



Building Tribal Early Childhood Systems

*Practical Strategies for Coordination, Parent
Involvement & Sustainable Change*

Dr. Kimber Olson, MSW, PhD
Tribal Early Learning Initiative Coordinator, ECD

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SESSION ROADMAP

90 Minutes Together



15 min

Introduction & Context

Why systems building matters for Tribal communities

25 min

Core Elements of Tribal EC Systems

Components, strategies & small-group discussion

20 min

Parent Involvement & Leadership

Centering families in system design

15 min

Overcoming Barriers

Common challenges & adaptive strategies

10 min

Action Planning & Q&A

Your next step in 3–6 months

PART 1: INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT



Why Systems Building Matters

Our early childhood programs are strong. But too often, they operate in silos, with each funded, managed, and measured separately. Families navigate a maze when they could be walking a clear path.

Reduce Duplication

Families should not have to fill out the same intake form for every program. Aligned systems share information with consent and respect.

Improve Family Experience

One door, many services. Families deserve a seamless path from prenatal through kindergarten entry and beyond for multiple services.

Elevate Quality Together

Shared professional development, shared standards, shared vision across Tribal child care, Head Start, home visiting, and beyond.

Amplify Tribal Sovereignty

When Tribes build their own coordinated systems, they control the narrative. Data, quality, and outcomes on their own terms.



A Framework for Systems Building

The TELI Collaborative

- Intensive 3-year technical assistance
- Individualized support for systems alignment
- Strategic planning & implementation coaching
- Peer learning across Tribal contexts
- Focus: operations, data, governance, family engagement



Riverside-San Bernardino County Indian Health, Inc

Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

Seneca Nation of Indians

TELI Collaborative (Cohort 4) Partners (2026-2028)

Cocopah Indian Tribe





Early Successes from TELI Communities

Kenaitze Indian Tribe

Built a full-day, full-year program across Tribal child care and Head Start, reducing family burden and improving data sharing across programs.

Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation

Built cross-program professional development pathways, so educators across settings share training, mentoring, and cultural grounding.

Pueblo of San Felipe

Centered language and culture as the organizing framework for system coordination, ensuring alignment serves cultural revitalization.

Each community's path is unique. There is no single model — only shared principles adapted to local context.

PART 2: CORE ELEMENTS

Components of a Tribal Early Childhood System

Prenatal through Kindergarten Entry



Aligned Intake & Referral

One front door. Shared enrollment processes with family consent.

Shared Assessments

Common screening and developmental monitoring across programs.

Coordinated Professional Development

Joint training, mentoring, and credentialing across all settings.

Shared Data & Reporting

Interoperable data systems that serve families and tribes, not just funders.

Joint Quality Improvement

Shared standards, peer observation, and continuous improvement cycles.

Integrated Governance

Cross-program leadership bodies that coordinate decisions and resources.



Where Are You Now?

In small groups (10 minutes):

Consider the six system components. For your community:

- 1. Which component is your strongest? Where are you already doing well?**
- 2. Which component is your biggest gap? Where do families feel the fragmentation most?**
- 3. What is one thing that would need to change for your biggest gap to improve?**

If you came from different communities, share what you're learning from each other.



Nothing about families *without* families.

Why Parent Involvement Is Central to Systems Building:

Legitimacy

Systems built without family input lack credibility. Families are the experts on their own experience.

Responsiveness

Parent perspective reveals where the system struggles, including the gaps professionals cannot see from the inside.

Cultural Integrity

Parents carry cultural knowledge that must shape how services are designed, delivered, and evaluated.

Sustainability

Systems that families own and trust endure. Systems imposed on families do not.



Meaningful Parent Leadership — Not Just Input

Parent Advisory Councils

Standing bodies with real decision-making authority. Parents shape policy, not just react to it.

Co-Design Teams

Include parents in designing new processes (intake, transitions, curriculum). They prototype alongside professionals.

Compensation & Capacity

Pay parent leaders. Provide child care, transportation, and meals. Build their skills through leadership development.

Culturally Grounded Gathering

Gather family input in cultural ways, through sharing circles, family meals, community events, not just surveys and focus groups.

Governance Roles

Parents on oversight boards, hiring committees, and quality review teams. Structural voice, not just advisory.

