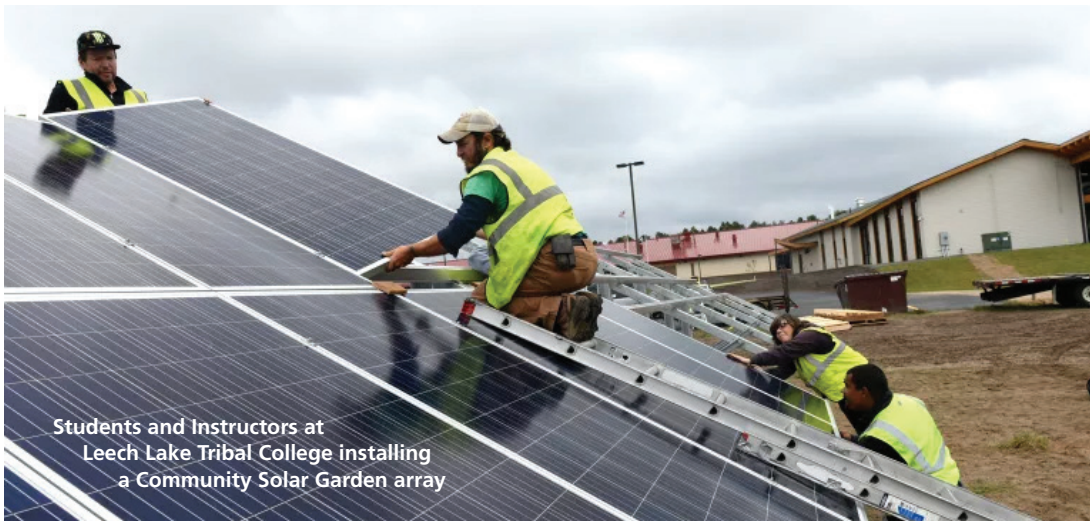
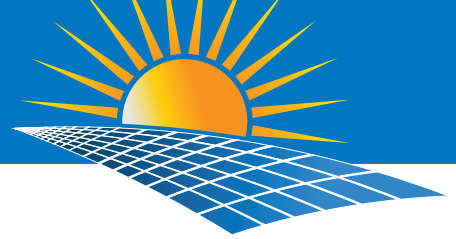
This lack of understanding causes situations in which consultation with Tribes is overlooked or inadequate, which further strains relationships and can threaten Tribal sovereignty and self-determination. Similarly, a lack of understanding of or respect for Tribal processes often leads to the State’s incorrect assertion that the Tribe must follow the State’s processes, including the often vague and bureaucratic hurdles and their associated and extensive paperwork.

Aside from Tribal sovereignty, many State officials fail to consider the stark differences in capacity that are common between State and Tribal organizations. A comment in Executive Order 14112 issued by the Biden Administration in December of 2023 illustrates the point well, and applies to the relationship between Tribes and States as much or even more than between Tribes and the federal government:

Despite the progress of the last 50 years, Federal funding and support programs that are the backbone of Federal support for Tribal self-determination are too often administered in ways that leave Tribal Nations unduly burdened and frustrated with bureaucratic processes. The Federal funding that Tribal Nations rely on comes from myriad sources across the Federal Government, often with varying and complex application and reporting processes. While Tribal Nations continue to rebuild, grow, and thrive, some Tribal Nations do not have the capacity and resources they need to access Federal funds—

The lack of understanding causes situations in which consultation with Tribes is overlooked or inadequate, which further strains relationships and can threaten Tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

¹ Susan Johnson et al, *Government to Government Models of Cooperation Between States and Tribes* (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2009), pg. 7, https://documents.ncsl.org/wwwncsl/LegislativeStaff/Quad-Caucus/2009_gov_to_gov.pdf.



and even for those that do, having to repeatedly navigate Federal processes often unnecessarily drains those resources.²

W. Ron Allen, Chairman of the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe in Washington State, put it this way:

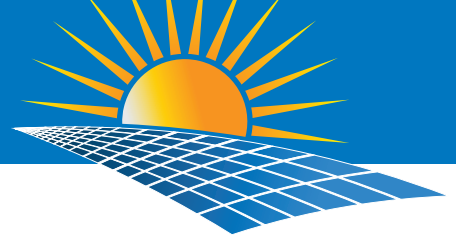
It is very difficult to accomplish anything with the state if every time you meet with someone you have to justify who you are and why you have a right to be involved. Tribes have treaties with the federal government and we are recognized in the U.S. Constitution, but we often have to teach that to every state official we meet. How are we supposed to get into the details of an issue on fisheries or taxes, if we can’t get past the ABCs?³

It’s important to understand that the jurisdictional tensions inherent in State and Tribal relationships are ongoing, and that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to Tribal and State collaboration.

