

# TRIBALHUB *magazine*

A PUBLICATION FOR TECHNOLOGY MINDED PROFESSIONALS IN TRIBAL GOVERNMENT  
TRIBAL HEALTH, TRIBAL GAMING AND NON-GAMING TRIBAL ENTERPRISES



**TRIBALHUB**  
SPRING 2024

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25TH ANNUAL

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# TRIBALHUB<sup>magazine</sup>

## SPRING 2024



## WELCOME

TO THE PAGES OF TRIBALHUB'S MAGAZINE

Once again we are pleased to bring you an amazing edition of the TribalHub magazine!

Opportunities and challenges relating to technology at tribes and tribal enterprises may sometimes feel like you're caught in a storm. But, having access to the information and resources you need, can help you weather it! With the range of valuable and important topics covered by our writers and agency update contributors in this issue, our Spring edition is your umbrella! Providing information, connections and resources is in essence what we're all about and what we aim to do year round at TribalHub for our community. The largest community of technology minded professionals from Tribes across the U.S.

Also, I gotta say this 2024 is starting off great and it's really because of all of you! We have had a ton of engagement and contact already just in the first 3 months and so much is right on the horizon. Virtual events, in-person regional roundtables, podcasts, webinars, membership meetings and more and we haven't even mentioned the biggest happening of the year...25 years this year for TribalNet!

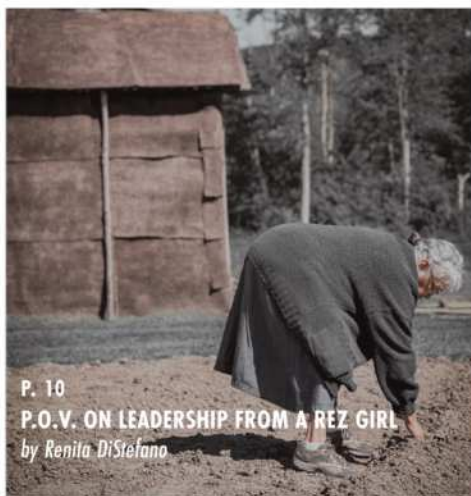
Our [team](#) enjoys being a part of your day every day that we can and are really feeling the love lately from you guys with all the feedback you are sharing with us via email, LinkedIn and more! Keep it coming. Enjoy this edition and a special thanks to our advertisers for continuing to allow this great publication to come to your desktops and phone in this cool digital format- complimentary!!!

Cheers!

*Shannon Bouschor*

Director of Operations, TribalHub

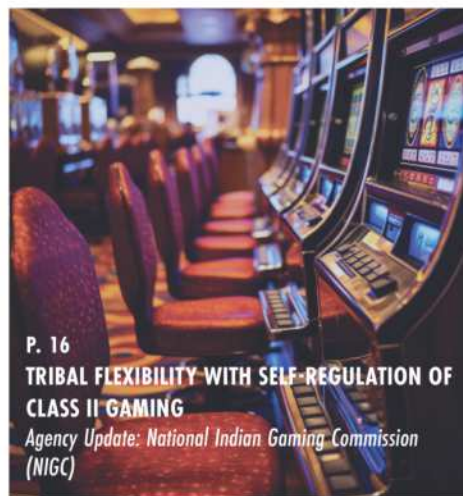
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# Cloud-First to AI-First Strategy



BY

**RAM PATRACHARI**FORMER CIO/VP OF IT  
JAMUL CASINO

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ram has more than 30 years of experience in IT and has worked at premier organizations like Bell Labs, Compaq, Exodus Communications and AT&T wireless. Ram Patrachari is a forward looking IT entrepreneur with extensive experience in implementing and managing highly scalable information systems across a diverse portfolio. Prior to joining Jamul Casino, Ram managed the IT portfolio at Viejas Enterprises. He was instrumental in establishing the core infrastructure to handle the successful additions of four hotel towers which included a campus wide fiber infrastructure and resilient compute/storage systems.

Ram has an MBA from Monmouth University and a Master in EE from Stevens Institute of Technology. He is PMP, SCRUM Master, and CISSP certified. He can be reached at Ram@SPentarkAI.com



*In the fall of 2022, I wrote an article for the TribalHub magazine on adopting a Cloud-First strategy. AI as we know it now was still in its infancy. Fast forward to the spring of 2024; the astonishing surge and widespread embrace of AI has caught everyone off guard. Below are some ways a tribal enterprise might benefit from incorporating AI into the business process.*

## HYPER-PERSONALIZATION

Currently, most of the casinos in operation have slots and player tracking systems in place. AI systems can be utilized to fine-tune the base recommendations that are generated from these systems. AI systems can also be augmented with structured and unstructured data from other internal/external systems. The enriched data sets can then be stored in the casino data warehouse to act as a central repository for player information. Leveraging machine learning continuously enhances the data and its quality. Due to AI's capability to analyze vast amounts of data, hyper-personalization can lead to better promotions, bonuses and ensure that the right demographic of players is targeted.

## GUEST SERVICES

Implementing chatbots and virtual assistants for proactive guest support can be one of the easiest ways to test the AI waters. Since these are external guest-facing systems, it would be prudent to implement technologies like Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG) to ensure the accuracy and reliability of data. AI models are trained with vast amounts of data but are still prone to giving out incorrect or misleading information called hallucinations. These can result from the models being based on insufficient training data, incorrect assumptions made by the model, or inbuilt biases within the data used to train the model.

## SECURITY AND SURVEILLANCE

With the power of video analytics, casinos and hotels can monitor the player tables and other cash-handling areas in real-time. The task of keeping a close watch on the transactions taking place between the employees and the guests can be supplemented with AI. Currently, this task requires significant human effort and is susceptible to human vulnerabilities. With the help of AI, any player or employee behavior that is outside the norm can be flagged and addressed in real-time.

## OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND ANALYTICS

Slot machines and their maintenance are some of the major investments and ongoing costs in a casino. Casino operators must make sure that the machines are running optimally, which has a direct impact on guest satisfaction. AI systems can help with preventive as well as predictive maintenance, keeping track of which machines need to be serviced and when.

## FRAUD DETECTION

AI can be used for fraud detection by using multiple machine learning models to detect anomalies in customer behavior and play patterns. A large language model capable of learning meaning and context can prevent fraud at the outset and ensure that it doesn't percolate

within the environment. Casino surveillance teams can be assisted by LLM-based assistants running RAG on the backend to tap into policy documents that can help expedite decision-making on whether the cases are fraudulent.

#### OTHER CASINO APPLICATIONS

Integrating AI into HR, ERP, and CRM systems can enhance workforce management, streamline internal processes, and optimize customer interactions, contributing to the overall efficiency and success of the tribal enterprise.

#### ADOPTING AN AI-FIRST STRATEGY

As listed above, many applications of AI can revolutionize a gaming enterprise. To put an AI-First strategy in place, the following points need to be addressed.

- **Define Objective/Goals:** Clearly define the business objectives and goals that AI can help achieve. If improving customer experience is the goal, a SMART objective can be listed and measured for impact.
- **Assess current state readiness:** List existing technologies, data infrastructure, and workforce skills. Assess the organization's readiness and potential challenges.
- **Executive Support:** AI cannot be an IT project. Top leadership support is crucial for its success since the impacts will filter to the entire organization.
- **Build AI Awareness and Skills:** To bring the staff up to speed, conduct training programs that raise awareness and build AI skills. This may include workshops, online courses, and external training/experts to educate your team.
- **Identify Use Cases:** Identify specific use cases where AI can bring the most value. A rank-ordered list can help provide a roadmap for implementation.
- **Data Infrastructure/Governance:** Ensure your current infrastructure can support the huge data preparation, analysis, and presenting needs. AI policies need to be carefully crafted to ensure that critical data and tribal sovereignty are protected.
- **Start with small pilot projects:** Early successes with pilot projects will propel the initiatives and get executive buy-in quickly.
- **Security/Compliance:** Ensure that you bring the tribal gaming commission into the project early to

get their buy-in and concurrence. The tribal gaming commission must be satisfied that measures are in place to protect sensitive data and ensure compliance with the MICS.

- **Ethical considerations:** Address ethical considerations such as bias in algorithms and ensure compliance with the existing policies and procedures.
- **Measure and communicate ROI:** Establish KPIs to measure the impact of AI and demonstrate the value AI brings to the tribal enterprise.

#### CHARTING THE TRANSFORMATIVE WAVES

As your organization embarks on this thrilling journey with AI, the possibilities are endless. The future is now, and with each step into the realm of AI, the organization is not just adapting; the organization is pioneering a new era of innovation, efficiency, and endless possibilities. Buckle up to chart an exhilarating course into the limitless potential of AI!

## NEW TRACK THIS YEAR AT TRIBALNET! AI's Revolution



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# AGENCY UPDATE

## CISA: Strengthening Tribal Cybersecurity: Utilizing CISA's Cyber Resource Hub

LEARN MORE AT:

[cisa.gov/cyber-resource-hub](https://cisa.gov/cyber-resource-hub)



In today's digital landscape, cybersecurity stands as a paramount concern for tribal governments, enterprises, and health facilities. With the increasing sophistication of cyber threats, it's imperative for tribal leaders and decision-makers to adopt proactive measures to safeguard their data, infrastructure, and community trust. To support the evolving needs of this unique sector, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) offers valuable resources through its [Cyber Resource Hub](#). This comprehensive platform equips tribal nations with essential tools, guidance, and best practices to enhance their cybersecurity posture.

Key Features of the Cyber Resource Hub include tailored resources, assessments, regulatory guidance, and tools. Notably, CISA recognizes the unique challenges faced by tribes. As such, the Hub provides tailored resources specifically curated to address the cybersecurity needs of tribal communities. From threat intelligence to incident response strategies, the hub offers a wealth of information designed to empower tribal leaders in making informed decisions.

One powerful tool on the Hub, the Cyber Resilience Review, offers a variety of resources across a wide range of topics, including risk management, compliance, and emerging cyber threats. Participants can walk away from the resilience review with improved enterprise-wide awareness of the need for effective cybersecurity management, a review of capabilities essential to the continuity of critical services during operational challenges and crises, integrated peer performance comparisons for each of the 10 domains covered in the assessment, and a comprehensive final report that includes recommendations for improvement.

Additionally, the Cyber Resource Hub offers guidance and support for incident response planning and execution. In the event of a cyber incident, a timely and effective response is crucial to mitigate damages and restore operations. From initial detection to recovery efforts, tribal communities can leverage the resources available on the Hub to navigate through challenging situations with confidence.

Navigating the complex landscape of cybersecurity regulations and compliance requirements can be daunting for tribes. The Cyber Resource Hub simplifies this process by providing guidance on relevant regulations and compliance frameworks. Whether it's HIPAA for healthcare facilities or NIST guidelines for government agencies, the Hub offers practical assistance to ensure compliance with industry standards.