Parent-to-Parent Networks

Create peer support structures where experienced parent leaders mentor new families entering the system.

FACILITATION EXERCISE

Draft One Mechanism for Parent Leadership



Individually or in pairs (8 minutes):

Think about your community's early childhood system. Draft one specific strategy to enhance parent leadership. Consider:

1. What mechanism will you use?

(Advisory council, co-design team, governance role, gathering method, etc.)

2. Who will you engage first?

(Current parent leaders? New families? Elders? Community members?)

3. What support will parents need?

(Compensation, child care, training, transportation, cultural protocols?)

4. What is your first step this month?

PART 4: OVERCOMING BARRIERS



Common *Trust Challenges* in Systems Building

These are predictable, not permanent. Every one can be addressed with the right strategy and patience.

Funding Silos

Each program's funding stream comes with separate rules, reporting, and restrictions. Coordination feels like it violates compliance.

Data Privacy & Interoperability

Systems don't talk to each other. Tribal sovereignty over data must be honored. FERPA, HIPAA, and Tribal law add complexities.

Staff Capacity

Small teams, high turnover, and competing demands make "one more thing" feel impossible.

Leadership Turnover

When the champion leaves, the work stalls. Systems depend on people and relationships.

Navigating Tribal & Federal Systems

Tribal self-governance intersects with federal requirements. Alignment must honor both without sacrificing either.

Aligning Different Metrics

Head Start measures one thing, CCDF another, home visiting another. Whose definition of quality counts?



Starting Small

Building Relationships

Formalize agreements for data sharing, referral, and joint staffing. Simple MOUs create the legal and relational foundation for alignment.

Phased Alignment

You do not have to align everything at once. Start with ONE process (intake, PD, screening). Build momentum. Expand.

Shared Capacity and Trust Building

Pool resources for joint trainings, shared coaching, and cross-program mentoring. More impact, less cost.

Pilot Projects

Test a new approach with one family cohort or one program pair. Learn, adjust, then scale. Low risk, high learning.

Learning About Each Other

Establish a cross-program leadership table that meets regularly. Even quarterly meetings create shared ownership.

Continuous Feedback Loops

Build family and staff feedback into every phase. Adjust based on real experience, not assumptions.

FUNDING FLEXIBILITY



Using Tribal CCDF Funds for Systems Building

Federal guidance allows Tribal CCDF funds to be used flexibly beyond direct services. Allowable systems-building uses include:

Planning and coordination activities across early childhood programs

Data system development and interoperability infrastructure

Professional development and credentialing systems

Quality improvement systems and program evaluation

Parent and family engagement infrastructure (advisory councils, compensation, gatherings)

Cross-program governance and administrative coordination

Consult your CCDF plan and regional office to confirm allowability for your specific context.



One Action in the Next 3–6 Months

Individually or with your team (5 minutes):

Draft one next step toward systems alignment or parent engagement:

What will you do?

(Be specific: align intake, create advisory council, schedule cross-program meeting...)

Who needs to be involved?

(Name specific people, programs, or roles)

What is your timeline?

(Within 30 days? 3 months? 6 months?)

What support do you need?

(TA, peer learning, funding clarity, leadership buy-in?)

KEY TAKEAWAYS



01

Systems building is not about creating new programs. It is about connecting the ones we have.

02

Start where you are. Phased alignment builds momentum. You do not need to do everything at once.

03

Parent involvement must be at the center; not as input, but as leadership.

04

Tribal CCDF and other funds can be used flexibly to support coordination and planning.

05

The goal is a system worthy of our children — culturally grounded, family-centered, tribally controlled.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES



What We Covered Today

- ✓ Described the goals, components, and structure of the TELI model for Tribal early childhood systems building
- ✓ Explored key principles and strategies for aligned, coordinated early childhood systems in Tribal settings
- ✓ Identified concrete approaches to centering parent involvement, leadership, and contributions in system design
- ✓ Recognized common barriers and adaptive strategies to overcome them
- ✓ Drafted one next-step action toward systems alignment for your community



Our children deserve systems
as strong as the communities
they come from.

Strong start. Strong systems. Strong Nations.

anaabasee
 dawaeh wapila
 thankyou
 lemlmts
 piveqiji
 wado
 quyanaa
 hiri:miigwech
 tansi
 baasee
 ah-hoh
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