Despite these challenges, there has been more collaboration between Tribal and State governments in recent years. As areas of mutual interest and benefit and barriers are identified and discussed, Tribes and States are collaborating in novel ways and creating entirely new agreements and systems for collaboration that aid the two entities in working together. Generalization is, of course, difficult considering the complexities inherent in the 534 federally recognized Tribes, the 50 individual States, and the unique histories, conditions, and legal landscapes that shaped such relationships. Some Tribes within a State work well with State offices and programs, while other Tribes within the same State have little to no communication.

² Executive Office of the President, *Reforming Federal Funding and Support for Tribal Nations to Better Embrace Our Trust Responsibilities and Promote the Next Era of Tribal Self-Determination, A Presidential Document* (Executive Office of the President, December 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/12/11/2023-27318/reforming-federal-funding-and-support-for-tribal-nations-to-better-embrace-our-trust>.

³ Johnson, *Government to Government Models of Cooperation*, pg. 8



The Minnesota Context

Minnesota was the first State to establish an Indian Affairs Council in 1963. The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) is the official liaison between the State and the area's 11 Tribal governments.

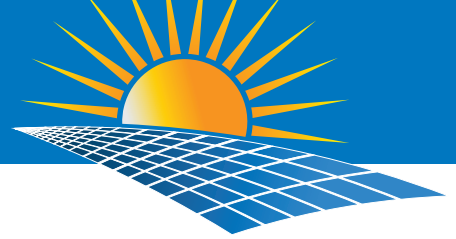
The Minnesota Executive Order on Indian Tribal Governments, executed in 2003 and signed by Governor Tim Pawlenty, affirmed that the 11 federally recognized tribes in Minnesota are sovereign entities who play a key role in serving all citizens of the State and are entitled to their right to existence, self-government and self-determination.⁴

Although Minnesota is one of the States that has implemented a series of mechanisms for State-Tribal collaboration, it has many of the same issues as other States—infrequent or inconsistent communication with Tribes across divisions of the State government; lack of early and frequent consultation; mechanisms designed for the State's processes but not the Tribe's; and a long and troubled history with Tribal nations that complicate efforts to collaborate on equal footing.

Another important point is that the work done building and maintaining relationships with one State office or official does not translate into progress with others. If Tribes want to foster a healthy relationship of mutual respect with the State, they need to be present and engaged with actors across the entire State government—and do so with much less staff capacity than their State counterparts.

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⁴ Governor Tim Pawlenty, Executive Order 03-05 Affirming the Government-to-Government Relationship Between the State of Minnesota and Indian Tribal Governments Located Within the State of Minnesota, Minnesota Executive Order, April 2003, <https://www.lrl.mn.gov/archive/execorders/03-05.pdf>.



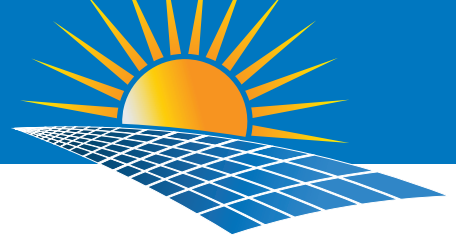
Tribal-State Coordination on the Leech Lake Reservation

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO or The Band) is a Federally- Recognized Indian Tribe. The reservation is located in rural north-central Minnesota (MN) within the four-county region of Beltrami, Cass, Hubbard, and Itasca counties, about 100 miles south of the Canadian border and 225 miles north of Minneapolis/St. Paul. The reservation boundaries include 17 communities/villages and a population of about 11,500 people, about half of which are indigenous residents, scattered across 864,158 acres of geographically distinct landscape, including several of the largest lakes and wetlands in the State.

