

Summary Report

***2006 Workshop on Research and Data Collection Needs
To Assess the Use and Impact of Food Assistance Programs
On Indian Reservations***

***January 26-27, 2006
The Westward Look Resort
Tucson, Arizona***

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Introduction:

The American Indian Studies Program (AISP) in partnership with the Native Peoples Technical Assistance Office (NPTAO) at The University of Arizona was awarded a ninth year of funding from the [USDA Economic Research Service](#) to facilitate research on the impact of food assistance programs on American Indian reservations. AISP/NPTAO regard this small grants program as a unique opportunity to foster tribal college faculty development, institutional capacity building, tribal college student participation in the research process, and partnerships between 1862 and 1994 land grant institutions or other collaborations. Research grants are directed to Tribal Colleges, reservation or off-reservation rural and urban Indian organizations and associations, tribal governmental agencies, and researchers at colleges and universities with Native American partnerships. Five new applicants were funded in 2005, with an average of \$30,000 per award.

The first USDA/ERS Food Assistance Summit was held on January 27, 2006 at The Westward Look Resort in Tucson, Arizona. Representatives and specialists from the United States Department of Agriculture/Economic Research Service, Indian Health Service, The Urban Institute, The University of Arizona, and public/private agencies were invited to convene in Tucson in order to inspire dialogue in the area of food assistance and nutrition research in American Indian/Alaska Native communities. (See Appendix A for participants.)

Background and Overview:

The meeting was introduced by Claudia E. Nelson, Director of the Native Peoples Technical Assistance Office and Joseph “Jay” Stauss, Professor of American Indian Studies, both at The University of Arizona. After preliminary introductions, Stauss thanked Betsey Kuhn and David Smallwood for initiating this summit, and as moderator, outlined the day’s activities. Stauss remarked that he is struck by the fact that the data indicates self-identified Indian people in addition to enrolled members. An intriguing fact is that the data available is showing a significant increase for American Indian economic well-being for gaming and non-gaming tribes alike. The expectation was that non-gaming tribes would lag behind, but there is a three-fold increase in self-governance and economic development between 1990 and 2000. The median income on Indian reservations is only one-half that of the national population. The question is this: how do we measure changes doing work on reservations?

Betsey Kuhn, ERS’s Food and Rural Economics Division, USDA, indicated that she has discovered there are not many experts in the area of food assistance. For example, ERS has only four or five people working in this specialty. The need is great for partnerships to help in this effort, and Jay Stauss is helping focus on American Indians, a relatively neglected group as a minority, and where economic status is quite low. She is grateful for the partnership and is eager for it to continue.

David Smallwood, Deputy Director for Food Assistance Research in the Food and Rural Economics Division, spoke to the specificity of the ERS Small Grants Programs for Tribal Colleges and American Indian reservations. There is a \$20-40,000.00 range for small, one-year grants, and 3 year grants in the range of \$200,000. They specifically address data development, enriching data series for ECLS (Childhood education and nutrition in tribes). For example, Kenneth Finegold and Nancy Pindus, policy analysts at The Urban Institute were awarded an ERS grant to compile data and write the report on Food Assistance, distributed prior to this meeting. Craig Gundersen, Associate Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University, is also looking at using multiple years of national data to look

at American Indian populations and food consumption, purchase, and assistance. Smallwood considers the purpose of this summit to be to get “up to speed” on what’s going on, and what the next steps are in food assistance for Native peoples. It is critical to expand research programs in Food Assistance areas, and a keystone in that research is to look closely at stakeholder issues.

Finegold feels gratified to see the work of ERS and the continuing research. He shared a handout which outlined his work, written in collaboration with Nancy Pindus, Laura Wherry, Sandi Nelson, Timothy Triplett, and Randy Capps. This paper points to high levels of unemployment and poverty (greater than 2 times the national rate) in American Indian and Alaska Native populations. He reviewed health issues in American Indian populations. The current issues include the importance of nutrition. The historical perspective is that as late as the 1960’s, the health status of Native populations was like that of third-world countries, with health and nutrition problems that stemmed from lack of food. Since then, malnutrition and underweight have become less common, but a new set of problems associated with consumption of a modern American diet and lack of physical exercise has emerged. Obesity and diabetes, for example, are now more prevalent on the reservation than elsewhere in the US. Food assistance may have contributed to both the good and bad aspects of this transition. The term “Commod Bod,” came into use to describe reservation residents who depended heavily on commodity food. Recent changes in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) and other commodity programs have made healthier foods available to program participants. The last major study of FDPIR, published in 1990, included a comparison with the Food Stamp Program, but there have been important changes in both programs since that time, so the findings are not necessarily applicable today.¹

Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) can and do administer FDPIR, WIC, and CSFP, but the statutory provisions for tribal administration of the Food Stamp Program have never been utilized. In interviews with the Urban Institute research team, issue experts suggested coordination could be improved, both among these food assistance programs, and between food assistance programs and non-USDA programs such as TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), the Indian Health Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs programs.

