

Tips for Improving RFP Response Rates in Rural School Systems Serving Tribal Communities

Here are some compiled tips for best approaching rural school systems serving tribal communities with an RFP:

- Ensure the application paperwork is as simple and straightforward as possible. Don't hold an essay contest!
- Personal contact and communication is essential. Look for meeting with state tribal and tribal education leaders, special education directors and staff, and Indian Education directors and staff, and parent advisory committees. You can never have too much personal contact!
- The potential applicants approached first may not have time to work on an application, or be trusted to connect with involved other parts of the school system. Cast a wide net!
- Use data to help schools "see" their Native students and how many there are.
- Design a visibly reasonable ration of data collection and reporting to the offered grant amount. Don't design an under-funded research project, design a supported and embedded implementation and improvement project!
- Aim for sublime yet simple clarity in describing the funding opportunity: Who is it for? What is it for? Why?
- Help your intended applicants see themselves and their students in the grant opportunity: "This is about you, we invite you specifically, and here's why you should be applying..." Put it in the very first lines of the RFP information for anyone.
- Give the phase of informing and raising awareness about the opportunity the time it needs in order to be understood, attractive and truly accessible.
- Use social media to get the message going out and the interest coming in! #socialmediaisreal
- Know and understand that for small schools, with few staff, an application is an Act of Love, a sacrifice of personal time and energy, from someone with a passion for their students and what you are talking about.
- Bring people together into discussion circles and use dialogue to talk about what the grant opportunity should and can do in their schools, families and communities: who, what when specifics and how to apply.
- Keep the RFP playing field level for small school systems that will tell you, "We don't have grant writers!"
- Always, always use the true count of students who identify as American Indian, including students who identify also with other government devised race and ethnicity categories.
- Clearly explain how the opportunity is intended to support the work, schools, families, and community, not add to the challenges and work already faced by the schools, families and community.