In 2014, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe began developing its renewable energy portfolio and sowing the seeds for what would later become its Sustainability Program. At that time, Air Quality Specialist Brandy Toft in the Environmental Department held a series of informal meetings around renewable energy and sustainability. At the time, there were no Band employees dedicated to gathering baseline data, setting goals, or pursuing greater sustainability within the Band's operations. Any work towards those ends was being done in addition to the staff's official job duties. The ad hoc group allowed those interested in sustainability to learn, coordinate, and pool their time and resources. It also created buy-in for early initiatives across the separate divisions of the Tribal government, helping to break down organizational silos. The diverse group of professionals who made up the team quickly grew to include botanists, foresters, wildlife technicians, construction management professionals, GIS specialists, air quality specialists, accountants, community health professionals, water resource specialists, and Tribal planners.

At that time, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) was administering its GreenStep Cities Program, a voluntary recognition program meant to celebrate the sustainability measures achieved by Minnesota cities. Despite a series of listening sessions conducted throughout the State in 2007, the coalition that outlined the program, which included "Representatives from dozens of cities, non-profit organizations, the University of MN, businesses and state government agencies..."⁵, no one thought to ensure that Tribal Nations were included as participants. This is a good example of the ways in which Tribes are often overlooked—the coalition that designed the program appeared to be made up of every stakeholder group aside from Tribes. However, the Band's Green Team, led by Brandy Toft, pressed the issue and worked with GreenStep Cities staff to ensure that there would be an avenue of participation for Tribes.

⁵ Minnesota GreenStep Cities website, <https://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/>.



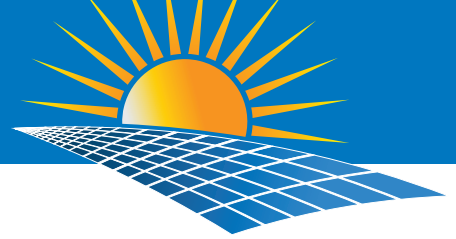
This action on the part of Toft and the Green Team laid the groundwork for a continuing relationship and dialogue with State employees that allowed the Band to pursue projects with greater State collaboration in the years that followed. In the same year, the Band, through the Green Team, applied for and won a Seed Grant through CERTs (Clean Energy Resource Teams), a public-private partnership based at University of Minnesota Extension. The grant funded the installation of solar furnaces on five Tribal homes and included a training component that taught Band Members to install furnaces in their own homes.

The Band's Green Team then engaged with the Minnesota Green Corps Program, an AmeriCorps program that places Members with Host Site Organizations to increase resilience to climate change in a variety of program areas. Much like the GreenStep Cities Program, it was a framework that could provide valuable opportunities for Tribal communities and organizations but lacked Tribal engagement. The Green Team pursued the opportunity and worked with MPCA to adapt the framework to allow for a Tribal Government to serve as a host site. The Band has had a GreenCorps Member serving at the Leech Lake Division of Resource Management nearly every year since, and they became a vital component of the growth of the Band's renewable energy assets and its sustainability program. Members, who served in the Air Pollutant Reduction track, allowed the Band to ramp up the capacity of its Green Team to pursue climate resilience and sustainability prior to hiring full-time staff.

The Band's continued participation in the program has generated many opportunities for collaboration between the Band and MPCA to make the program more impactful and more equitable. It is due to these efforts on behalf LLBO and MPCA staff that the Band will have a Leech Lake Resident serving the Band as a GreenCorps member for the first time in 2024 and 2025. Collaboration continues between the two entities on a variety of barriers facing rural host sites and the members that serve them, including inadequate housing options and the comparative lack of training and professional development resources available in rural Minnesota. Members serving at the Leech Lake Division of Resource Management have consistently reported that they appreciated the breadth of experience they received. Today, the GreenCorps Members are hosted by the Sustainability Program, where they provide vital assistance to the program's single employee and are responsible for coordinating Green Team meetings.

In 2017, the Band partnered with the Rural Renewable Energy Alliance, a nonprofit operating in central and northern Minnesota, and a coalition of foundations to construct the LLBO Community Solar Garden, a 200kW solar PV network that reduces consumption on Tribal buildings and sells a portion of the power generated to the grid. The funds received are then fed into the Band's Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and are used to subsidize the heating bills of low-income Band members during the harsh winter months. The project was the first community solar project in Minnesota designed to help low-income residents, the first formally integrated into LIHEAP and the first in the U.S. on Tribal lands. It went on to win the Clean Energy Community Award.