As operated on reservations, food programs interact with tribal norms. Sharing of food is frequent; elders are vital and key people for the dissemination of nutrition information, as they are instrumental and influential in passing knowledge to others in the tribe.

The Urban Institute study reviewed the information on reservation food assistance and its effects on health and nutrition from 26 different surveys. Finegold described four surveys as particularly promising data sources: include the Navajo Health and Nutrition Survey (NHNS), the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K). Information from the NHNS, however, is not necessarily representative of other tribes. The advantages of CHIS include a 2001 oversample of American Indians and Alaska Natives, supported by IHS, but California American Indians are not necessarily representative of Indians in other states. For example, more American Indians identify themselves as Hispanic than in other states.

A small number of additional questions, asked of American Indian and Alaska Native respondents only, would greatly increase the usefulness of the Current Population Survey (CPS)

¹ Charles L. Usher, David S. Shanklin, and Judith B. Wildfire, *Evaluation of the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations*. (Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation, 1990).

and the SIPP (Survey of Income and Program Participation); both surveys are large enough to include many American Indians and Alaska Natives, even without oversampling. CPS is a cross-sectional, housing-based survey that does not follow people from place to place; SIPP is a longitudinal survey that does track families as they relocate.

ERS and USDA generally should follow a practice of including reservation sites in any multisite study or demonstration. Finegold and his colleagues are doing this in their current study of CSFP, which includes the larger of the two tribal programs, that of the Oglala Sioux, among the study sites. There are real opportunities for ERS to collaborate on data development with other agencies, for example by adding questions to surveys such as the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). Tribes increasingly insist on active participation in collaborative research, including formulating study questions and developing and administering research instruments. Collaboration can make research more difficult, but it can also improve its accuracy and make the results more useful for the people being studied.

How we can get agencies to “partner up” with this type of research? Smallwood responded that the problems are planning, money, and data collection (methodology). Ongoing, longitudinal surveys are difficult because of the transitory nature of family conditions and community cohesion.

Walter Hillbrant, President of the consulting firm Support Services International (SSI), added that there are critical points and limited resources—“how do we get the maximum from the money spent?” The transcendental problem in getting data in Indian country is the issue of sovereignty. In accordance with tribal sovereignty, an alternative approach to collection of data unilaterally mandated by federal agencies is a cooperative, holistic effort of data collection, and coordination among stakeholders such as federal agencies (there is little integrated activity among federal departments), tribes, and universities. The federal government should say “We need to work together, and how do we share data?” Secondly, because of their inherent sovereignty, tribes should want these data; very often, American Indian tribes don’t see the usefulness of the data collected in response to federal requirements. NCAI (National Congress of American Indians), tribes, and others should be looking to partner on deciding what data are to be collected, how often, and to what ends. How will we be able to marshal resources required to get the most effect and value from data collection efforts?

Two ways, stated Jennie Joe, Director of NARTC (the Native American Research and Training Center) at The University of Arizona. Data is collected because someone is receiving services of one type or another. Most Native communities don’t feel that they obtain anything from the research that’s been done. No one actually sits and talks about American Indians’ needs. The research is often treated differently: how do American Indians benefit? There should be community participation on all levels.

Peggy Halpern indicated that the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has worked to have an integrated research agenda focusing on both health and human services pertaining to Native Americans. ASPE recently completed the Barriers Study that examined barriers that tribes face in accessing HHS discretionary grants and proposes strategies to remedy these barriers. ASPE is also conducting a study entitled: *Data on Health and Well Being of American Indians and Alaska Natives*. This project is designed to address the lack of current information (in one place) about key administrative and survey databases. Access to these data sources is important for research, policy development and program management. This study will: (1) identify and assess a range of existing datasets in terms of their key characteristics, methodology,

and strengths and weaknesses; (2) develop a data catalog that includes information about the selected datasets. The datasets will be selected on the basis of key policy issues impacting American Indians, Alaska Natives, (e.g., housing, education, health), and the data must meet quality criteria; for example, (e.g., public access, 1990's and later, contact information, minimal sample size); and (3) utilize this information and interviews with experts to develop an overview paper on data issues, data gaps, and potential strategies to improve American Indian/Alaska Native data in terms of statistical methods and substance. The project includes two workgroups comprised of representatives from Native groups and members of the HHS Data Council's Working Group on Race and Ethnicity.