As tribal leaders and decision-makers strive to safeguard their communities against cyber threats, CISA's Cyber Resource Hub can be a valuable ally in their cybersecurity journey. By leveraging the resources, training, and collaborative opportunities offered by the Hub, tribal nations can enhance their resilience, protect their assets, and uphold the trust of their constituents.

# P.O.V. ON LEADERSHIP FROM A REZ GIRL

*"A Relationship Since the Beginning of Time".  
Photo courtesy of Hayden Haynes, Seneca, Deer Clan.*



BY

**RENITA DISTEFANO**

PRESIDENT AND CEO, SECOND DERIVATIVE, LLC

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Renita is the founder, President and CEO of SECOND DERIVATIVE, LLC, a Native American, woman-owned business that provides a broad spectrum of technology services featuring strategic business/technology alignment, information security strategy, PMO & Portfolio Management capabilities. Renita has performed as both a CIO and a CISO, creating business, technology and information security strategy for medium to large sized businesses. One of the first Native American women to become a CISO, Renita is regarded as a pioneer in her field and one of just a handful of IBM iSeries information security specialists.

In a moment of revelation, clarity, and insight, it came to me. It was so simple and yet so profound. Everything I learned about being a good leader, I learned from my elders. It came after years of trying to suppress core values and fit in within a corporate culture that felt so foreign to me that I couldn't make sense of it. But still, I tried to reinvent myself, to become something that I am not in order to fit in so that I could be seen as a high-potential candidate for advancement.

Let's back up to a pivotal moment when I was contemplating which advanced degree I should pursue. "Should I go for an MBA or an MOL?" This was the question that I posed to my friends, relatives and loved ones, seeking guidance on my educational path. The overwhelming response was, "What's an MOL?" Nobody knew what that was. It made my decision easy. Shortsighted; but easy. Why would I get a degree in something that nobody recognized? If you Google it today - like right now - and type in, "What is an MOL?" your search results will return something about it being the "base unit of amount of pure substance in the International

System of Units." (Merriam Webster, 2024). Note to Colleges and Universities offering a Master of Organizational Leadership degree - you might want to consult with a search engine optimization person.

Straightaway, I headed down the MBA path. In spite of my shortsightedness, and what I can only acknowledge as a gift from the Creator, my MBA program had a significant focus on leadership and organizational development. We studied the obvious favorites: Covey, Maxwell, Lencioni, Drucker, Goleman, Brene Brown, and others. We studied concepts like emotional intelligence, inclusion, diversity, team dynamics, pillars of trust, self-awareness, moral integrity, social responsibility, vulnerability, and creating authentic connections with people - all good stuff.

So what does all of that have to do with this article? Well, what I realized in pursuit of my advanced degree was that everything I needed to learn about being a good leader, I learned from growing up on the

Rez — from people who did NOT have advanced degrees. I learned about righteousness from the most humble, ethical, community-spirited people in the world — at least in my world.

I was taught by my elders that “doing the right thing is always the right thing to do.” I learned about social responsibility by canning bushels and bushels of tomatoes with the neighborhood ladies. Lessons on team dynamics, trust, and continuous improvement were driven home as I watched these women churn through the day’s work like a well-oiled machine. I learned about inclusion, justice, fairness, and treating others with respect, equity, and dignity when we divided the proceeds from the day’s labor amongst the households. At the end of the day, households with more kids, bigger families, or those that were having a bad year got more tomatoes.

And jam. And peaches and so on. Belonging to something bigger than ourselves came with everyone sharing the workload. Diversity was embraced as everyone put their differences aside to achieve a common goal. Lessons on ethical conduct and righteousness came easy. There was always a set of eyes watching and ready to set us straight if we acted irresponsibly. Ne’ho niyo’dē:nö’. That’s the way it was.

It was at that time, studying the leadership experts of the modern day, that I came to celebrate that my ancestors had paved the way for me to become a good leader. I just had to have the courage to hold steady to the core values that had been instilled in me during my formative years. And so, to my indigenous friends out there making your way in the world, embrace the core values that have

been instilled in you. Resist the temptation to unlearn the lessons on leadership that your ancestors have passed on for generations. These lessons are not published, but instilled. They were lived and passed on through example from generation to generation — at community gatherings, at ceremony, and from our elders. To honor these lessons is to honor your elders.

It gave me pause to include the term “Rez Girl” in the title of this article at the risk of sounding cliché. But, it’s who I am; it’s where I’m from. And, for me, it is the education that I celebrate the most. Of course, I am proud of my MBA! I learned so much while studying for my MBA, and part of that journey held for me righteous validation for the irreplaceable lessons on leadership that my ancestors gave me.

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Date and Location TBD

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# DEMYSTIFYING BUSINESS TRANSFORMATIONS



BY  
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VP OF TRANSFORMATION  
MOHEGAN

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Over 25 years of gaming and hospitality experience leading transformation initiatives, including ERP implementations, hospitality technology implementations, building of shared services, integration of financial services, opening of integrated resorts, process mapping and design, data strategy and change management, as well as a strong accounting background. Prior to her current role, she was the VP of Global Transformation for Aristocrat Technologies and, prior to that, a variety of roles at MGM Resorts including Vice President of Strategic Initiatives and Vice President of Hospitality Accounting

**B**usiness transformations – what are they? One thing is clear, all businesses must continue to transform in order to be successful. But what does this actually mean? Sure, leadership and C-Suites all understand the importance of a transformation, but at the heart of it, is that enough? The success of a transformation is not about the leader's understanding, it is about the entire organization working together to transform the business. In essence, whether you are in an entry-level role or the most seasoned operator, the phrase "it takes a village" is 100% needed for successful business transformations.

In many organizations, the understanding of what a business transformation entails differs vastly from leadership to team members. Many times, this disparity in understanding is like the old telephone game – the first person's initial message is completely different from the message received by the person at the end of the telephone line. Often, the transformative vision of leaders differs greatly from the message relayed to team members. Is this the reason why so many transformations are only partially successful? Perhaps. Is the main challenge a lack

of clarity, lack of transparency, or lack of vision? Perhaps a bit of everything.

So, how can an organization truly capture the value that successful transformations bring? One strategy is to keep it simple. Transformations are about shifting the organization's mindset, changing hearts and minds, therefore the "why," "what," and "how" are incredibly important.

We will start with the "why." Transformations must have a single compelling reason that resonates with most people in the organization – from the CEO to the entry-level team member. Clear, transparent, concise messaging should be formulated around the why of the transformation. While most transformations will involve efficiencies (whether in revenue generation, cost reduction, talent development, process efficiency, or FTE reduction), the messaging cannot simply be about improving the bottom line. How does this relate to the majority of the team members? It does not translate. You cannot change the hearts and minds of team members without properly linking to the why. Central reasons for embarking

on a transformation should be aspirational yet attainable, and their value must link back through every team member. "What does this mean for me?" is the first question team members will ask when faced with change.

Next is the "what." The "what" is simply the mechanism that supports and helps us achieve the objective of every transformation. What are we doing as an organization to work toward our why? One of the pitfalls many organizations fall into is only focusing on the what. No well-laid plan goes unpunished! Always link the WHAT back to the WHY, which then links to the team members. Again, the why is aspirational until we have a well-laid-out what. This can be technology implementation, process change, reorganization, or a variety of different large-scale programs of work. Clearly defining the roadmap for how an

organization will execute the what is essential. Again, leaders lead by ensuring the messaging is clear and transparent about what the organization will be delivering; bait and switch never ends well. Team members are much more understanding when they know exactly what to expect.

Once you have the "why" and the "what" clearly identified, then you can focus on the "how." You can think of it like the recipe listing the steps to make an exceptional meal. You have the ingredients, you know what the meal should look and taste like, and the "how" is the plan for how you will accomplish the objective. Team members may never know every ingredient in the recipe, but they do know there is a recipe. This is also the part of a transformation when organizations must be nimble. While the intent is to have all the ingredients on hand, imagine in the middle of completing the recipe we realize

one of the ingredients is missing, incomplete, or simply rotten. Do you stop everything and start over, or do you adapt and look for creative solutions that still achieve the right objective? This is where organizations must challenge themselves. No transformations will go exactly to plan. Addressing issues head-on and implementing solutions is key to keeping transformations going.

Transformations can be scary - but they don't need to be. Simplicity will demystify transformations; the less clouded they are, the more likely they are to succeed. The clarity must start from the top leaders with clear communication on the why, the what and the how. A shared why is the most powerful asset an organization can have. When all team members at all levels believe in and work towards the same north star, the results can be magical.

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# AGENCY UPDATE

## NIGC: Tribal Flexibility with Self-Regulation of Class II Gaming

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For additional information on the latest updates and ongoing activities of the Commission, please visit [NIGC.gov](http://NIGC.gov)



Within the framework of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), Indian tribes that operate Class II gaming activity may petition the National Indian Gaming Commission (NIGC) for a certificate for self-regulation. Self-regulation provides tribes greater autonomy over gaming operations, which can also provide greater financial incentives to tribes. Self-regulated tribes are no longer required to submit the Agreed Upon Procedures (AUP) reports or facility license notices and are no longer subject to NIGC site visits and requests for records regarding Class II operations (except through subpoena). The tribe is eligible for reduced fees on Class II gaming revenue, and it may continue to access NIGC training, technical assistance, and other services at no cost.

NIGC's Office of Self-Regulation (OSR) is responsible for directing and coordinating the certification process. After submission of a petition, the OSR must determine the petition is complete within 30 days after the submission. If the OSR determines that the petition is incomplete, the OSR will notify the tribe in writing. The written notification to the tribe will include what additional information is needed to complete the petition along with the timeline that information needs to be received by the OSR. If the OSR determines the petition is complete, the review period begins and the OSR has 120 days to complete its review and submit a recommendation concurrently to the commission and the tribe as to whether a certificate of self-regulation should be issued or denied. At any time during the review process, the tribe can withdraw their petition for self-regulation. It is important to note the Commission issues a certificate of self-regulation to the tribe, not to a particular gaming operation.

The OSR has created tools designed for a tribe to assess its readiness for self-regulation, eligibility, submission, and criteria measurement. These tools can be found on the NIGC's website at [www.nigc.gov/utility/office-of-self-regulation](http://www.nigc.gov/utility/office-of-self-regulation). The readiness checklist includes various criteria, procedures, documents and other information that will be used to evaluate a tribe's petition. This is a "self-assessment" checklist that provides tribes with the basic actions they can take to meet the qualifications to be eligible for self-regulation. The OSR will use the submission, eligibility and criteria measurement checklists to evaluate and determine if the Commission should grant the tribe's petition for self-regulation.