Despite the eventual success of the project, it almost didn't happen. Minnesota law governing net-metering dictates that if a solar array has a capacity of 40kW or less, the utility must pay



for the power generated at the average retail rate. For arrays over 40kW, this is not the case, and area utilities were able to offer significantly lower rates for the power generated by those arrays--sometimes over two-thirds lower than the average retail rate.

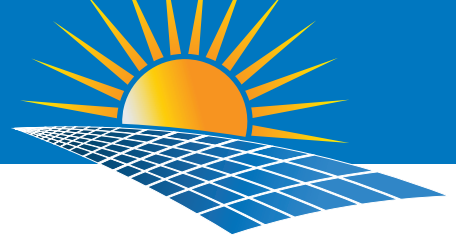
Complicating the project further, electrical cooperatives in Minnesota are not bound by net-metering laws because they fall outside the jurisdiction of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC). According to the Minnesota legislature it was “deemed statutorily unnecessary” for cooperatives to be regulated since their actions are, in theory, regulated by Boards made up of their members. Unfortunately, this is another area in which the State overlooked the on-the-ground implications for Tribes, because the boards of the electric cooperatives serving parts of the Leech Lake Reservation have rarely included Tribal representation. This is equally true for other Minnesota Tribes whose members are served by electric cooperatives, and depending upon the utility in question, they may have a contentious relationship with the government of the Tribal Members that they serve.

To address these challenges, the 200kW array was split into five separate 40kW arrays and scattered at disparate sites across the Reservation. Some components of the Community Solar Garden receive average retail rate for the power generated, which was the only way the team could find to make the project financially viable. The solution, while workable, poses its own challenges based on the geography of the Reservation and the physical distance between sites, which, amongst other things, increases the cost of maintenance.

In 2018, the Band performed Investment Grade Audits (IGAs) on 22 of the Band’s worst-performing government-owned buildings to identify energy conservation measures (ECMs) and their associated payback time based on the amount of money each measure would save the Band in energy costs. Ultimately, six categories of ECMs were identified and implemented, including: mechanical system upgrades, control system upgrades, LED lighting, water conservation, utility-related measures, and solar PV. These measures resulted in a reduction of greenhouse gases equivalent to the removal of 423 passenger vehicles from the roads annually while also increasing the functionality, lifespan, and quality of critical building systems.

The project was made possible by the Guaranteed Energy Savings Program (GESP) offered through the Minnesota Department of Commerce, which was established to provide technical, contractual, and financial assistance to organizations in reducing energy consumption and maximizing operational savings. While a State program made the project possible, coordination with State agencies was cited as the most difficult and burdensome aspect of the undertaking. This is noteworthy, considering the complex scope of the nearly \$5 million project. The final report on the project mentions specifically “reviewing and processing the reams [of] paperwork with the Minnesota Department of Commerce’s Guaranteed Energy Savings Program.”⁶ As noted above, the insistence on the application of State processes despite the lack of Tribal staff capacity is a common issue. However, coordination on the GESP project led to an increase in accommodation to Tribal processes in subsequent

⁶ Brandy Toft, *First Steps Toward Developing Renewable Energy and Energy-Efficiency on Tribal Lands Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe* (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, 2019), <https://www.osti.gov/servlets/purl/1509831>.

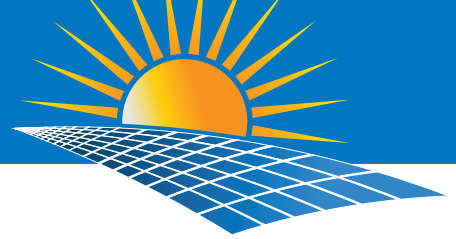


collaborations between the Band and the Department of Commerce, including participation in the Minnesota State Fair's Eco Experience, allowing the Band to share its successes with thousands of attendees. The Band and the Department of Commerce are currently finalizing an agreement that would fund a grant writer to pursue energy funding on behalf of the Band's Sustainability Department.

Also in 2018, the Band received a second Seed Grant from CERTs – this time to fund a Solar Master Plan that analyzed all Tribally owned buildings on the Reservation for solar suitability, including projections on the financial feasibility of each site. The ongoing relationship with CERTs allowed the Band to access small pools of funding for strategic planning that were easy to apply for and administer. This allowed the Band to pursue these projects without spending their limited resources on needless complexity. Later, in 2021, CERTs Seed Grant funding allowed the Band to expand on strategic planning efforts and produce an EV-Ready Guide, Solar-Ready Guide, and Approaching Net Zero Energy Building Guide. As a partnership between the Minnesota Department of Commerce, local nonprofits, and universities, CERTs were able to offer more flexibility in its funding and processes that benefited the Band greatly. Additionally, the Band was able to work with one of seven smaller regional CERTs teams that were more familiar with conditions on the Reservation.