Finegold added that it is important to discuss the possibility of American Indian community members actually receiving training in interview techniques. NCAI is an agency that is very supportive of research. Nancy Pindus of the Urban Institute brought up the issue that there is an opportunity for capacity building in tribal colleges as well as tribal communities. Jennie Joe echoed that sentiment, adding that long-standing relationships are necessary, so when capacity building is occurring, communities are excited about the work and the potential; we need to build it and keep building. Of course, an ongoing dilemma is the need for funds to build capacity.

In response, Nelson presented an overview of the Food Assistance review article she prepared with Stauss and White. Long-term funding for capacity building is always an overriding concern. To date, however, nine relationships have been successfully built. Chief Dull Knife is the best dataset acquired. One successful component of that study was provided by a nutritionist from Brigham Young University who lived in the Lame Deer community and knew it well. She was able to contribute a great deal to the research and validation of the information. In addition, tribal college staff and faculty should definitely be involved and can be valuable components in the research. These institutions are probably the most highly qualified to do research because of the close proximity to community members. In the White, Nelson and Stauss paper, the Navajo Nation research was the most challenging, and nutrition information was not available prior to this report. Mark Bauer of Diné College, Shiprock campus, stated that they are developing a three week research methods course for tribal college students. This course will include program evaluation training and then sending students back to their own colleges to engage in interviewing. Pindus mentioned that this is a form of capacity building that should be encouraged and reproduced. Diane Austin, Research Anthropologist from the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology at The University of Arizona shared her experiences in capacity building and community involvement in the Kaibab Paiute Tribe in Southern Utah. Her years of work in the community have created collaborative projects working with Kaibab tribal staff and youth.

Joe articulated the important issues in training students and faculty members to do this type of research. Translational research is not all vested in one person. Faculty members at Tribal Colleges have many courses to teach, and there are community board members who have to learn about research and how it can benefit the community. Her concern is how this works across the board? How do we keep students excited about research, and how can we get faculty engaged. It is difficult to ask institutions alone to take on another burden. The question is, is there too much of a burden already on Tribal College personnel, and is asking them to do this setting them up for failure?

She added that overarching themes include who is American Indian/Alaska Native, at the community level and in large datasets. A small sample size is also 'haunting' community data. The data produced must be useful for communities as well as researchers. The California study

was important because community members were trained in decoding the data. Identity was a problem, however, and Native people said, “We can’t work with this” because it meets statistical and researcher parameters but not the community’s. We have to deal with a different model in order for it to make a difference.

Technical assistance is also very important for tribal colleges, etc. in order to disseminate information after a study. We need to develop a way to identify geographical area research centers in order to develop research and data to be useful, take care of and eliminate the “divide.” Collaboration is a key aspect, using cross-fertilization and learning from obesity and diabetes studies. The information available today is getting stale, so we need to listen closely and stay connected in communities. Storytelling gives research a life.

A major health problem in American Indian communities is Type II Diabetes in children. It is important to design health information for children so they understand it and can be interested in it. Funders need to understand that planning grants are very important in order to build teams, and small grant studies should be building on each other.

Identification and Review of Research Issues

The conversation segued to research funding, and Finegold discussed foundations and other funding opportunities. President Bush’s administration is now financially supporting faith-based organizations and research, and research in American Indian communities and systems can involve spirituality or beliefs (i.e., holistic approach). Halpern indicated that HHS is attempting the challenge to identify information on grants accessibility to pass on to various groups and communities. These needs were isolated through various surveys. Dawn Aldridge of the USDA suggested various grant funds available, some small, through her office and others, such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. According to their website, <http://www.rwjf.org>, “[d]uring 2004, the Foundation made 823 grants and contracts, totaling \$249.3 million in support of programs and projects to improve health and health care in the United States.”²

Hillabrant reiterated that longitudinal research is necessary so we can project to the future--right now, there are too few data points to make reasonable conclusions. Improvement and performance hinge on feedback. “We’ve hardly ever been involved in longitudinal work” he said. Institutional development should reflect these types of research and evaluations. He also believes that research should generally use the “KISS” (Keep it Simple, Stupid) philosophy and that, often, “Less is More.” Four things should be asked and addressed in planning and prioritizing research in Indian country: 1) What is/Who is the target of the research (generally American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians); 2) Who will collect the data (will community members be involved in the research protocol, in collecting the data, using what means, at what cost; 3) data analysis needs to be addressed--how is it done and who is doing it; and 4) what are the goals of the research—who will benefit, how will the results be used?

