

# Developing a Tribal Elder Protection Team



Initiating a Tribal Elder Protection Team (EPT) in your community may be complex, time consuming, and can be difficult to plan. Take the time in this developmental process to consider all of the potential barriers and to identify areas of concern. This will greatly benefit the creation of a successful EPT in your tribal community.

## Benefits of a EPT

To build a solid foundation for your tribal EPT, the EPT Coordinator will want to know what elder service agencies are available in the tribal community. The creation of a tribal EPT will allow agencies to share the burden of investigating and efficiently responding to cases of elder abuse in a timely manner. Team members can support each other's roles, which decreases additional trauma to the elder and allows them to continue as a valued and respected member of the tribal community. Elders benefit from EPTs by:<sup>1</sup>

- Gaining access to coordinated services no matter how the elder enters the system,
- Receiving concurrent services across multiple agencies specifically for the elder's needs,
  - ❖ Increasing awareness of available services which improves access to all programs the elder needs, and
- More positive outcomes for elders through tribal agency collaboration.

## Getting Started

### 1. Build a team of professionals. Things to consider:<sup>1,5</sup>

- You may already have a group of individuals that share the same elder concerns
- Make a list of all resources available to elders in your tribal community
- Schedule a meeting with local professionals to discuss establishing a partnership between agencies to focus on elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- Learn what this team would want to accomplish
- What are the anticipated outcomes to developing an EPT?

### 2. Identify the tribal community's concerns for the elderly through a Community Needs Assessment.<sup>2</sup> A

#### Community Needs Assessment should include:

- Definitions of elder abuse and other related terms
- Elder abuse statistics (if available)
- Proposed solutions to how the EPT will respond to elder abuse

Complete a *Statement of Needs* summary report, this document should present all of the findings from the Community Needs Assessment. This document should include a proposed response to any elder abuse problems and clarify the areas of need to help address elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The Statement of Needs Report is required for any grant proposal. Additional documents include:<sup>3</sup>

- a) The goals of your EPT
- b) Drafting a grant proposal
- c) Gathering commitment from local authorities for the creation of an EPT
- d) EPT member recruitment
- e) Additional outreach and promotional materials to create awareness of the EPT

### 3. Develop organizational rules for the EPT<sup>1</sup>

- Who is the leader (e.g., EPT Coordinator)?
- Identify the goals of the EPT
- Develop protocols and documents needed to achieve the goals
- Establish written commitment from team members
- Develop EPT effective communication rules for any potential disagreements

### 4. Develop a tribal elder protection code (if none are already established by the tribe).

- See the "Development of Tribal Elder Protection Code" handout

## 5. Learn about State and Tribal Laws in your area

- Is there a Tribal Adult Protective Services worker employed by the tribe?
- Does the tribe have a Victims of Crimes office?
- Is the tribe in a Public Law-280 state?
- Identify statutes around law enforcement, elder care facility, guardianship and conservatorship, and mandatory reporting statutes

## 6. Program considerations include:

- Identify technical experience available to launch the EPT (e.g., computer resources)
- Determine if there are sufficient economic resources available
- Determine the legal requirements or restrictions for the EPT
- Develop a business plan and budget addressing how the EPT will operate. Some tribal communities run the EPT with minimal funds from one of the representative agencies, but most are coordinated on a volunteer basis

## 7. Develop a sustainability plan<sup>2-4</sup>

- Must address how the EPT is funded
- Depending on the EPT, some tribes have funding to cover staff (e.g., EPT Coordinator) travel costs, and meeting per diems. Unfortunately, many tribal EPTs do not have funds to support paid staff, but it is recommended to employ at least one paid staff person to serve as the coordinator and conduct administrative duties. This may be part-time or a portion of the individual's duties, depending upon the workload
- Another cost to consider is production and dissemination of meeting materials
- Tribes may designate a small percentage of civil and criminal penalties in cases involving elder abuse to be used to build an Elder Justice fund, which can go to supporting the EPT

## Barriers to Service

EPTs generally appear to have similar challenges that prevent the best outcomes for elders and the EPT. Service agencies struggle to provide help to clients in the face of dwindling funding and resources, and staff members may feel that utilizing the EPT creates an additional burden. Some barriers to service that EPTs face include:<sup>4-5</sup>

- Attendance issues (e.g., not having a large variety of agencies represented), lack of commitment from representatives to attend meetings regularly, lack of cases presented
- A lack of knowledge of other agencies' policies and mandates, that often leads to a negative perception that some agencies are non-cooperative
- A frustration among agencies in dealing with seemingly unsolvable cases
- Maintenance of confidentiality
- Costs, travel time to meeting location, and
- Mandated reporter policies

## References

1. Center of Excellence on Elder Abuse & Neglect, Human Service Department, County of Sonoma (2012). *A collaborative approach to multidisciplinary teams in Sonoma County*. Retrieved on May 30, 2017 from [www.centeronelderabuse.org/docs/A-Collaborative-Approach-to-Multidisciplinary-Teams-in-Sonoma-County.092812.pdf](http://www.centeronelderabuse.org/docs/A-Collaborative-Approach-to-Multidisciplinary-Teams-in-Sonoma-County.092812.pdf)
2. Department of Justice, Elder Justice Initiative (2017). Chapter 3: selecting team members. Retrieved on May 30, 2017 from [www.justice.gov/archives/elderjustice/file/961006/download](http://www.justice.gov/archives/elderjustice/file/961006/download)
3. Department of Justice, Elder Justice Initiative (2017). Chapter 6: MDT coordinator. Retrieved on May 30, 2017 from [www.justice.gov/elderjustice/file/961021/download](http://www.justice.gov/elderjustice/file/961021/download)
4. Content for this document was adapted from correspondence with Wilson Wewa of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs from November 2016 through May 2017.
5. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Wilson Wewa (2014). *Multidisciplinary Team Approach on Elder Abuse*. Retrieved from [www.nieji.org/pdf/multidisciplinary-team-approach-elder-abuse-presentation-121014.pdf](http://www.nieji.org/pdf/multidisciplinary-team-approach-elder-abuse-presentation-121014.pdf)

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The NIEJI project has been retired, but they have granted NIJII permission to share materials.  
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