A certificate of self-regulation shall become effective on January 1 of the year following the year in which the Commission determines that a certificate will be issued. Once a tribe receives a certificate of self-regulation, they still must meet annual requirements. By April 15 of each year following the first year of self-regulation, or within 120 days after the end of each fiscal year of the gaming operation, NIGC requires each tribe that holds a certificate to submit an annual independent financial audit and a complete resume for all employees of the tribal regulatory body hired and licensed by the tribe after its receipt of a certificate of self-regulation.

To learn more about self-regulation, visit [www.nigc.gov](http://www.nigc.gov) or send questions to [osr@nigc.gov](mailto:osr@nigc.gov).

# OUTSIDE IN



BY  
**JOHN FILIPE**  
DIRECTOR OF IT  
ROLLING HILLS CASINO

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Cash Filipe is an accomplished Casino Executive with over 25 years of Casino IT experience. He has worked nationally and internationally for several properties, across many types of gaming, from commercial to tribal, and riverboat entertainment facilities. He is also the author of *Soulbraider*, and *Soulbraider AD*, two science fiction books that are getting great reviews in the literary community. Recently awarded Outstanding Showhost 2023 for his work on Gaming & Leisure Voice. He continues to write for several industry magazines focusing on leadership and trends, as well as authoring a weekly humorous blog titled *Vegas in the Morning*.

**W**hen I was a kid, I was always the last one picked for a game or the odd one out of most gatherings. This was because I was raised all over the country until I was eleven, hence, I didn't have a lot of long-term friends.

My parents were divorced – shocker I know – and my father moved around for work. I spent winters in one state or another and summers in Reno until I was eleven, when my brothers and I were shipped to stay with my mom full-time.

One thing I learned from that experience is that I was always the new guy because I didn't have the shared history and experiences that formed the adolescent bond among my peers. My brothers and I became very close because of it, but that wasn't the same as having friends my own age.

My career followed a similar path. I casino-hopped from fourteen to nineteen, leaping from busboy, to houseman, to dishwasher, until I joined the US Navy. In both the Navy and the casino industry, transience is part and parcel. The Navy necessitates moving every couple of years. The casino industry compels workers to move constantly because of opportunity and growth, and sometimes because of closings and layoffs.

My story isn't much different from many executives in this industry, or any industry for that matter. It is always about being the new kid in town and staring through the dirty glass window trying to figure out what is going on inside the other room – watching everyone and trying to determine what their rhythm is or what their needs are. And always, thinking about

what you would give to go from the outside staring through the window, to being part of the dance going on inside the room.

Some people squeeze in immediately; they have their own rhythm that allows them to glide in and out of the room. I have a word for those people: annoying. Okay, maybe not annoying, but this approach makes me curious and sometimes a bit concerned. These leaders don't think too deeply. They have a set plan when they arrive and everyone conforms to it either through changing the rhythm or dance or via replacement of the dancers. I have never liked being that direct in my approach. I like to observe before I lead. I don't mind looking through the window and watching for a bit. I want to see what the people inside are doing and feel my way into the dance.

Why do I prefer this approach?

It is the best way to retain staff and build direction without destroying what has been built over the years before my taking over. I have tried both approaches, and this one fits my style much better. Typically, if you are hiring an IT leader, you are looking for someone who walks in with a set plan and solid direction that they want to lead the team. I hate to say it, but this is the wrong approach. Take it from an expert at walking into new teams and staring through that glass window – from someone who is always outside looking in. I have seen and tried it several different ways and the blunt force change that companies say they want is rarely what they really want, and it takes an experienced executive to recognize that, and then move with it.

They will tell me, "I want this severe change," then when I get there and lay out the plan for that severe change and drop it on the team, I look like an idiot. This is because I forget the people that I am leading have reasons for not implementing the change in the first place. Most staff want to do the right thing, but they also have reasons for not doing it the way others want.

Once, I was told that I needed to put people directly at the eight different properties that I oversaw, and I needed to break up the IT team among these properties. As a new person on the outside looking in, I agreed and built my plan. It was beautiful: compensation for moving and taking on the position, raises in money and titles – it was a lot like what England offered Scotland for their allegiance. When I got there and talked through my plan with the team, there were takers – mainly single,

young people who wanted to impress the new CIO with their flexibility. What I found out was that they were snickering behind my back at my strategy.

Why?


Because the systems were completely centralized. The call center was centralized. And the need for immediate boots on the ground, because of the remote work infrastructure, was few and far between. The executive management only heard the few complaints that came from a couple of the general managers who thought that they would get faster support if someone was sitting in their office.

This is why, being a new executive, stepping into a new situation with a new team, you must stare through the window and watch for a while. You can make promises of change when you

are sitting in the interview, but any plan that worked before at another property will need a great deal of adjustment to work in a different setting. In other words, before jumping into the room and changing the dance that everyone is used to and have spent a great deal of time and effort to create, you should first observe and learn. I can say one thing that is the counterargument to this philosophy. If after staring through the glass you find that change is needed – that the dance is wrong and the dancers are turning and tripping on each other – then by all means, jump in and show them your dance moves.

But always stare through the dirty window squinting and waiting to see if there is a pattern to what looks like chaos. You will be a better leader for it, and the team will be more accepting of change because you take the time to watch before you try to lead.

## 3rd Annual Tribal-ISAC Golf Outing

A day of HACKtivism - For the love of  TRIBAL-ISAC

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# AGENCY UPDATE

## USDA: Rural Development High-Speed Internet

**ANDREW BERKE**

Administrator  
Rural Utilities Service

Contact your Telecom General Field Representatives (GFRs):  
<https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/telecom-gfr>

Submit Questions, Comments, and Suggestions to Telecom's  
Contact Us Page:  
<https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us>



The Biden-Harris Administration is investing more than \$40 billion to deliver affordable, high-speed internet to every household and business in America, including in rural communities that lack access and are often overlooked. USDA plays a critical role in connecting rural America to high-speed internet and ensuring people in rural and tribal communities have the same opportunities as everyone else.

USDA Rural Development invests billions of dollars toward this goal and has accepted applications through four programs key to the Administration's **Internet for All** initiative to connect everyone in America to high-speed internet by 2030.

## RECONNECT LOAN AND GRANT PROGRAM

The ReConnect Loan and Grant Program doesn't just expand high-speed internet access to people in rural America, it is specifically designed to fund the most difficult high-speed internet projects in the most rural, remote, and under-resourced communities throughout the country. Eligible applicants include Alaska Native corporations, tribal governments with funding set aside for projects serving tribal lands, colonias, persistent poverty areas, and socially vulnerable communities. These projects provide new jobs and opportunities to rural households, business owners, and farmers, helping them stay in the communities they love.

In the fourth round of ReConnect, USDA announced 88 awards totaling more than \$1.7 billion, with nearly \$500 million supporting broadband expansion to tribal communities.

USDA is inviting applications for the fifth round of the ReConnect program. The 100% grant for Alaska Native corporations and tribal governments continues to be an option. Tribal entities applying for 100% grants no longer have to submit pro forma financial projections and any non-funded service areas if they can guarantee that the project will be constructed.

Tribal entities may continue to self-certify that sufficient access to broadband is lacking in proposed project areas. Certain scoring criteria incentivize all applicants to serve tribal lands. Tribal applicants may also request alternative scoring consideration for the economic need of the community by submitting tribal-specific census data.

## BROADBAND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

In 2023, the Broadband Technical Assistance program was launched to provide funding to entities interested in receiving or delivering broadband technical assistance and training. This program promotes the expansion of high-speed internet into rural and tribal communities by funding feasibility studies, network designs, application development assistance and more.

USDA prioritized projects serving areas where at least 50% of the project's communities are tribes and tribal entities. To date, USDA has announced 24 awards totaling more than \$9.7 million, including eight projects that will serve tribal areas.

## DISTANCE LEARNING AND TELEMEDICINE GRANTS (DLT)

Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) Grants assist rural residents in financing equipment to help them improve their digital access to education and health care, two of the most crucial keys to successful rural economic and community development. In fiscal year 2023, USDA announced 145 DLT awards totaling more than \$83 million.

USDA is accepting DLT applications for fiscal year 2024 and provides special consideration to applicants proposing to serve tribal lands. Applicants continue to have the ability to receive additional points for projects that use distance learning to protect, revitalize, and promote the use of Native American languages. DLT projects proposed by federally recognized tribes and entities wholly owned by tribes will now receive additional points.

## COMMUNITY CONNECT GRANT PROGRAM

The Community Connect program provides financial assistance to tribes and other eligible applicants to provide high-speed internet service on a community-oriented connectivity basis in rural communities where service does not exist. The program recently opened an application window, which closed on February 20, 2024.

# NAVIGATING THE LANDSCAPE OF BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE:

## Tribes and Contractors



BY  
**FOREST JAMES**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
ENERTIBE

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Forest James (Ch'ee-taa-ghee-ne) is an enrolled citizen of the Tolowa Dee-n'i Nation and a seasoned professional specializing in infrastructure development for indigenous communities. Forest's experience includes broadband development, renewable energy, and clean water initiatives.



In the realm of broadband infrastructure development, two common questions consistently arise for those involved: "Where do I begin?" and "Who do we partner with?" This is especially true for tribes seeking to expand their broadband capabilities. One critical aspect is identifying a reliable partner capable of providing technical assistance throughout the complex process. This article explores the essential elements necessary for successful broadband infrastructure projects, with a particular focus on the dynamics between tribes and contractors.

### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SHOVEL-READY PROJECTS

For tribes embarking on broadband infrastructure projects, it is imperative to have a contractor who can carry out a comprehensive technical analysis of the existing infrastructure in the region. This analysis forms the foundation for drafting a broadband funding roadmap and producing a pro forma financial analysis. These documents are not just administrative requirements; they are what transform a project into a "shovel-ready" state, making it eligible for infrastructure grants. However, the current funding climate demands that tribes act swiftly on the data they collect, as waiting could mean the difference between securing funding or not. It's also important to note that many grant agencies allow post-award adjustments to the project.

### DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN FUNDING SOURCES

With an increasing abundance of funding opportunities, it can be challenging for tribes to discern

which sources are best suited to their unique circumstances. Not all grants are created equal, and understanding the policies and requirements of each funding source is crucial. Some grants are straightforward, with established reimbursement procedures, while others demand substantial financial accounting support, which can consume a significant portion of the budget. Navigating these funding sources requires careful consideration and strategic planning.

### BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT CATEGORIES

Broadband infrastructure projects can be divided into distinct categories, including planning, funding, engineering, permitting, construction, operations, and maintenance. Tribes often find it easier to secure funding for planning than for engineering, which can lead to data becoming outdated within a relatively short time frame. Some planning grants allow for high-level engineering considerations, providing a workaround for this issue by producing "technical studies." The key is to tailor your approach to the available funding opportunities.

### CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR TRIBES

Several critical questions must be addressed by tribes when embarking on broadband infrastructure projects. These questions help shape the type of partnership they establish with providers, contractors, or agencies. Key inquiries include:

- Has the tribe separated business operations from the government?

- Does the tribe have an IT Department in place?
- Is there a Business Development Corporation within the tribe?
- Who currently manages existing broadband infrastructure projects?
- Is there a Planning Department, Realty Department or Tribal Historic Preservation Office?
- Understanding the answers to these questions is pivotal in making informed decisions about partnerships and project execution.

#### CONTRACTORS' PERSPECTIVE

Contractors in the broadband infrastructure field must also navigate a complex landscape. Contractors often have diverse activities within their sales pipeline, which can include grant writing, planning, equipment sales, installation, and engineering and construction. Establishing

rapport and forging long-lasting partnerships is a primary goal for contractors, but this can be especially challenging with smaller tribes.

While larger tribes may attract more attention, the real niche market lies among smaller tribes. These projects can be financially rewarding but typically require significant upfront investments. Some firms may even donate consulting services to help smaller tribes establish themselves, with the expectation of long-term partnerships lasting up to 20 years. Therefore, contractors must adjust their sales pipelines to align with the realities of government work, particularly with newly formed governments, which may have longer project timelines.

In the evolving landscape of broadband infrastructure development, tribes and contractors play essential roles.

Tribes must ensure that their chosen contractors have a vested interest in the project's success and should not hesitate to ask questions to facilitate better understanding between parties. Contractors should involve their leadership to ensure clear project timelines and expectations. Ultimately, successful partnerships between tribes and contractors can bridge the gap in broadband accessibility, bringing much-needed connectivity to underserved communities. As tribes, we need to remember to ask the simple questions (e.g. Please explain that to me in a different way) and have skin in the game without just giving money away. As contractors, we need to remember that this business is personal as it directly impacts people's lives and well-being when money is misused. We often hear, "this is business, not personal," but in Indian Country, business doesn't get more personal.

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# AGENCY UPDATE

## FCC Program and Proceeding Updates

TO ASK QUESTIONS OR SEEK TRIBAL  
CONSULTATION, WRITE TO:

[Native@fcc.gov](mailto:Native@fcc.gov)



In 2024, the FCC will continue its efforts to close the digital divide, including on tribal lands and for Tribal Nations.

**BROADBAND DATA COLLECTION:** The FCC's latest version of the [National Broadband Map](#) provides refined location data and updated information about internet availability. There are over 25,000 more Broadband Serviceable Locations identified in tribal areas than in the previous version. The map shows more precise availability data in tribal communities due to resolved challenges, verification and audit efforts, and improved data from providers. While significant improvements have been made to the map, we encourage you to review the map for your community. You may submit a [Location Challenge](#) if you identify any remaining locations that are missing or misidentified. You may also submit an [Availability Challenge](#) if you believe the availability data is inaccurate.

**ACP WIND-DOWN:** Due to the lack of additional funding from Congress, the FCC has initiated steps to wind down the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), including freezing program enrollment. Program funds are expected to run out in April 2024 (date is subject to change). The FCC released an [ACP Wind-Down Order](#) in January to provide details on the wind-down process and its impact on consumers, service providers, and other ACP stakeholders. Current ACP program information can be found at [fcc.gov/ACP](https://fcc.gov/ACP) and [AffordableConnectivity.gov](https://AffordableConnectivity.gov).

**UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND E-RATE SUPPORT FOR TRIBAL LIBRARIES:** The schools and libraries ("E-Rate") program provides financial assistance for high-speed broadband services and internal connections (e.g., Wi-Fi networks) to eligible schools and libraries, including eligible tribal libraries. In July 2023, the FCC adopted new rules making tribal college and university (TCU) libraries eligible for E-Rate support when they act as a public library by having dedicated library staff, regular hours, and a collection available for public use in their community. The FCC also renewed its [tribal library pilot program](#) for a second year to assist tribal libraries with their E-Rate program applications and related processes.

**OTHER E-RATE NEWS:** To apply for funding for the upcoming 2024 E-Rate funding year (July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025), schools and libraries must satisfy competitive bidding requirements and file an FCC Form 471 application by March 27, 2024. For recent initiatives, the FCC is considering permitting E-Rate program funding for the off-premises use of Wi-Fi hotspots and wireless internet services in an effort to close the "Homework Gap" (FCC 23-91). The FCC is also considering adopting a pilot program to provide support for cybersecurity and advanced firewall services to protect K-12 schools' and libraries' networks and data from the growing number of cyber events (FCC 23-92). The pilot program is expected to provide up to \$200 million to eligible schools and libraries over three years.

**OFFICE OF NATIVE AFFAIRS AND POLICY (ONAP):** ONAP has a dedicated staff that maintains an active tribal consultation, engagement, and outreach program. ONAP's webpage is at <https://www.fcc.gov/office-native-affairs-and-policy>.

# SPECIAL THANK YOU

To Our Dedicated TribalNet Advisory Board Members



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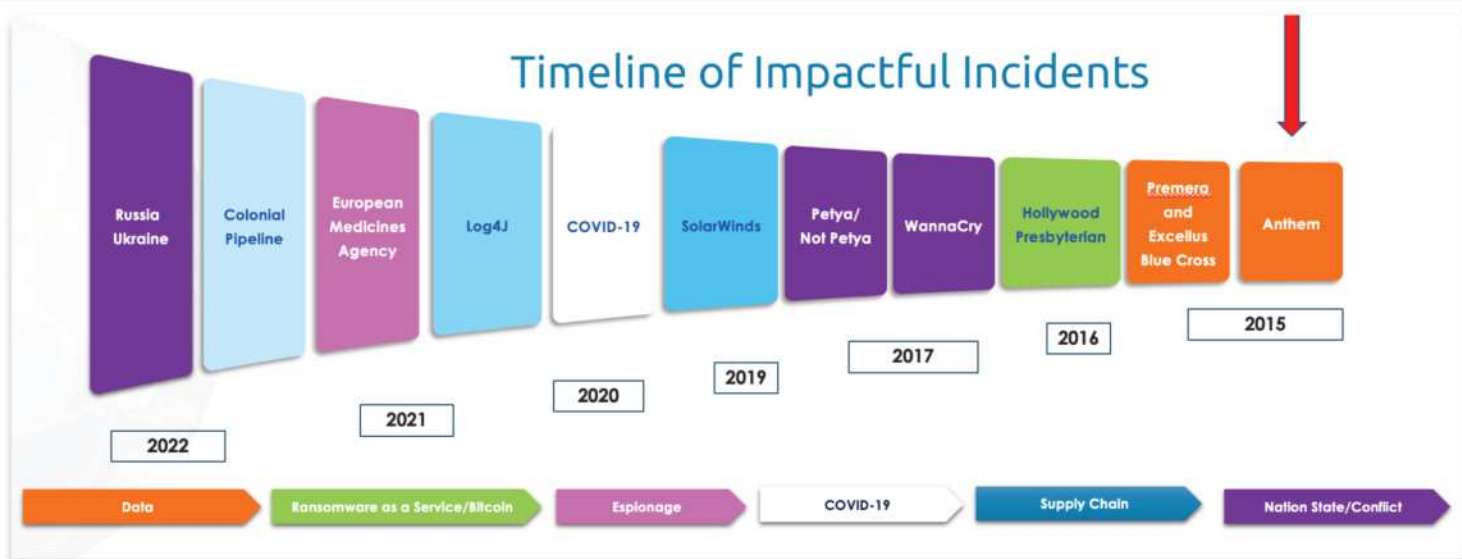
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## The Evolution of Cybersecurity and Cyber Threats in Healthcare

### THE ROAD TO HELL IS PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

In 2009, when the Health Information Technology Act (HITECH) was passed, no one foresaw that this effort, designed to make access to health records efficient, would lead to the health sector being one of the most attacked sectors today.

The US government poured \$35 million into the sector to promote the adoption of electronic records, and within six years, over 75% of providers digitized records. However, no one incentivized security.

### FROM DATA PRIVACY TO OPERATIONAL THREATS

Initial security concerns were around data privacy. In 2015, nation-state actors stole almost 80 million records from Anthem, a large insurer. It is one of the largest data breaches ever and the largest in healthcare. Criminals quickly realized that health data was a golden treasure and immediately began to attack Healthcare Delivery Organizations (HDOs) to get access.

In 2016, Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center in California

experienced the first known ransomware attack against a hospital. Unfortunately, the hospital was public about paying the ransom, which painted a target on the back of healthcare. Cybercriminals realized that hospitals could not afford to have down-time and thus were a rich source of revenue.

### NOT DIRECT TARGETS BUT DIRECT IMPACTS

2017 brought two major nation-state attacks that targeted countries and impacted healthcare either directly or indirectly through supply chains. In the case of Petya/Not Petya, companies that did business in Ukraine were impacted by a malicious patch to an accounting software program that was required to be used to file taxes in the country.

SolarWinds and Log4J brought a different variant to the threat landscape when a nation-state deliberately targeted a security software agency used by myriad companies to access client lists. The Log4J vulnerability was so ubiquitous it impacted almost everyone, and threat actors used it to their advantage to get access.

### COVID-19 BRINGS A FOCUS ON HEALTHCARE

The global pandemic raised the visibility of the critical nature of healthcare. In particular, there was a focus on Intellectual Property (IP) theft for therapeutics and vaccines for the disease. Pfizer and Moderna had done their due diligence and protected the IP around their vaccines. In order to distribute vaccines in Europe, they had to submit all of their IP documentation to the European Medicines Agency, whose security was breached and the IP stolen.

In addition, a major (and pretty much sole) supplier of packaging vital for the distribution of vaccines and therapeutics experienced a large ransomware attack, which had a substantial impact on delivery.

### A FOCUS ON COMPLIANCE VERSUS SECURITY

In 2021, when Colonial Pipeline, a fuel supplier to the US Mid-Atlantic region, had a ransomware attack, there was panic as people rushed to gas stations to fill up. While Colonial worked with the FBI and was able to get some of its money back, the dearth of reporting to

other government agencies led to a movement resulting in the requirement of organizations to report security incidents or ransom payments within a certain time period. This focus on mandatory reporting will take resources away from security. Time and money spent on reporting an incident detracts from time and resources devoted to incident response.

#### GEOPOLITICS AND HEALTHCARE; NOTHING IS SAFE

The wars in Ukraine and Israel have also impacted healthcare with Hacktivist Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks on hospitals in the EU and US and interruptions of clinical trials and supply chains. In 2023, Killnet, a Hacktivist group, targeted hospitals as the result of the US and EU announcing they were sending tanks to Ukraine.