Concurrent with the CERTs Seed Grant and the GESP program, the Band developed a Population Vulnerability Assessment and Climate Adaptation Framework with funding from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Local Climate Action Grant. This document identifies the most vulnerable entities and relationships on the Reservation and provides actionable recommendations for supporting them for an indefinite amount of time. In 2021, the Band secured more funding from the same program to expand upon the vulnerability assessment with a more comprehensive Climate Change Adaptation Plan. The contractor selected for the job, and the Tribal staff that contributed, faced substantial barriers in completing the project, including a lack of necessary data, a lack of capacity for Tribal experts to participate, and difficulties in engaging the public.

Perhaps the largest barrier, however, was the early selection of a city-centric model as a guide to the development of the Band's adaptation plan. It quickly became clear to Tribal employees involved in the project that the city-centric template did more harm than good, as it was based on several inescapably incompatible premises of western science—namely, that elements of a natural system exist in isolation, and that nature is to be viewed as a resource and not a relative. These principles contrast sharply with Anishinaabe ecology and lifeways, which emphasize the connectedness of all things and the relationships between humanity and their non-human relatives, including the water, sky, earth, plants, animals, fishes, insects, etc. This profound difference in viewpoint and values ground the team to a halt, and it was agreed that a climate change adaptation plan for the Band would necessarily be much different than that of a city or State—so much



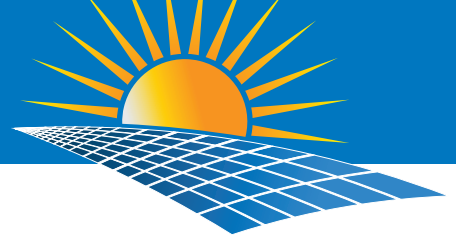
so that using one as a guide for the other caused only frustration amongst most project team members, partners, and community members. The Band explained the delays in the project to their contact in the MPCA, and was told that the office in charge of the funding was willing to offer as many extensions as were needed in recognition of the importance of adaptation planning in rural and Tribal communities. This flexibility and respect for difference enabled the Band to return to the project with a fresh approach, informed by past mistakes, and without the pressure of a looming deadline leading to a subpar final product. Work on the effort continues at this time.

In May of 2023, the Minnesota Department of Commerce and a workgroup composed of Tribal Nation volunteers (including LLBO) began the work of establishing the Tribal Advocacy Council on Energy (TACE), an organization meant to provide Minnesota's Tribal Nations a centralized body for consultation, collaboration, and policy recommendations to improve energy outcomes for Tribal members both on and off Tribal Lands. The council was initially proposed by Tribal leadership during consultation with the Department of Commerce in 2019. It was included in legislation that was passed by the State Legislature in February of 2023. Notably, TACE was not designed as an appendage of the State or the Department of Commerce, and was convened as a Tribal Nations advocacy council that would be guided and governed by appointed Tribal representatives. This effort, and others like it, are critical to Tribal energy sovereignty, energy equity, and climate adaptation.

IIJA/IRA Funding and CPRG Rollout

Recent collaboration between the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and the State of Minnesota around sustainability has focused largely on the rollout of the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding, including the EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) program. These recent efforts, on the part of the State, can be characterized as much more flexible and receptive to the differences in Tribal life, governance, and perspective. Several meetings were scheduled with the State offices in charge of IIJA and CPRG funding to discuss equity concerns and brainstorm models of funding distribution that may lead to more equitable outcomes for Leech Lake Band Members, other Tribal Nations, and rural communities across the State.

When the release of the funding announcement by the federal government caused those offices to be inundated with calls and emails about the State's plans for disbursing the funds, State employees rapidly implemented an unofficial "no wrong door" policy around disadvantaged communities and the rollout of climate pollution reduction activities. Originally adopted as a provision of the Affordable Care Act, the "no wrong door" policy was aimed at breaking down bureaucratic barriers around accessing healthcare services, in part by breaking down silos across the government. The implementation of this policy



around the IIJA, IRA, and CPRG rollout meant that instead of having to navigate the often-labyrinthine State bureaucracy to access information about the funding from a wide variety of government offices and employees, all interested parties were instead directed to a committee that acted as a “one-stop shop” for all information pertaining to the awards. This, in turn, drastically reduced the administrative burden on staff-constrained rural and Tribal municipalities.



