

AMERICAN INDIAN TRIBES: STRENGTHENING GOVERNMENTS,  
ADVOCATING ISSUES, AND PRESERVING CULTURES

*A Concept Paper  
Presented by*

*THE NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS*

INTRODUCTION

The future existence of American Indian Tribes is seriously being threatened by legal and bureaucratic encroachments on Tribal sovereignty by the United States, the insatiable demands of the economic sector for Tribally-owned natural resources, and the erosion of Tribal identity by the dominant society. Approximately 500 culturally distinct American Indian Tribes and Alaskan Native villages, recognized through Treaties or Federal acknowledgement, exist on land bases spread across the United States. Over the last 125 years, Federal policy has controlled almost all aspects of Tribal development as determined by the U.S. Congress. Individual Tribal governments are virtually helpless in protest against the vast Federal bureaucracy which manages Tribal affairs by regulations, definitions, and disbursements. Collectively, however, Tribal governments have begun to effectively determine and express Tribal policy over the last 40 years through the National Congress of American Indians (*NCAI*). Founded in 1944, *NCAI* is the oldest and largest national Indian organization in America historically serving an advocacy role with the United States as the representative voice on American Indian concerns.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The effectiveness of *NCAI* is constrained and compromised, similar to Tribal governments, by the reliance on Federal financing for operational

support. Legitimate and reasonable Tribal concerns, ranging from recognized government status to pending legislation, are currently supported through projects and programs requiring Federal approval. Necessary travel for regional and national meetings inherent to Tribal leaders' dialogue and decisions on policy issues generally requires a Federally approved agenda. Domestically, the Reagan administration announced in January, 1983 a formal White House American Indian policy of dealing with Indian Tribes on a "government-to-government basis." Although the *NCAI* provided a formal written response to this in late January basically affirming this new policy in principal, the administration has maintained official silence on the subject. The Tribal side of the government-to-government relationship requires extensive communication and discussion among Tribal leaders prior to a consensus response on Tribal government views and negotiations on this relationship. Federal support for this dialogue and decision-making would inhibit a truly independent process for Tribal leaders.

Internationally, indigenous Tribal populations are politically dominated by governments with varying degrees of human rights concerns. These Tribes, estimated at 500 million worldwide, represent the poorest of the poor. *NCAI* involvement at international conventions sponsored by representative indigenous organizations could immeasurably improve the future condition of these peoples in their negotiations for rights to existence based on historical experience and future aspirations in relation to the United States. Unfortunately, U.S. support for such dialogue is limited and private support is restricted.

The *NCAI* recently reorganized its structure and priority foci to more effectively and meaningfully address issues of Tribal concern. *NCAI's* organizational portfolios reflect functional components including: General

Administration, Communications, Human Resources and Cultural Affairs, Inter-governmental Relations, Tribal Economics, Natural Resources, International Relations, Legislation & Litigation. Although the Federal government will probably support various programs across the portfolio spectrum, each portfolio will require private support to complete missions requiring minimal Federal involvement.

PROPOSED PROGRAM

The *NCAI* seeks private support for two basic organizational goals and the implementation of the corresponding portfolio project elements. The basic programs goals are:

- A) To create a foundation within Indian Country for the organization of a political consensus regarding the establishment and conduct of bi-lateral and multi-lateral discussions between American Indian Tribes and the United States government concerning present and future political relations between their respective governments.
- B) To permit American Indian Tribal government representatives to gain access to international indigenous institutions and State institutions concerned with the evolving self-determination and political development of indigenous populations under international law.

The *NCAI* portfolio project elements necessary to support initial implementation of these broad goals include:

- 1) Tribal Government Dialogue and Decision-Making Process on Government-to-Government Relations

This project component, managed by the Intergovernmental Relations Portfolio, would support five regional meetings of Tribal leaders to discuss Tribal policy perspectives on government-to-government relations and determine a consensus on Tribal policy positions at a national forum. The five regional meetings, held between July, 1983 and May, 1984, would be held at the following proposed sites to ensure the broadest possible Tribal participation:

- a) Oklahoma City, Oklahoma representing Southeast/Midwest Tribes
- b) Anchorage, Alaska representing the Alaskan Native Villages
- c) Minneapolis, Minnesota representing Upper Midwest and Northeast Tribes
- d) Phoenix, Arizona representing Southwest Tribes
- e) Seattle, Washington representing Tribes from Montana and the Pacific Northwest

A national meeting will be convened during July/August, 1984 to debate the issues and determine a national consensus regarding the Tribal perspective on government-to-government relations.