#### CHANGING THE MINDSET: INVEST NOW RATHER THAN PAY LATER

The threat landscape has changed dramatically over the space of twelve years. With threats ranging from data and IP theft to ransomware, supply chain, and DDoS attacks, healthcare security teams need to be ever mindful of the threats, threat actors, motivations, their firms' attack surface, and the risk they are willing to accept. Joining an information-sharing community such as an Information Sharing and Analysis Center (ISAC) is a great way to stay abreast of threats and learn from peers.

While investing in security may be the last thing cash strapped HDOs consider, it is better to invest up-front than pay a fortune later. As one hospital CEO described, before the ransomware attack on his firm he wouldn't have spent an extra dime on security. After the attack, which cost almost \$63 million, he wouldn't think twice.



BY

**DENISE ANDERSON**

PRESIDENT AND CEO  
HEALTH-ISAC

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Denise Anderson, MBA, is President and CEO of Health-ISAC and Chair of the National Council of ISACs. She serves on several Boards and Advisory Committees and speaks at events all over the globe. She graduated from the Executive Leaders Program at the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Security.

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# AGENCY UPDATE

## IHS: Indian Health Service

**MITCHELL THORNBRUGH**

Chief Information Officer and Director of Office of Information Technology

**VISIT THE IHS HEALTH IT MODERNIZATION  
PROGRAM WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION  
ABOUT THE PROGRAM.**

[www.ihs.gov/hit/](http://www.ihs.gov/hit/)

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to stay up-to-date on Program updates.



One of the central principles of the Indian Health Service **Health Information Technology Modernization Program** is to build and operate the new enterprise Electronic Health Record solution with our partners, not for them. Our dedicated Division of Health Information Technology Modernization and Operations (DHITMO) team and partners continue collaboration to prepare for the implementation of the new enterprise EHR solution.

In November, the IHS **announced** the selection of General Dynamics Information Technology, Inc. to build, implement, and maintain a new enterprise EHR solution utilizing **Oracle Health** technology. This selection was made through a competitive federal acquisition process that was open to all vendors. Throughout the process, the IHS coordinated with tribal and urban Indian organization partners through multiple Tribal Consultation and Urban Confer events, listening sessions, advisory committee meetings, an Industry Day, and the participation of hundreds of IHS, tribal, and urban system users in vendor product demonstrations. The IHS is pleased to partner with General Dynamics Information Technology, Inc. over the coming years to continue its mission of providing health care at the highest level for generations to come.

Building on the substantial progress achieved thus far, 2024 will be a pivotal year for the Health IT Modernization Program. The IHS will continue to engage and listen to its partners throughout the development, implementation, and evolution of the new enterprise EHR solution. The DHITMO will host focus groups for volunteers from IHS, tribal, and urban entities to discuss the new enterprise EHR solution and allow participants to gain information of value to their organizations. Initial focus groups will cover the following topic areas: health IT implementation, interoperability, and data management and analytics.

Additionally, the IHS is proactively establishing a collaborative governance structure to guide the building of the new enterprise EHR solution, including the Enterprise Collaboration Group (ECG). The ECG will be a user-focused body that informs the enterprise EHR system configuration in clinical and administrative areas. The ECG will review evidence-based practices and provide recommendations for the enterprise EHR solution's design and configuration. The enterprise EHR solution will be configured collaboratively by expert users from participating IHS, tribes, and urban Indian organizations. The ECG will be comprised of Domain Groups representing a wide variety of clinical and business areas.

Collaboration with our tribal and urban partners is crucial to the success of the Health IT Modernization Program. Working with our partners, the DHITMO will provide and connect technology, business systems, and data to help providers and patients make informed decisions to improve care and health outcomes across Indian Country.

The Modernization team's commitment to our shared goals and efforts has been instrumental in driving the Health IT Modernization Program. The IHS looks forward to continued excellence in the coming years.





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and can lead to late payments, disputed rate amounts, or overpayment. It means waiting on the vendor's timeline and not having insight into the methodology behind the repricing.

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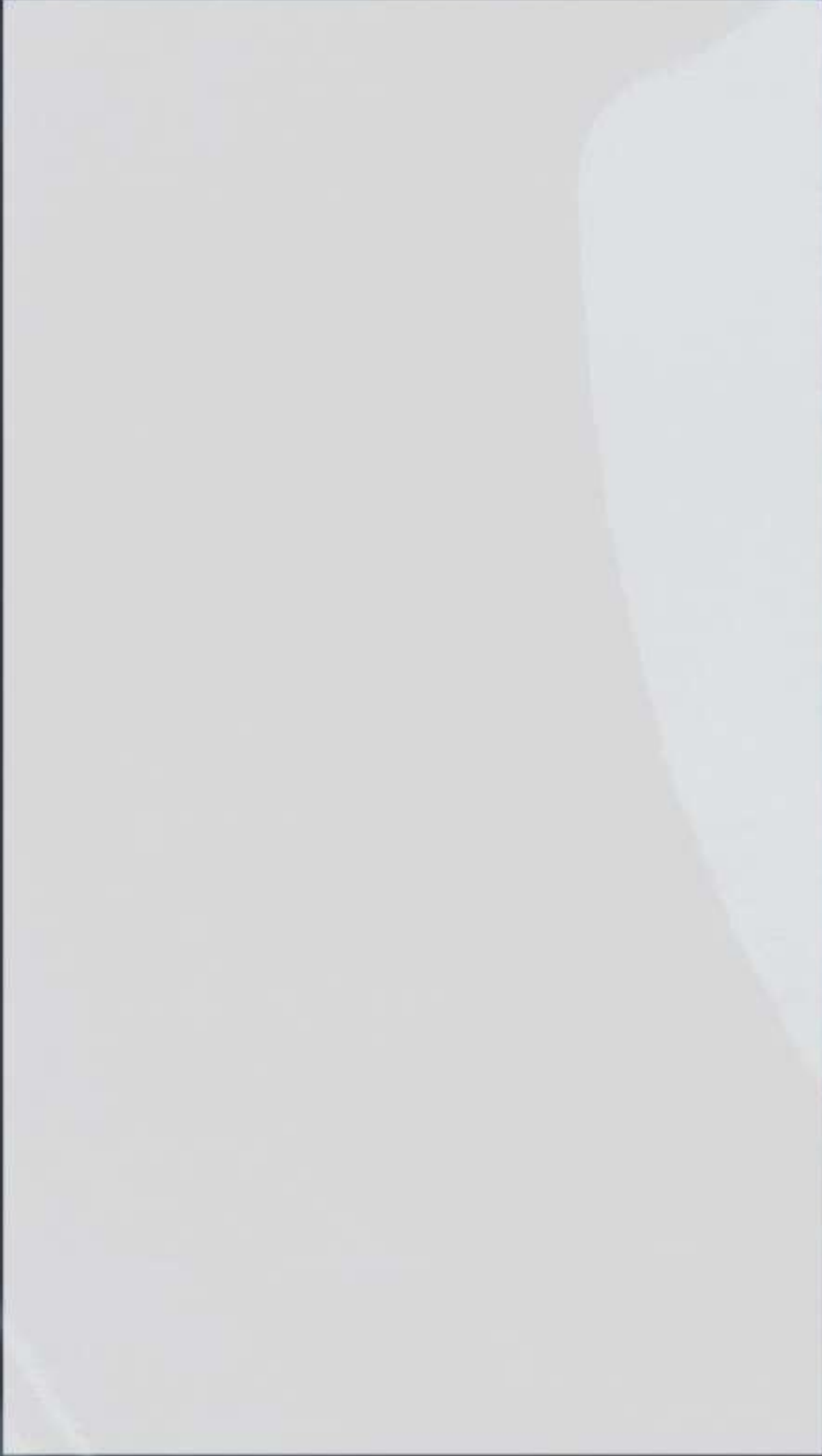
Built by Medicare repricing experts, we provide personalized set-up and training, and real-time support



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# "X GON' GIVE IT TO YA"

## THE EMERGENCE OF XDR IN CYBERSECURITY



BY

**JUSTIN RAISOR**  
REGIONAL SALES MANAGER  
VECTRA AI

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

With over a decade of experience in supporting the United States Federal Government and Native American tribes, Justin Raisor is a highly dedicated and passionate sales professional. He has a wealth of experience in IT and government, having worked as a network administrator, IT manager, consultant, and sales professional at Nutanix and currently working in sales for VECTRA AI. He is deeply committed to helping his clients succeed and is currently supporting the Federal Civilian government and Native American tribes in their cybersecurity efforts. In his free time, Justin is an enthusiast of amateur car racing and a die-hard fan of the Buffalo Bills.

*"Arf, Arf, yeah, uhh, yeah, yeah, uhh, (growl). Don't get it twisted" - Earl Simmons*

Truer words (and dog vocalizations) have never been spoken; Simmons was a true poet of the early 2000's - RIP.

"Don't get it twisted" - using a clumsy association of lyrics from a 2002 banger to cybersecurity, I want to start by defining in simple terms what XDR is to set the stage for why it's now becoming one of the most used terms in the cybersecurity space. Throughout this article, I'll highlight differences within and the benefits provided by XDR.

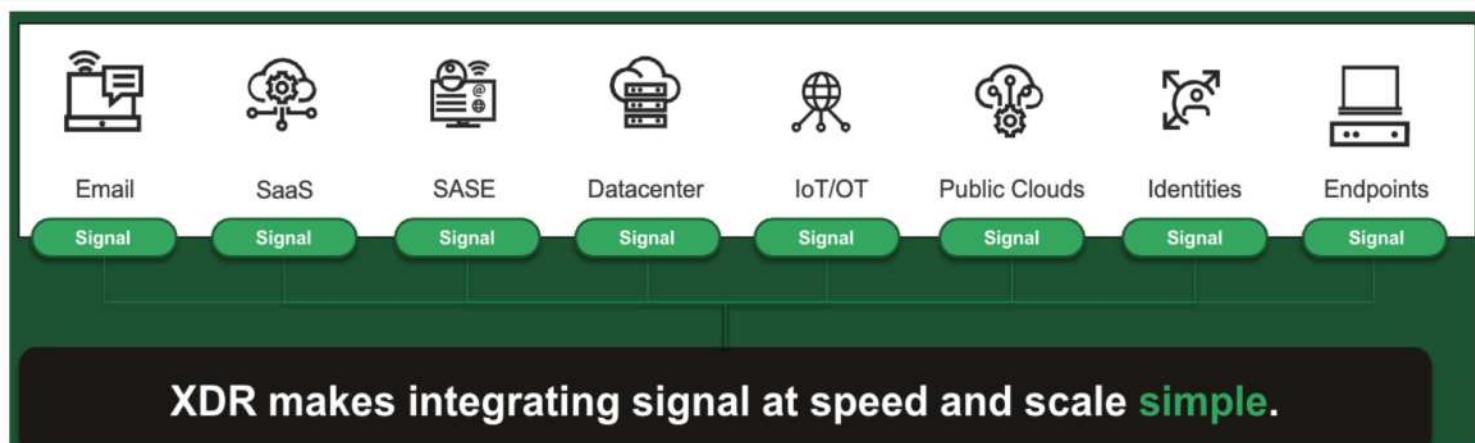
*"First we gonna rock, then we gonna roll"*

XDR stands for Extended Detection and Response. XDR is the culmination of many existing technologies and techniques with an emphasis on integration and orchestration. Some of the technologies that make up an XDR suite are Network Detection and Response (NDR), Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR), and Security Information and Event Management (SIEM). XDR may also include ticketing systems, next-generation firewalls, email, and other cybersecurity bits and pieces.