Best Practices

Relationships between Tribal and State governments are extremely varied and carry complex problems with long histories and few easy solutions. Improving these relationships and increasing both the frequency and depth of collaboration between the two will take work on behalf of both entities. The following are best practices for both Tribal and State employees that have been identified from the Leech Lake Band's work with the State of Minnesota on sustainability initiatives. Though some practices may seem more relevant to professionals on one side of the relationship than another, it is important for all parties in the relationship to understand the challenges of the others, as well as the best practices they might employ to address these challenges.

Empower Advocates. The initial impetus for change in the context of State-Tribal collaboration around the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe's path to solar development was largely the result of a single Tribal employee's efforts. In the realm of sustainability, such impassioned advocates are often referred to as "Clean Energy Champions". Whether on the State or Tribal side of the relationship, it's important to identify the champions at your organization and empower them to pursue new opportunities and build bridges on the organization's behalf. For the Leech Lake Band, this person was Air Quality Specialist Brandy Toft, who founded the Green Team and initiated the relationship between the Band and CERTs, and pushed for Tribal inclusion in the Minnesota GreenCorps Program. These relationships and early successes helped build trust between the respective project teams, which in turn made it easier to collaborate with State entities on subsequent, more complex projects, such as the Band's Climate Adaptation Framework and the design of IIJA, IRA, and CPRG funding mechanisms.

Create an Intraorganizational Team. The foundation of the Band's Green Team brought diverse perspectives to the table, increased project buy-in, and tore down silos between the different divisions of the Band's government. Due to this early framework for collaboration, the Band was able to pursue larger projects that required an investment of staff time and resources that would likely not have been possible without it.

Look for Recurring Opportunities for Collaboration. The Band's participation in annual programs like GreenStep Cities, MN Green Corps, and the CERTs Seed Grants ensured that the Green Team stayed in contact with their peers in these organizations. Further, it ensured that Tribal Nations have a seat at the table and that their perspectives are heard and honored. These recurring opportunities for collaboration and relationship



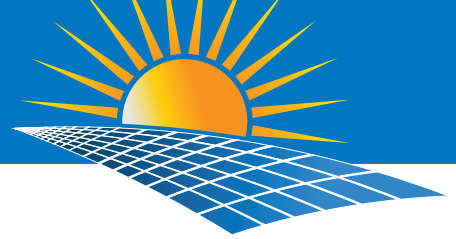
building can lead to tangible programmatic changes that make state programs more accessible and valuable for Tribal participants. It is only through the persistence of advocates within both entities that long-term collaboration flourished.

Assert and Respect Sovereignty. Tribal Nations must insist on being met where they are, in an appropriate way. Sovereignty, when not exercised, is lost. State employees should inform themselves on the unique legal relationship between Tribes and States, including their obligation to respect Tribal sovereignty by adapting State processes to better work with Tribes and eliminate any barriers those processes may impose. A good first step for many in state government would be further education on the history of the Tribes whose land you occupy, including the history of the relationship between those Tribes and the State that you now represent. Remember that this relationship is likely quite old, and that you are not starting from scratch the first time you reach out to your tribal counterparts. It is an oft-forgotten fact that the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe’s relationship with the federal government, including many treaties, predates the existence of the State of Minnesota. Without an awareness of the historical context for these conversations, it is all too easy to reinforce and perpetuate past wrongs—even if you don’t know that this is how your words and actions are being perceived. Reach out to area Tribes and ask if they have sources they would recommend.