Hillabrant shared that the medical concept “triage” could be applied to the evaluation of programs, policies, and issues—“we should apply scarce resources to policies, issues, or programs that are likely to survive rather than programs with a fixed short term or which are likely to be terminated/de-funded. Hillabrant also argued for a more interactionist/systems model in program evaluation rather than a simple cause and effect model. The simple causal model

² A new (February 9) article entitled “**New Study Indicates Majority of Hospitals Collect Patients' Race, Ethnicity and Language Data; Yet Few Hospitals Use the Data to Improve Quality of Care**” can be found on the foundation’s website, <http://www.rwjf.org/newsroom/newsreleasesdetail.jsp?id=10394>.

tends to look at relationships as unidirectional with the cause predating the effect. In contrast, the systems view is that most phenomena/relationships are interactive with components interacting in complex ways. Because almost everything has both costs and benefits, it is important to avoid killing the processes being evaluated through the measurement processes. One way to reduce the intrusion/change introduced by the evaluation process is by using “unobtrusive measures.” For example, it is possible to get a lot of information from grocery and convenience store sales and purchases—such data can reveal what people are they buying and selling and that can translate to what people are eating. Sampling and in-depth, hard data on surveys with a small group can be the key to getting valid information.

What is the point of most nutrition research in Indian country? We must try to understand what’s going on; often what is important is the “story.” For example, tell the story of a family regarding *where* they get food, *how* they prepare it, *how* they use it. What’s the food-related problem in Indian country--People eat bad food. In general, the diet is inadequate with not enough nutrients. What is the goal with respect to nutrition in Indian country--We want to change diet and eating habits of individuals and their families. How do we do that? The answer is, to a great degree, already known. Over 40 years ago (associated with food shortages during World War II), the USDA funded research on changing what Americans eat. Working for USDA Kurt Lewin and his colleagues did studies that showed that educational efforts had little effect on getting homemakers to change the way they prepared meals. Lewin found that, to change behavior, it’s crucial to get people actively involved in small group discussions and activities, as opposed to listening to lectures and reading educational materials--social support is necessary to get people to change behaviors and adopt healthy habits.

Hillabrant mentioned that there is a positive note, in that we know one person *can* change the world; the woman who started MADD, for instance. One mother whose child was killed by an impaired driver was able to lobby Congress and state legislatures to enact laws to punish drunk drivers and revoke their driver’s licenses. Still, people can’t effect change working alone in isolation—one person can make a big difference by working with others to effect change. A great success story involves nutrition: in the 1950’s, American Indian infant mortality rates were equal to those of third-world countries. Today, through the efforts of the tribes and the IHS, on reservations, the infant mortality rates are lower than that of all races in the United States. A key component of this achievement was the near elimination of infant diarrheal disease. For example, on the near-by Tohono O’odham and other reservations, it was found that, despite adequate refrigeration, most babies were bottle-fed. IHS, working through the CHRs and others began maternal breast-feeding education campaigns throughout Indian country; breastfeeding dramatically increased, with a corresponding decrease in infant mortality.

Pindus noted there are many opportunities for interdisciplinary studies in each of the areas identified in the Urban Institute Study: nutrition/nutrition education; participation; program administration, and cultural content. For example, in the area of nutritional education, do we really know about the allocation of resources and how money is being used? Chances are we probably do not, so there are prospects for expansion here. As far as best practices go, along with dissemination of this information storytelling is an excellent method for sharing information. Outcomes: What works and how do we know it is working? There are good, promising programs, and opportunities for small grants to explore outcomes and outcomes measurement.

Pindus also said that coordination in nutrition education is crucial. There is education going on through various agencies, but dollars aren’t being leveraged and coordinated and the

information is scattered. It is important to look at the “Kith and Kin” model or multigenerational approaches (family teaching family), particularly with elders.

Evaluation of participation is important; data issues, identity issues and locale should be addressed. There are meta-analysis opportunities for agency information gathered, to “put it all together” and remove barriers. Selected approaches that show promise can be incorporated into demonstrations and tested.

On the administrative side, Pindus considers coordination with nutrition education to be essential, but also notes that the various reservation programs for food assistance should be coordinated to accommodate personal or family situational changes. Tribes may not necessarily administer programs, but some tribes have effective working relationships and collaborations with county assistance offices that are viable subjects for further investigation. Her view is that communication is key. Along those lines, cultural content is critical, as we can’t generalize about foods and practices, but must stress cultural relevance in programs for the target population. Pilot studies are a good way to start, including examination of food sharing and ceremonial activities with food. These situations are *ripe* for educational opportunities.