Historically, one of the biggest issues customers face, even if they procure these multiple solutions, is that the technology operates in silos. While, yes, you may have solutions like NDR or EDR monitoring the entirety of your network traffic, all looking for threatening behavior, the real issue - and the one that XDR ultimately solves - is automation and orchestration. XDR allows these technologies to operate as a cohesive solution that feeds off of information from those multiple technology solutions (NDR, EDR, SIEM) in a layered cybersecurity fabric. The orchestration and automation are the connective tissue and are often handled by solutions called Security Orchestration Automation and Response (SOAR). Unfortunately, many organizations don't implement SOAR on their own because of the perceived complexities around creating playbooks/workflows. In the tribal space, operating without SOAR might inhibit an organization from - beyond simply seeing a threat - quickly responding to and mitigating it before it leads to a tragic outcome.

*"X gon' deliver to ya  
Knock knock, open up the door it's real"*





Another aspect of XDR is its ability to take different signals or "feeds" from point solutions and technologies that provide coverage, incorporate those signals via API integrations, leverage Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AI/ML) to provide clarity and context to what is a priority, and finally, control the threats with SOAR to prevent them from spreading and doing damage.

So, who is XDR "right" for? As attacks become more sophisticated and arise at an ever-increasing pace, and as security teams become more burnt out, the answer really is: every organization. Even those organizations with traditionally adequate security teams and tools are finding it hard to contend with the onslaught. For the organizations that are feeling potentially outgunned already,

XDR has the potential to provide massive assistance in this fight. There are additional conversations to be had about Native XDR vs Open XDR and now Managed XDR, but the intention here is to explain the main purpose of XDR, and at this point, I've...

"Talk too much for too long (what?)" But, "Don't give up, you're too strong (what?)" -JR




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# GOT GRANT (FUNDING)?

## ...AND EVEN IF YOU DON'T



BY  
**JENNIFER LYN WALKER**  
DIRECTOR OF CYBER DEFENSE  
THE GATE 15 COMPANY

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Lyn Walker is the Director of Cyber Defense for The Gate 15 Company. She is a cybersecurity professional with over twenty-three years' experience supporting critical infrastructure organizations. In her current role at Gate 15, she provides senior cyber analytic support to the Tribal-ISAC and is the Director of Infrastructure Cyber Defense for WaterISAC. Jen is experienced in malware analysis, cyber threat intelligence, cybersecurity awareness, compliance, insider threats, threat assessments, and OT/ICS cyber safety and security.

**W**as your tribe awarded funds from the FY 2023 Tribal Cybersecurity Grant Program (TCGP) to address cyber risks and threats to your information systems? If so, then a condition of receiving the grant was for recipients to "address key cybersecurity best practices in their Cybersecurity Plan and within individual projects." The FY 2023 TCGP Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) specifically highlights consulting [CISA's Cross-Sector Cybersecurity Performance Goals \(CPGs\)](#) to address best practices toward ensuring a strong cybersecurity posture.

### WHAT ARE CROSS-SECTOR CYBERSECURITY PERFORMANCE GOALS (CPGS)

CISA's Cross-Sector Cybersecurity Performance Goals (CPGs) are a prioritized subset of information technology (IT) and operational technology (OT) cybersecurity practices that can be voluntarily implemented to meaningfully reduce cyber risk across all organizations – including tribes! The current version (1.0.1) of the CPGs contains 38 security practices that cover the original five NIST Cybersecurity Framework (CSF) pillars (Identify, Protect, Detect, Respond, Recover) – with emphasis on Protect and Identify. The CPGs are reviewed regularly and are expected to incorporate the updated NIST CSF 2.0 pillars after the next review. While small- and medium-sized

tribes may struggle to implement something as all-encompassing as the CSF due to many resource challenges, any tribal organization can greatly benefit from many of the CPGs. As a matter of fact, in just applying for the grant, your tribe already addressed one of the CPGs (**1.B Organizational Cybersecurity Leadership** recommends that a named role/position/title be identified as responsible and accountable for planning, resourcing, and execution of cybersecurity activities). Congratulations!

There are many cybersecurity frameworks, standards, and regulations that apply to various activities that tribes operate, including gaming, Payment Card Industry (PCI), Industrial Control Systems (ICS)/Operational Technology (OT), and healthcare. The CPGs are not intended to replace other guidance and directives. However, regardless of size, tribal organizations that have been latent with cyber resilience efforts should find the CPGs a resource to measure against existing cybersecurity controls or a practical primer to begin to meaningfully reduce cyber risk.

### RACKING AND STACKING THE CPGS FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT OF FUNDING DOLLARS

Despite its baseline posture, the current version of the CPGs includes 38 well-informed practices aimed at meaningfully

reducing cyber risk. However, even 38 practices may seem daunting if you're just embarking on the cybersecurity journey. With this new grant funding, tribes may be wondering which solutions or products to invest in or prioritize for the most impact. While cybersecurity is often expensive, it doesn't have to start off that way. It's not always about buying the next shiny (expensive) thing. That's what makes the CPGs so great!

For little to no monetary investment, tribes may find benefit in 21 of the CPGs' low- to no-cost practices. Even more beneficial, of these 21 low-no-cost practices, there are 14 that have a high impact toward risk reduction and are considered low complexity to implement. Now that's what I call a good bang for the grant funding buck! Implement the **low-no-cost, high-impact, low-complexity** practices first and you can save funding for the more expensive high impact stuff later!

### NAVIGATING THE CPGS FOR FUN AND CYBER RESILIENCE

Excited to get started? CISA makes it easy. The [CISA CPG Checklist](#) is probably the most valuable document in the CPG package. It's designed to help prioritize and track your organization's implementation and provide inline form properties to enter status, respective dates, and notes. Additionally, each CPG includes information on the risk addressed, recommended action, and in many cases, references to free services. The checklist and the Complete CPGs Matrix/Spreadsheet include general estimates of the cost, complexity, and impact of implementing each goal. The spreadsheet makes it extremely easy to sort so you can quickly identify those **low-no cost, high-impact, low-complexity** practices mentioned above. Likewise, the estimates provide an aesthetically pleasing format

to reference when communicating with organizational leaders and other stakeholders (and what executive doesn't love a little eye candy?). By utilizing the CPG companion resources to prioritize efforts, increased cyber resilience is just a click or two away!

If you haven't already bookmarked the CPGs, just navigate to [cisa.gov](https://cisa.gov) and search for "CPG" to get started today. As a first step, be sure to download the [CISA CPG Checklist](#) and Complete [CPGs Matrix/Spreadsheet](#). Finally, if you're looking for more assistance, just connect with Tribal-ISAC, I'd be happy to help you!



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# AGENCY UPDATE

## FBI: The FBI's CJIS Division Has Many Services to Assist Tribal Law Enforcement Agencies

BY MCKENNA ATHA

Writer-Editor

FBI's Criminal Justice Information  
Services Division

For more information, visit [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov) or contact representatives  
from the FBI's CJIS Division by emailing [leeu@fbi.gov](mailto:leeu@fbi.gov).



The FBI has partnered with tribal law enforcement agencies to assist with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Initiative, victim services, various training opportunities, and more. As a result of these partnerships, tribal law enforcement agencies have used services from the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division, such as the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), in a variety of ways to investigate crimes and stay safe. Some of the CJIS Division's services are:

- **NCIC** stores criminal justice information to assist in apprehending fugitives, locating missing persons, recovering stolen property, and identifying those who pose a threat to the safety of officers and the public. This information is available to law enforcement and other authorized agencies.
- The **Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) File** in NCIC contains information about individuals who are determined by courts to be a threat to themselves or others, providing another protective piece of information to our law enforcement and criminal justice partners to increase officer and public safety.
- The **Violent Person File (VPF)** is also in NCIC and consists of information about individuals who have a history of violence against law enforcement. This file gives officers a warning that the individual they are about to encounter may be violent.
- The **National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS)** conducts background checks on individuals who are attempting to purchase a firearm or explosive.
- The **NICS Indices** contains information about individuals who are prohibited from receiving firearms by state or federal law. Individuals in the NICS Indices are automatically denied a firearm.
- The **Next Generation Identification (NGI) System** is the FBI's national repository for biometrics. NGI provides identification services for fingerprints and irises; investigative services for latent fingerprints, palm prints, facial images, and images of scars, marks, and tattoos; and identity history services through checks and challenges.
- The **Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal (LEEP)** is a secure platform for law enforcement agencies, intelligence groups, and criminal justice entities to use more than 60 web-based investigative tools and analytical resources.
- The **National Data Exchange (N-DEX)** is a national information-sharing system in LEEP that contains more than 1 billion criminal justice records for law enforcement and criminal justice personnel to search, link, analyze, and share.
- The **Virtual Command Center (VCC)** is a critical incident management system that provides immediate and effective information dissemination to law enforcement and criminal justice users. The VCC is available in LEEP and fosters collaboration between federal, state, local, tribal, military, and territorial users.
- The **Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program** gathers and publishes crime and law enforcement statistics regarding topics such as hate crime and law enforcement use-of-force statistics.

The operation and management of these criminal justice systems does not rest solely on the FBI; the FBI and its law enforcement and criminal justice partners are mutually responsible for these systems. The cornerstone of this shared management concept is the CJIS Advisory Policy Board, which includes representatives from law enforcement agencies and national security organizations throughout the United States. With feedback from several working groups and ad hoc subcommittees, the board provides recommendations to the FBI Director regarding technical and operational topics and policies related to the CJIS Division's programs and services. In addition, the CJIS Division has many more services to help law enforcement do their jobs safely and effectively.