Honor the Connections Between People and the Land. State employees and others more familiar with western knowledge systems should adopt a place-based perspective that “...embeds [natural] resource attributes back into the system of which they are a part, reminding managers that resources exist in a meaning-filled spatial (and temporal) context.”⁷ Despite residing in the same region, state, and perhaps even county, there remain frustrating disconnects between the perspectives of the people who live on the land and the decision-makers, many of whom reside in completely different environments with different relationships to them. In the experience of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, inviting other parties to visit the Reservation and meet Tribal officials and community members on their own lands has done much to bridge the gap between vague academic understandings of the Reservation and lived experience. Visiting the communities of the people who are impacted by your work is vital in understanding their perspectives, values, and potential contributions. A 2003 paper by Antony Cheng, Linda Kruger, and Steven Daniels notes that: “How one understands, evaluates, and acts in a geographic setting directly reflects one’s self-identity. Like a tinted window, place is at once reflective and transparent, allowing one to look on oneself while looking on others.”⁸ The paper goes on, and is worth quoting here in detail:

7 D.R. Williams et al., “Beyond the commodity metaphor: Examining emotional and symbolic attachment to place,” *Leisure Sciences* (14:1, 1992), pg.508-509, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490409209513155>.

8 Antony S. Cheng et al., “‘Place’ as an Integrating Concept in Natural Resource Politics: Propositions for a Social Science Research Agenda,” *Society and Natural Resources* (2023), p. 93, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08941920309199>.



In general, natural resource politics has been dominated by organized interest groups, commodity industries, elected officials, scientific experts, and resource specialists. All of these groups assign and advocate place meanings that tend to be general rather than nuanced. For example, a piece of land may be classified as a “roadless area,” “multiple use,” “critical habitat,” or “semi-primitive recreation.” It is far more efficient for these dominant groups to lump places into general categories than spend time exploring and understanding the nuanced natural and cultural histories of particular places. However, in choosing efficiency over understanding in making natural resource decisions, many voices are marginalized or even ignored. By classifying places into general categories, the dominant groups in natural resource politics have developed a fairly narrow set of place meanings considered in natural resource decision making, whereas the meanings people assign to places and the connections people form with places can be extremely diverse, nuanced, and multi-layered. This relatively narrow set of place meanings serves to legitimize the existing power of the dominant groups, benefiting both organized environmental groups and commodity industries, as well as scientific experts and resource specialists. Missing are the rich, layered place meanings that are expressed and valued by people not strongly affiliated with organized interest groups or industries, or trained in a natural science discipline or resource management.⁹

The last sentence is particularly true for Tribal communities and their rich ecological knowledge, culture, and perspectives, which are needed now more than ever.

Be Persistent. Change is often slow, especially with changes in governance and policy. Tribal Nations and States will not develop equitable and well-functioning working relationships overnight. It is important to start with small incremental changes and chances for collaboration. These small steps can help build a lasting rapport that can erode barriers to change and lead to more and larger chances for collaboration. Without the latitude granted to early advocates for change—both in State entities and the Leech Lake Band—and without their persistence, it is unlikely that the Band would have achieved the successes it has in developing its solar infrastructure. Perhaps more importantly, it is equally unlikely that either team would enjoy the benefits of closer collaboration that they do today. The relationships and mutual respect that were developed early in the Band’s sustainability journey continue to influence collaboration on a wide array of projects and priorities, not all of them related to solar, renewable energy, or sustainability. In this way, the development of State and Tribal collaboration around renewable energy development can have a powerful multiplying effect that reaches across Tribal and State divisions and priorities.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 100-101.

The Clean Energy States Alliance (CESA) is a national, nonprofit coalition of public agencies and organizations working together to advance clean energy. CESA members—mostly state agencies—include many of the most innovative, successful, and influential public funders of clean energy initiatives in the country.

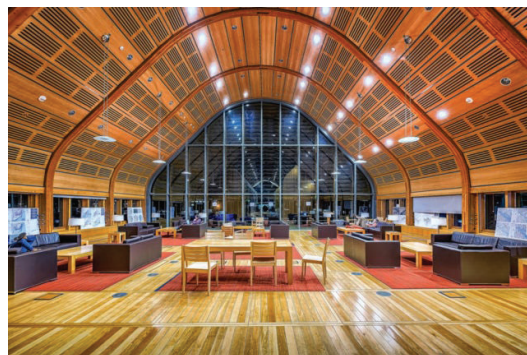


CESA works with state leaders, federal agencies, and other stakeholders to develop and promote clean energy programs and markets, with an emphasis on renewable energy, energy equity, financing strategies, and economic development. CESA facilitates information sharing, provides technical assistance, coordinates multi-state collaborative projects, and communicates the views and achievements of its members.

Ørsted US Offshore Wind/Block Island Wind Farm



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