Social marketing is an area with much broader implications beyond American Indians only. There are ways for tribes and colleges, along with ERS, to team with foundations, and now is an opportune time for this kind of research. We have a great opportunity to engage in meaningful research. Marketing good food behavior needs group support; there shouldn’t and can’t just be a flyer that says, “This isn’t good for you” as that is not working anymore. In order to bring about behavioral change, there must be economic and cultural incentives as well as health incentives. Marketing and economic development opportunities can be developed that increase the demand for traditional foods, especially those that are healthier, and to market these foods to the broader population. Bagels used to be an ethnic food--now look at the general consumption of bagels. Another example is the Museum of American Indian in Washington, DC-- the cafeteria is the major selling point because of its cultural offerings.

ERS has a lot of good work to do, to keep the momentum going. Pindus suggests that various nationally recognized institutions should be teamed with small grants recipients to give studies more visibility.

Aldridge presented the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) research priorities for food assistance on Indian reservations. FNS knows relatively little about food assistance program participation dynamics in Indian Territorial Organizations (ITOs). FNS is interested in knowing the basic demographics of FDPIR participants, why there has been a recent decline in participation, what are people’s criteria for choosing FSP vs. FDPIR and what are the dynamics of people cycling between FSP and FDPIR?

FNS is also concerned about improving its understanding and targeting of administrative funding. How much does it cost to administer the basic program? What are the cost drivers? What are the main causes of administration cost differences among tribes? What is an equitable, workable administrative funding structure for FDPIR?

Aldridge also indicated that a major area of FNS’ concern is nutrition education in ITOs. How can FNS most effectively deliver nutrition education to tribes? She pointed out that, currently, ITO’s are not leveraging the funds available from FSNE (Food Stamp Nutrition Education) Program.

Another area FNS considers important is issue of traditional foods in FDPIR. While FNS is sympathetic to the desire among some for traditional foods to be a part of FDPIR food packages, generally, the cost is prohibitive because of low demand. Bison is a good example.

USDA has provided Bison through FDPIR for a number of years with ear-marked funding, however, the cost is quite high compared to other meats. How can tribes help to increase the demand for traditional foods to make them more affordable? Finally, USDA is interested in finding more efficient, user-friendly ways of delivering commodities to tribes. USDA has already conducted the Prime Vendor Pilot program to evaluate an alternative FDPIR commodity distribution system intended to improve program operations and administrative efficiency while improving product acceptability and procurement flexibility, and reduce Federal staff resources in the food ordering and delivery process.³ While the Prime Vendor pilot turned out to be user-friendly, it was quite expensive. Aldridge said that USDA is interested in testing the effect of the Southwest hybrid pilot, a similar project which appears to be more cost-effective. Another area of concern is about food choices and availability at reservation food outlets (*see* Hillabrant, 5, *supra*).

There are programs that need further study for the Native populations, i.e., WIC and Senior Farmer's Market. Can these programs be instrumental in providing better foods to reservations and elders, as well as controlling diabetes and other health concerns? Policy changes are sorely needed, as in Alaska with the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC). This conference, "Dena' Nena' Henash ("Our Land Speaks"), has been in existence since 1962 and a non-profit corporation since 1971 working on behalf of its member Tribes. TCC is an intertribal consortium made up of 37 federally recognized Alaska Native Tribes and 5 non-recognized villages/Native groups located in Interior Alaska. From 1971 to the present, TCC has acted as the political, economic, legal, and social advocate as a non-profit entity charged with meeting the governmental, health, and social needs of our Tribes."⁴

The floor was then opened for discussion and questions. Gundersen brought up the analogy of the identification of "Hispanics" and "American Indians within surveys." In many cases, researchers would like to have more information based on, respectively, country of origin and tribal affiliation. Instead, inferences must be made for the broad categories which may lead to policy recommendations which are not completely relevant for all groups. Joe indicated that the IHS format for geographic distribution, i.e., Plains vs. Southwest vs. Northwest, is good, however, this leaves out the urban population. What about food insecurity in urban areas? These populations are diverse because of marriage patterns, length of time there, and economic levels. These are issues that should be further addressed.

Hillabrant then stated that it is incumbent upon us as researchers to include historical references to racism, genocide, Policy (removal, etc) so people understand the significance of the problem. This is integral to a discussion regarding Indians who live in urban areas.