The government-to-government project component expenses will include staff salaries to prepare position papers and manage the meetings, print/telephone communications, staff/*NCAI* official travel, accommodation costs, and final report preparation. The project would include an *NCAI* delegation trip to several Micronesian governments to discuss their recent experience in seeking independent government status.

## 2) International Relations Support for Policy Development & Dialogue

The *NCAI* International Relations Portfolio will manage this project element allowing staff communications access to international indigenous institutions, development of *NCAI* international policy positions, and *NCAI*

representation at international forums. *NCAI* staff and three *NCAI* officials delegated International Commission members would, specifically, participate and present American Indian Tribal policy position statements at:

- a. The U.N. Human Rights Commission sponsored International Work Group on Indigenous Populations, Geneva, Switzerland, August 10-18, 1983
- b. Fourth General Assembly of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, OAXACA, Mexico, April, 1984.
- c. International Covenant on Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- d. World Council of Churches International Forum, Vancouver, British Columbia, August, 1983
- e. At least five international meetings will be attended by an *NCAI* delegate or designated staff including the implementation of the North American First Nations Assembly Charter

The International Relations Portfolio will also be responsible, under the proposed project support, for increasing domestic awareness of international indigenous issues, securing long-term financial support for project operations, and developing *NCAI* policy statements for *NCAI* general assembly consideration. Generally, project costs will include staff, telephone, print communication, travel and lodging expenses.

### 3) *NCAI* Policy Formulation Mechanism Support

Federal support for *NCAI* meetings usually imposes a Federal presence on the topical agenda and preparation of "Federally approved" deliverables. *NCAI* seeks support, as managed by the *NCAI* general administration, for the *NCAI* annual convention and general assembly (November, 1983), Executive Council

meeting (January, 1984), four *NCAI* Executive Committee meetings, and a limited number of *NCAI* delegate committee meetings for policy formulation related to emerging issues, i.e., water rights, litigation, economic development.

Project component costs would include administrative staff, logistical preparations, meeting accommodations, travel and lodging.

#### 4) Legislative Monitoring/Reporting Support

The U.S. Congress is constantly considering legislative proposals both beneficial and detrimental to American Indians. Individual Tribal governments have minimal means to keep abreast of legislative developments and concomitantly express timely views. This project component, managed by the *NCAI* Legislation & Litigation Portfolio, would monitor the status of pending legislative developments, provide accurate in-depth reports to Tribal leaders, and coordinate multi-Tribal responses through Congressional hearings and meetings. Basic project costs include staff and telephone/print communication expenses.

#### 5) Monthly *NCAI* Newsletter Support

Communication with Tribal leaders and *NCAI* membership on developing issues, Congressional deliberations, Federal decisions, and staff activities under the *NCAI* portfolios is an essential project element to keep abreast of current/emerging issues impacting Indian Country. In the narrowly defined world of American Indian concerns, subscription/advertisement support for a comprehensive newsletter is extremely difficult. This program component, managed by the *NCAI* Office of Communications, would publish/disseminate a monthly newspaper, *The Sentinel*, covering issues germane to American Indians. Several information "alerts," defining issues requiring immediate Tribal consideration, would also be issued. Project component costs would include an editor, printing and postage expenses.

6) Cultural Enhancement and Exchange Project Support

Each Indian Tribe and Alaskan Native Village have individuals/groups which maintain distinct cultural representations ranging from a variety of art forms to philosophy and religion. The very diversity of these cultural elements create difficulties for individual Federal support. Tribal cultural presentations from Mexico and Canada are impossible to access even though comparative representations are only separated by non-Indian defined boundaries. These fragile cultural presentations require continued promotion to preserve the true historical reflection of identity against the imposing onslaught of modern society.

This project component, managed by the *NCAI* Human Resources and Culture Portfolio, would collect/compile descriptive information on existing cultural art forms domestically and Canada/Mexico; coordinate presentations at appropriate forums; develop international exchanges, and, seek continuing program support. Basic project element costs will include staff, telephone/print communication, travel and lodging.

BUDGET

The basic budget breakdown for each proposed program component is delineated as follows:

1. Tribal Government Dialogue and Decision-Making Process on Government-to-Government Relations	\$ 75,000
2. International Relations Support for Policy Development & Dialogue	60,000
3. <i>NCAI</i> Policy Formulation Mechanism Support	206,000
4. Legislative Monitoring/Report Support	25,000
5. Monthly <i>NCAI</i> Newsletter Support	20,000
6. Cultural Enhancement and Exchange Project Support	<u>25,000</u>
Subtotal	\$411,000

NCAI Indirect @ 135% of Direct Salary (estimate)	150,000
G&A @ 19% of Project Total	78,100

TOTAL ESTIMATE	<u>\$639,000</u>
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