# THE SUCCESSFUL ADVENT OF TRIBAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE INFORMATION SHARING



BY

**CHRISTOPHER B. CHANEY**

PRINCIPAL DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE,  
OFFICE OF TRIBAL JUSTICE

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris is a member of the Seneca-Cayuga Nation located in northeastern Oklahoma. He earned his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Oklahoma and his Juris Doctor from Brigham Young University. He has extensive litigation experience in Tribal, Federal, and State courts and has handled indigenous criminal justice matters for over 30 years. Chris has served as Prosecuting Attorney for two different federally recognized tribes, as an Assistant United States Attorney, and as Principle Deputy Bureau Director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Justice Services. Most recently, Chris has served as Unit Chief of the FBI Office of the General Counsel's Criminal Justice Information Law Unit and currently serves as Deputy Director in the Department of Justice, Office of Tribal Justice.

Tribal nations have adopted technological advances to improve public safety on tribal lands across the United States. Underlying these advances is application of the legal principle of tribal sovereignty, which at its core is the authority to govern for the greater good. Perhaps the most visible field of tribal governance is the area of law enforcement. The criminal justice system is broad-based and includes such areas as policing, investigation, prosecution, judicial services, probation/parole, corrections, and sex offender registration. Staff working in these areas rely heavily on the timely sharing of information to effectively do their jobs. Tribal criminal justice information sharing is saving lives both within and outside of tribal lands. Getting to this point of success has taken years of effort.

Perhaps the first time that tribal criminal justice information sharing was formally studied was the ground-breaking "Census of Tribal Justice Agencies in Indian Country, 2002" published by the Department of Justice (DOJ) Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). That study found that only 55% of tribal law enforcement agencies had access to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Criminal Justice Information Services Division (CJIS) National Crime Information Center (NCIC). NCIC is the nation's central repository for federal, tribal, state, and local information about fugitives, sex offenders, stolen property, missing persons, and

domestic violence protection orders. NCIC access is a necessity for law enforcement agencies, yet at the time of the study, barely half of tribal police agencies utilized it. This situation put tribal police officers and the public at risk.

Things began to change with enactment of the Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA) in 2010. The TLOA took a broad view of criminal justice in Indian Country and enacted overdue reforms in criminal jurisdiction, training, police agency cooperation, prosecutorial coordination, and criminal justice information sharing. The TLOA enacted what is now 28 USC 534(d)(1) to formally add tribal criminal justice agencies to the list of entities that could utilize NCIC and other FBI CJIS systems. The TLOA enacted 25 USC 2802(c)(15) to require the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Office of Justice Services (OJS) to collect and report statistical crime data for each reporting tribe individually.

Another provision of the TLOA required the DOJ to "...ensure that tribal law enforcement officials that meet Federal or State requirements shall be permitted access to national crime information databases..." 34 USC 41107(1). With this mandate, the DOJ sprang into action and started a pilot program to provide tribal law enforcement agencies with a workaround in situations where states had denied tribal

access to FBI CJIS systems via state network restrictions. The pilot program worked and in 2015, the DOJ announced the establishment of the Tribal Access Program for National Crime Information (TAP). TAP expanded the pilot program to include other tribal government agencies such as courts, sex offender registration offices, and agencies that did authorized background checks such as those on prospective employees that would have contact or control over children per 25 USC 3207(a)-(c).

In 2022, Congress enacted updates to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). This new legislation continued the momentum created by the TLOA in 2010. Congress expressed its approval of what had already been happening. VAWA 2022 provided that the DOJ "... shall establish a program, to be known as the 'Tribal Access

Program', to enhance the ability of tribal governments and their authorized agencies to access, enter information into, and obtain information from national criminal information databases..." 28 USC 534(d)(2)(A). Also in 2022, legislation was passed requiring FBI CJIS to deny persons the ability to purchase or possess firearms when it would violate tribal law (18 USC 922(t)) and requiring FBI CJIS to notify tribes when certain prohibited persons attempted to illegally purchase firearms (18 USC 925B).

Currently, there are over 400 tribal government agencies from 132 federally recognized tribes that participate in TAP. [As noted in a September 21, 2023 press release issued by DOJ](#), "Using TAP, tribes have shared information about missing persons; registered convicted sex offenders; entered domestic violence orders of protection

for nationwide enforcement; run criminal histories; identified and arrested fugitives; entered bookings and convictions; and completed fingerprint-based record checks for non-criminal justice purposes such as screening employees or volunteers who work with children."

During the last two decades, tribal and federal officials have worked together on criminal justice information sharing and that collaboration has greatly improved public safety. That success has protected vulnerable persons and saved lives in tribal communities and beyond.

*The contents of this article are not necessarily the views of the United States government.*



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BY

**EVEN BRANDE**

FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN

HANDEL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES, INC

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Even Brande is the Founder and Chairman of Handel Information Technologies, a technology company that provides software solution to tribal, local, and state government agencies. He is also an Adjunct Professor at the University of Wyoming, College of Business where he teaches Information Management and Business Analytics. Prior to founding Handel in 1997, Even held executive positions with Aspen Tree Software and Tandy Corporation. He has served on several boards including the State of Wyoming Information Technology Policy Council, Governor's Digital Privacy Task Force, and the Wyoming Technology Business Center. Even is a sought-after speaker and frequently speaks at technology conferences on topics involving government and technology. Even is passionate about helping government agencies become more efficient and delivering better services to their constituents through better use of technology. In his spare time, Even likes to spend time with his wife and three children at their ranch on the Wyoming/Colorado border. Even is also passionate about music, running, and cross-country skiing.

## USING BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY for Tribal ID Cards

**B**lockchain technology has now been around for almost two decades. Yet, for many, it seems to be synonymous with cryptocurrency. Cryptocurrency, however, is just one application of blockchain technology.

A blockchain is a distributed database shared among several nodes (computers) on a network. Unlike a traditional database, which typically lives on one computer or server, a blockchain exists across multiple servers or computers. As such, it becomes virtually indestructible. One server going down can take down an entire database. One node going down on a blockchain will have no impact on the integrity of the data stored on that blockchain. For this reason, blockchain technology has become the go-to platform for electronic currency. However, this technology has the potential to serve so many other areas.

Here is one big distinction between traditional data living on the internet and data living in a blockchain: data on the internet is typically owned and controlled by the host of that internet site. Data on a blockchain is typically owned by the user or consumer. Take, for example, your medical record. In a traditional database environment, each of your medical providers

has their own copy of your health record. None of them are complete, and none of them are completely accurate. All of them are controlled by the owner of the record, your provider, and not by you, the patient. If your medical record were on a blockchain, this relationship would be turned on its head; there would be one copy of your medical record that you own and control. You then decide which providers can access your medical record, what portion of it they can see, and for how long.

Now imagine if we extend this concept to ID cards. You may carry around a wallet with a dozen or more cards, including a driver's license, gym access card, fishing license, health insurance card, credit card, etc. What if all of these cards could live online and you didn't need to carry them with you at all times? Of course, we already see examples of this. You can use Apple Wallet on your phone for payments, tickets, and other forms of ID. Yet, in this model, Apple, not you, has the key to your identity kingdom. In a blockchain model, your ID cards would live on the blockchain, just like your cryptocurrency does today. You can decide when, where and with whom to share your driver's license, your fishing license or your tribal ID card.

This is not fiction. This year Handel IT has been working with FireAnts Labs, a Las Vegas company that works with several Native American Tribes. FireAnts is currently building out a blockchain for tribal ID cards. This technology allows tribal members to store their tribal ID in a blockchain. Using their digital wallet, they can access services electronically or identify themselves without having a physical tribal ID card. We have recently integrated this technology with our RiteTrack Tribal Enrollment System. This technology supports both the tribal enrollment process and verification processes each time the tribal member interacts with the tribe. While it is beyond the scope of this article to provide in-depth technical information on this process, we will provide a short summary.

When a tribal member enrolls, a non-fungible token (NFT), a unique cryptographic token that

exists on the FireAnts blockchain and cannot be replicated, is created. This NFT is airdropped to the tribal member's digital wallet. Simultaneously, the encrypted unique address of the token is shared with the RiteTrack enrollment database. When a tribal member interacts with the tribe for, say, social services, medical services, or financial assistance, they can identify themselves using the NFT stored in their digital wallet. Unlike a physical ID, the NFT cannot be lost, stolen, or shared with another individual. Furthermore, it cannot be tampered with. Storing the tribal ID on a decentralized blockchain ensures that the tribe can verify the authenticity of the NFT, providing greater trust and confidence in its authenticity.

"We see great promise in terms of automating the identification process and removing barriers to service for tribal members," says Handel CEO, Josh Becker.

"NFT and blockchain is the key to secure, immutable identity verification, promising integrity and endless future benefits," says Christian Douangphouxay, FireAnts Labs, Inc. Co-Founder.

Handel IT is excited to be working with FireAnts Labs and looks forward to showcasing this technology at this year's TribalNet Conference in Las Vegas.



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# AGENCY UPDATE

## NTIA: Funding Program Updates

MARGARET GUTIERREZ

[mgutierrez@ntia.gov](mailto:mgutierrez@ntia.gov)

[www.ntia.gov](http://www.ntia.gov)



## TRIBAL BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM UPDATE

On July 27th, 2023, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) announced a second Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP). Nearly \$1 billion in funding will be available to eligible Tribal entities to deploy Internet infrastructure and increase broadband use and adoption. The second NOFO originally established a 180-day period for Eligible Entities to submit applications for TBCP funding. On January 22, 2024, NTIA issued a public notice extending the original submission deadline to March 22, 2023. The deadline extension is intended to provide potential applicants with more time to develop competitive project proposals and project consortia. NTIA will continue to host monthly webinars and provide technical assistance for eligible entities. Additionally, NTIA has offered several in-person technical assistance sessions throughout the country at events that include, but are not limited to, the Alaska Federation of Native Annual Conference and the National Congress of American Indians Annual Convention. NTIA is also working with the Federal Communications Commission to assist Tribes with challenges to the National Broadband Map through online Office Hours.

The TBCP is a nearly \$3 billion program that deploys high-speed Internet infrastructure, establishes affordable Internet access programs, and supports digital inclusion projects for Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities. The program has been split into 2 funding rounds, where the first funding round opened in 2021, and the second in 2023. As of February 2024, NTIA has made 226 awards to Tribal entities. These awards are made available from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021.

While NTIA prepares to review applications and make awards under the second NOFO, awards made under the first NOFO have begun to clear environmental review requirements and break ground. To date, more than 30 individual projects have received environmental clearance.

## INTERNET FOR ALL PROGRAMS

**Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program:** This \$42.45 billion program for states will expand high-speed Internet access including Tribal communities. As of December 27, 2023, all states and territories submitted to NTIA Initial Proposals for how to connect unserved and underserved communities. Many states have initiated and continue to engage in Tribal consultations, a key requirement of local coordination. Tribes may review state broadband coverage maps, challenge them, and submit their own broadband data maps to ensure more areas are served.