Another issue inherent in all tribal areas is that of environmental concerns and "stakeholders." Jaime Eyrich, Instructional Specialist with the Native Peoples Technical Assistance Office at The University of Arizona asked about how to speak to environmental issues blanketing regional tribes, specifically addressing health and dietary concerns with food and air pollution. Austin agreed that it is a problem. The Shivwits Paiutes in the St. George, Utah region share the environmental overflow from housing developments that are encroaching right up to the boundary of the reservation. Louisiana tribes and concerns over access to shrimping areas are other areas affected by availability of assets and supplies (or lack thereof).

³ USDA, 2006, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/Published/CNP/FILES/FDPIRPrimeVendor.htm>).

⁴ (For more information on Tanana Chiefs, see website at <http://www.tananachiefs.org/corporate/welcome.html>).

Joe reiterated that storytelling is important, not only to researchers but to the tribal members. We need to address how we can best get beyond the “culturally sensitive” like pretty pictures being shown in a pamphlet or questionnaire. One example of a successful method is the arthritis research mobile unit. Ruben Naranjo, a Tohono O’odham graduate student in American Indian Studies, University of Arizona, was hired to develop a brochure picturing Tohono O’odham people living now, not romanticized in the ethnographic present. The portrayal of living people in the community personalized the message, and now Tohono O’odham people talk about arthritis as an important health issue. Through this method of delivery, the message became incorporated into the community.

Review of Research Approaches and Challenges

Theresa Cullen began the afternoon session by addressing the work that IHS is doing in evaluation, specifically using datasets, with a major focus on healthcare and data quality.. The Resource and Patient Management System (RPMS), is comprised of over 60,000 data fields, over 60 different clinical and practice management applications; this health information system includes data on over 1.8 million people. User populations are defined by those who accessed services at the health care facility at least once within last 3 years. There are approximately 1.3-1.4 million people who use the Indian Health Service as a primary health care provider. The drivers for data in health are “Actionable Data.” Tribal and other Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) have been trained over the years to include local community members on their IRB’s. IHS does support a national IRB that reviews research that has been approved by local IRB’s.

“On-the-fly” queries in the RPMS dataset are available from the local facility using the Q man application in RPMS. In addition, the National Data Warehouse is available for additional in-depth data evaluation. However, one must have appropriate local clearance to use local data sets; appropriate national clearance is required to access the National data Warehouse. IHS maintains a website on research information and upcoming events: <http://www.ihs.gov>.

Currently, RPMS data includes traditional measurements (including BMI), as well as educational information. IHS is in the process of updating the current dietary application to include community based data (for instance, WIC data) as well as more in depth ambulatory based diet information. This application should be developed and released within 12 months. It may be helpful to include people from the USDA during the requirements phase of the next version of this application.

Austin provided an overview of research in Indian communities. A major question is how to work with tribes in order to do research in Native communities. She described steps in participatory research as follows:

- Define the partnership (planning group often includes intertribal organizations);
- Contact the tribes to establish participants and potential roles;
- Have an orientation meeting;
- Design the research/outreach activities;
- Conduct the research/outreach activities;
- Analyze and share results.

Her key tenets of Community-Based research are:

- Foster collaboration among community members and researchers (including students);
- Engage all in reflective practice and reciprocal learning;
- Build the capacity of community groups to create change;
- Balance research and action;

Practice inter-and multi-disciplinary work;
Situating community concerns in a larger context.

Austin stressed that it is very important to establish government-to-government relationships. The question we should be asking is “Why are we doing this? Who’s setting the agenda?” We are certainly expected to engage in best practices. For instance, in this report (see Finegold, Pindus, et al., 2005) who designed the research question? Of major concern is that we pay attention to the needs of the populations we study. Austin also commented that community-based research helps students at tribal colleges learn about tribal governance, research methods, IRBs and decision making, using critical thinking and best practices.

Mark Bauer provided an account of the inception of the ERS grant process at Diné College. Rather than go through a lengthy IRB process the first year, they performed a study of convenience stores and the products they sell on the reservation. (Bauer has since become a member of the Navajo IRB). The Navajo Nation Research Act that governs the Navajo IRB mandates that Navajo communities and Navajo culture be respected and protected as well as individuals. The College’s second project was to assess the nutritional status of children in the Head Start program. There are now Chapter resolutions of support for this project. This is consistent with the Navajo IRB’s requirement that communities be informed and consenting of the research. The IRB process also calls for briefing other local agencies and offices on the research and securing letters of support. The various groups through which they negotiated, including the parent groups, helped improve the research. It can be a time consuming process, but a partnership relationship is usually forged. Researchers may go before IRB many times before securing approval. All presentations and publications from the research must also be specifically approved each time you change the aspects of study you wish to present to different audiences. There are many opportunities for further research, but it is important to be aware of Navajo Nation guidelines. They merely want to know the results of any study first rather than read them in a paper or publication.

Joseph Hiller, Assistant Dean for Native American Programs, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs) at The University of Arizona referred to the ERS project on the Hopi reservation. Matt Livingston is stationed at Hopi doing research through the small grants project. People in the villages were asked, and were asking each other: where do you get your corn? How are you planting it? The crux of the program in key villages was to identify women, primarily, to develop research questions regarding their own issues and what they think about regarding food. Community members learn through their own involvement in research. Our outreach extension people are community members and educators, not tribal leaders, law enforcement officers or administrators. Cultural resource offices and IRBs are in place at Hopi, but what is really important is to have a semi-permanent person in the community to keep track of changes that occur. Hiller provided a suggestion for research in Indian Country: slow it down and get some traction in the community; stretch out the research and do some longitudinal studies so we, as researchers, can actually learn, but also be present in order to gain trust and make a difference in the community long-term. He also added, as an aside, that outreach and extension are different; outreach cannot be paid for by education funds and that can be a problem.

Jennie Joe commented that the IHS dataset is very valuable, but it is clinic-based. We also need to look at who’s at risk, and this requires further evaluation within the community. Hiller brought up another fact about IRBs, and that universities do not accommodate the natural resource studies that involve Native communities and their resources, but not necessarily human

subjects per se. Austin echoed that, in that we, specifically at the University of Arizona, don't have an IRB process to protect communities, only individuals. There should probably be a modification to IRBs to reflect this. Basically, the IRB isn't required for studying a community or environmental issue, but the people in that community are ultimately affected.

Joe stated that research questions are now being generated in tribal communities, Native people identifying pressing needs and taking those questions to researchers and asking for studies addressing those needs. One example is the current genetic studies for diabetes research, because few of the dietary and lifestyle changes are helping with this epidemic. The reasons for the changes in attitude are varied, and cannot be simply listed, but often times gaming tribes are more willing to spend their money on research issues; another factor is because there are needs that aren't being addressed or questions that aren't being answered.

Halpern told of her visit to the Gila River Indian Reservation near Phoenix Arizona (see <http://www.gric.nsn.us/>) for the purpose of gathering information on the issue of obesity and American Indians/Alaska Natives. This community has a very high rate of diabetes and a very high unemployment rate, even with the presence of several casinos. Critical psychosocial factors in the community include a high incidence of deaths, depression, and methamphetamine use. While health researchers have emphasized genetic factors as contributors to obesity in this community, community members point to psychosocial factors as primary. The Gila River community utilizes a behavior health model which includes wellness centers, breastfeeding promotion, and home-visiting. In addressing obesity, the Health Corporation and community staff focus on increasing physical activity rather than on obesity or diabetes. Simple methods that make use of the five senses are used in educational efforts. The community is bringing an expert on motivational interviewing to speak to them as they have experienced a high drop-out rate among persons involved in obesity and diabetes programs.

Using National Surveys to Examine Native Americans

Gundersen then discussed his work with food and security rates with American Indian and non-Native, and food stamp participation rates and food assistance on American Indian reservations. To date, his work has concentrated on the former. He finds that, as expected, given the worse economic conditions facing American Indians their food insecurity levels are generally higher than non-American Indians. However, the magnitude and significance of these differences differ depending on the choice of food insecurity measure. If, instead, only the food insecurity rate had been analyzed, the picture of food insecurity among American Indians vs. non-American Indians would be markedly different. Even after controlling for other factors in multivariate frameworks, these comparisons between American Indians and non-American Indians remain.

His future work on both food insecurity and food assistance programs will use a new technique to better identify whether someone lives on-or-off a reservation. In particular, he will use the IPUMS (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, see [http:// www.ipums.umn.edu/](http://www.ipums.umn.edu/)), to identify areas with 100,000 or more residents and, within those areas, identify reservations in those areas.

Joe considers large datasets to be problematic because of notification issues (many Indian households have no telephone). Also, there are identification issues, especially in hospitals or on death certificates, where people are identified as American Indian when they're not, or vice-versa. Austin concurred. Identification, especially in the South, is critical; there is a different affiliation with tribes, as well as black/white issues. This changes over time with identification

and racism but also positive education in American Indian studies, etc. A key is to look at “when it is popular to be Indian” for economic or cultural reasons. Hillabrant added that analysis by IHS is looking at underreporting and errors/misclassification of American Indian persons in the National death index.