**Digital Equity Act Programs:** This \$2.75 billion program establishes three grant programs that promote digital equity and inclusion. States are currently working on the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program, in which Tribal governments are encouraged to participate. More information about the Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program and the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program is coming this year.

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BY  
**ZACH ESTEP**  
DIRECTOR OF IT  
GUN LAKE CASINO

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prior to joining Gun Lake Casino, Zach earned his Computer Information Systems degree and began my career in IT as a Systems Administrator at accounting firm BDO USA. After earning his Certified Associate of Project Management certificate, he took on a new challenge as a project manager for the firm's numerous mergers and acquisitions. Zach joined Gun Lake Casino in 2015 and in his time the team has successfully completed multiple property expansions and are currently working on the construction of a hotel tower and Aquadome. Zach is currently enrolled at WMU and on track to earn his MBA in 2024 while at the same time earning his Project Management Professional certificate (PMP, 2022) as well as WMU's Business Analytics certificate.

# CONNECTIVITY IN A CONNECTED WORLD

**W**hen Gun Lake Casino opened its doors in 2011, it drastically changed the landscape of the environment that immediately surrounds it: acres of farmland. Conveniently located south of Grand Rapids and north of Kalamazoo, the location gave the casino access to large markets, but the rural nature of the area brought unique challenges.

Among those challenges was cellular connectivity. On the weekends, the casino welcomed thousands of guests to play, eat, and enjoy their trip to the casino - and the cellular infrastructure that served the local community quickly became overwhelmed. In 2015, Gun Lake Casino began its first expansion, and as more concrete and steel were added to the existing building, there was a drastic decrease in the already-stretched-thin cellular service inside the casino. In 2017, the casino expanded again, and yet again in 2020, and the cell service problems were exacerbated; what were a few dead zones on the casino floor became only a few hotspots where guests could connect. As Gun Lake Casino's Director of IT, I walked

our floor on busy weekends and would see guests looking at their phones while walking around, their gaze fixated on the number of bars showing on their phones, and I knew that this problem needed to be solved BEFORE we invited our guests to stay the night with us in our new hotel. Construction is currently underway and the hotel is scheduled to open spring of 2025. After reaching out to our trusted vendors, we were thrilled to connect with Brisk Engineering to solve our problems.

"Wireless signals are measured in two ways: strength and quality," explained Ray Lam, President of Brisk Engineering, during our first call. "If you have good signal strength but poor quality, guests may be able to connect but speeds will be slow. If you have good quality but poor strength, very few guests will connect but they'll receive fast speeds. The goal is to optimize both of these measures."

The first step in the process was to assess our current signal strength and quality and overlay it on CAD drawings of our buildings.

The result was a heat map of the property covered in a blur of red confirming our guests' experience: poor signal strength and poor quality. Armed with this information, Brisk Engineering worked with our IT team to design a solution to solve this problem.

Implementation began with the Distributed Antenna System (DAS) network on the gaming floor and back-of-house areas. The devices themselves look like wireless access points and are connected back to TR closets using a composite cable consisting of fiber to carry the signals and small gauge copper to power the devices. In just over a week, the casino had an extensive network of antennas located throughout the building and piped back to the headend unit in the cold room.

There are a couple of options for how the headend unit receives the source signal and transmits it to the antenna network. At our location, we have a direct line of sight to cellular towers for all major carriers, so we opted to install a donor antenna on the casino building to pick up those signals. If cellular towers are not nearby, we have the option to feed the DAS with carrier signals via an internet circuit and signal sources, but that would incur additional operating costs.

With the new system fully installed and ready to keep our guests connected, we had paperwork to do first. Each of the cellular carriers requires a retransmission agreement. This is a legal agreement in place with the cellular providers granting us permission to receive and

rebroadcast their signal. Brisk Engineering coordinated with the carriers on our behalf and handed us the keys to our new system.

In 2024, cellular connectivity is no longer an amenity – it's a requirement. Hotel guests having a safety or health issue are more likely to pick up their cell phone than a room phone and we need to ensure their calls go through. Guests winning jackpots want to text their friends and family to brag and our Marketing Department wants this too! We are thrilled to offer this reliable connected experience to our guests and look forward to monitoring how this positively impacts our NPS scores, time on device, and overall guest experience!



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# AGENCY UPDATE

## FirstNet Announces Initial Network Buildout Complete and Invests in Network Evolution

BY JASPER BRUNER

National Tribal Government Liaison  
First Responder Network Authority

[FirstNet.gov/Tribal](https://FirstNet.gov/Tribal)



At the [First Responder Network Authority](#) (FirstNet Authority), it is our mission to ensure the building, deployment, and operation of FirstNet, the nationwide public safety broadband network. In December 2023, we announced the official [validation of the initial five-year buildout of the network](#), marking the completion of all state commitments and contractual milestones on time, on budget, and within scope.

Today, FirstNet covers more than 2.91 million square miles nationwide. On tribal lands, the FirstNet coverage footprint increased by more than 40% between 2020 and 2022. We remain committed to bringing broadband to all first responders — including those operating in tribal, rural, or remote areas.

## AN EVOLVING NETWORK FOR TRIBAL PUBLIC SAFETY

The FirstNet Authority is continuously making investments to grow and evolve the network for America's first responders. Now that [FirstNet's initial buildout](#) is complete, we are ushering in the next phase of FirstNet through a [series of strategic investments](#) focused on network evolution.

The investments, which total more than \$8 billion over 10 years, will enhance mission-critical services, bring full 5G to FirstNet, and expand coverage for responders through thousands of new, purpose-built FirstNet cell sites across the country — including 1,000 new sites within the next two years.

By [transitioning to a fully 5G network](#), FirstNet will achieve greater capacity and lower latency. This means the network will be able to move more data faster, allowing for the transmission of high-quality video, more accurate imaging, better situational awareness, and real-time voice and data sharing.

For tribal public safety, this has many benefits. EMS officials will be able to share high-quality, nearly real-time video with hospitals to support telemedicine. Emergency communications leaders will be able to establish remote dispatch centers. Law enforcement will be able to transform patrol cars into mobile offices, allowing officers to stay in the field longer rather than returning to headquarters to file reports. These are just a few examples of the many innovative ways the public safety community will be able to take advantage of 5G on FirstNet.

## ADVOCATING FOR TRIBAL PUBLIC SAFETY THROUGH THE TRIBAL WORKING GROUP

The FirstNet Authority remains committed to working closely with the tribal community as we expand and evolve FirstNet. [Our Tribal Working Group \(TWG\)](#) is composed of delegates from various disciplines, organizations, and tribes. Through monthly teleconference meetings and regular in-person meetings, the TWG provides valuable feedback on the challenges tribal public safety officials are facing and what they need from public safety's network.

With the TWG's help, the FirstNet Authority is able to provide critical outreach and education to federally recognized Tribal Nations. As we embark on the next phase of FirstNet's evolution, we will work with the TWG and the larger tribal community to ensure the network evolves to meet their unique needs.



# TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CREATIVE COLLABORATION



BY

**KELLY SHAW**

CEO

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Shaw is an empathetic, curious, and visionary coach, consultant and public speaker who has leveraged her 20+ years as a senior executive in both the gaming technology and non-profit sectors to mentor, inspire and galvanize teams to achieve outstanding results.

**T**hroughout my career in gaming technology, I encountered many clients interested in transforming and innovating their organizations for an improved consumer experience. While there were a variety of approaches for the deployment of the latest technological innovation, the most successful enterprises were the ones that believed in deep and broad stakeholder engagement.

What do technology deployments have in common with leadership, organizational culture, and personal transformation? Everything. It's never about the technology or the proposed change. It's about people, communication, alignment to purpose and a willingness to experiment with a creative approach. Have you thought about collaboration as a foundational requirement for transformation?

When we reach out of our comfort zones or small circles of trust and intentionally invite diverse perspectives into our journey, magic occurs. The magic is in the explosion and expansion of thoughts — the ability to build upon ideas and concepts that don't exist in the inner workings of our individual thinking.

To inject creativity into your collaborative projects, I invite you to experiment outside of the industry and your professional expertise

and to step into the world of our nervous system. In 2021, "Neuroscience News" published early findings from an experiment on team cohesion and team flow. A research team from Toyohashi University of Technology in cooperation with researchers at the California Institute of Technology and Tohoku University found brain waves and regions of the brain were sensitive to team flow compared with non-engaging teamwork or a solo flow. Their research suggests that when teamwork reaches the team flow level (team members operating in alignment with one another), the team performs in harmony, breaking and exceeding their performance limits.

I recently applied a bit of creative neuroscience in a leadership retreat while conducting a traditional SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis for the group's competitive market position. The senior leaders were executing well within their individual lanes of expertise; however, they were at odds with one another and lacked unity as a team due to the lack of alignment on a strategic vision. Each of them believed they were contributing to the growth of the organization while doing their work in isolation and not recognizing the cascading

impacts of their initiatives on other departments. The CFO had released a new policy that created a heavier workload for the field teams which optimized his finance team's function but negatively impacted the field.

We experimented with their team talent SWOT analysis from a seated position (a traditional approach to thinking – sitting at a conference table) and then from a physical rotation perspective (actively moving around the table), combining a series of breathing techniques and physical movements. Each senior leader provided input on their peer's organizational talent, and when the O (Opportunities) discussion emerged, the leaders began an ideas exchange that included concepts like facilitating “a day in the life” of another colleague, implementing a cross-departmental review process for new policies, and introducing self-inquiry to increase

empowerment and decrease decision bottlenecks.

What if you added a milestone to your project plan or strategic plan that included physical team movement and powerful questions?

My invitation to you through the lens of transformation is to open your next meeting with active movement around the table (or the Zoom desk) while posing a question to your team, “What does transformation mean to you?” By asking your team to walk around the table vs. take their traditional seat, you kickstart a different way to engage and think together. Once you have completed a few loops around your conference room table (or your Zoom environment), switch the direction while asking the transformation question again. What are you noticing? What is shifting? Is a quiet colleague feeling more comfortable speaking

up as you're collectively moving? Are your extroverted colleagues intentionally creating space for all voices to be heard? Did someone convey the idea to invite another colleague who isn't in the room into the conversation?

When we view the organization in which we operate as the superhighway system of our body (nervous system), we begin to recognize that each department needs the others for optimal health and success. Perhaps you include the suggested movement and breath practice to access diverse ideas and cohesion for your planning process in technology transformation. Perhaps the next level of experimentation is self-imposed disruption of your comfort zone with the power of questions in your next team meeting that doesn't include your traditional attendees. What does transformation look like to you? Why is technology innovation important to you? What does success feel like for you?

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