Pindus recounted her review of a New York Times series regarding diabetes in Spanish Harlem. A portion of that article alludes to the issues of race and poverty: “The fact that East Harlem is roughly 90 percent Hispanic and black, groups believed to have a genetic predisposition to the disease, explains part of the problem. There are also other factors: bad food habits, little exercise, rampant poverty and, according to health officials, poor access to medical care” (N.R. Kleinfeld, “Living at an Epicenter of Diabetes, Defiance and Despair,” Published: January 10, 2006).

Setting Priorities and Next Steps

David Smallwood provided a summary and overview of issues he heard raised at the summit. There was certainly a much greater appreciation of the challenges of conducting research in Indian country, citing the need for partnerships, establishing a research relationship with tribes, and developing a long-term agenda. He stated that the ERS research priorities for this summit were focused primarily on food assistance and its relationship to the needs and wellbeing of Native Americans. Research partnering is very important. This came through loud and clear from Federal partners, researchers, and tribal members. Partnering with IHS should be looked into seriously. In addition, the potential of noninvasive data collections such as through supermarkets, purchases and sales data, should be investigated as a research method

From ERS’s perspective, psycho-social and behavioral components are needed in surveys addressing diet and obesity issues. ERS is involved in a broad-based food consumption and marketing data initiative. As one component of this initiative, ERS has developed and added a diet/health knowledge module to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). This module could be adapted to surveys of Native Americans.

Better use of food program administrative data was cited as another unobtrusive and inexpensive research data source. It is important to “follow the money”.

Tribal heterogeneity was identified as a research issue. There was general discussion on the potential of grouping tribes together by common attributes such as geographical location, population size, region, or tribal attributes. ERS focuses primarily on reservation Indians because of limited resources. One of the costliest area for future research is the collection of dietary information. Although this is viewed as important, cost will be a likely deterrent to future work.

Aldridge maintained that the USDA is interested in practical application of delivering commodities. They need more information so they will not risk “flying blind.” Also, information gathering needs to occur regarding food stamp use and nutrition on reservations.

Smallwood asked the participants for short synopses of the “Low-hanging fruit” issues, i.e., issues that should be addressed soon and quickly. Below are their responses:

Pindus: Design demonstrations on issues we identified, and include evaluations.

Gundersen: We need more research on American Indians/Non-American Indians on reservations and Non-American Indians off reservations.

Hillabrant: Get a sense of what people are eating, target and focus on Alaska Native villages, and the single village store. Look at records of what people buy, what they sell. Look at

Navajo trading posts. What do we know already: people in general, American Indians in particular, don't eat right. We know what they should eat. Just go into the communities, and let's work together, we all know what good foods are, so let's work together and change the behavior.

Kuhn: Take a look at IHS data sources; ERS should add to these and enhance them. Also, Alaska Native [Tanana] Chiefs looking at food stamp program eligibility. The programs should be community driven. How do we channel Native people to take lead on research questions?

Finegold: Urban Institute is providing internships and training for college graduates for about a year. This is a skills teaching policy for Native people.

Nelson: We need more time and long-term commitments, and a more realistic time frame in which to carry out the research.

White: Ask the community what they need. The question "what do you need" is a good one to start using. Involve people in the community, do participatory research; when conducting research, set the context in history.

Joe: So many ways to look. What's doable? Data collection should result in periodic reports that launch exploration of application of knowledge to programs. Look at existing data in collaboration like training students at Community Colleges and use the dataset; create skills that can be used in the future.

Bauer: We need to see more emphasis on training.

Stauss: Perhaps it is important to use visuals, films, and stories.

Clauson: Make changes, and then take ownership of it. Communities need incentives and information on what the changes mean to them.

Halpern: Capacity building for faculty and students; also, do smaller studies, some studies focusing on urban components as well, lessons learned about urban Indians. We need more qualitative components in these studies.

Austin: What should we do? Tribes aren't here in this room to say what they want. Put it out to the tribes and ask "what to do?"

Joe: You can go to "research in IHS Native Country" conferences (for Native Researchers).

Eyrich: Create more internships and outreach work for students. Research cannot be learned through reading books, it must be in the field, hands-on. Supplement research methods classes with actual research, and create it, provide it, monitor it. Also, create a training institute on research for tribal members.

White: Regarding her work in Denver: they had training sessions for researchers; build capacity with community members working on research.

Joe: Train communities how to look at and analyze their own data, such as someone working with this information (Food Stamps) to do this. These people are already employed.

Appendix A
Participants
Friday, January 27, 2006
Westward Look Resort, Tucson, Arizona

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