

FINDING A COMMON GROUND

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPS A FUNCTIONING STATE-TRIBE RELATIONSHIP

Larry Maynard, District Engineer at District 6 for the New Mexico Department of Transportation, could not fulfill the federal mandates. Requirements to provide adequate highway and local road access to New Mexico's nearly two million residents were complicated by the regulations of 22 federally recognized Native American tribes and their reservations.

Maynard's district includes highways connecting other regions in the state and District 6 handles traffic between New Mexico's three neighboring states. NMDOT also oversees traffic on multiple reservations, including New Mexico's largest, the Navajo Nation.

Relations between Navajo leaders and NMDOT had been counterproductive and tense for years. Poor communication had left the tribal government unwilling to share their land for road equipment storage. Meanwhile, NMDOT officials, frustrated with long travel times and the inability to effectively reach far corners of District 6, grew unwilling to solve Navajo transportation needs that required heavy equipment.

In 2002, Maynard attended training with The Pacific Institute and came to understand that "[NMDOT's] entire relationship with the tribes was based on a dysfunctional past."

Within a year and a half, Maynard developed a network of new communications with the Navajo Nation and other tribes. Subsequent agreements were formed, including improved service for the Navajo Nation and new equipment facilities for the department.

The Pacific Institute's *"Imagine 21"* training helped us to transform the way we communicated, working toward new ideas and making progress," said Maynard.

DIAGNOSIS

Regulations with Restrictions and No Communication

Because NMDOT had no rights to reservation land, highways and roads could not be maintained without reservation assistance. "The reality of the situation was pretty bad," Maynard said, attempting to solve land and transportation issues with many separate tribal governments. "All the decisions [NMDOT] made were expectant of bad confrontations."

Although the tense state-tribe relationships were not unique to Maynard or the Navajo Nation, it had become a large part of his daily concerns. Specifically, the Navajo were not receiving basic transportation services. Also, any services to NMDOT's District 6 were costly and time consuming, leaving one of the state's busiest regions without many necessary repairs.

Attempts at negotiating a solution were contentious, further cementing both NMDOT's and the Navajo Nation's unwillingness to compromise.

INTERVENTION

Grassroots Reorganization Starts at the Top

A breakthrough in negotiations started with a shift of NMDOT leadership. New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson appointed Rhonda Faight as state Transportation Secretary in 2002. At this time, Faight, Maynard, and a few other NMDOT administrators attended one of The Pacific Institute's



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Imagine 21™ training sessions, sparking a reevaluation of departmental relationships, including tribal relations.

"I was particularly impressed at The Pacific Institute's ability to incorporate more of what we do at the Department of Transportation into the training," said Maynard. "They used the same training tools they had before, but discussion was based around what we do and the specialized needs of each group."

After Faught's appointment, The Pacific Institute's *Imagine 21* program became an essential training tool and template for problem solving in the general office and all districts.

MEASURABLE RESULTS

Sharing the Vision for a Better Relationship

Almost immediately after the *Imagine 21* training began in NMDOT's District 6 and general office, employees started to approach relationships by emphasizing better communications and reevaluating many longstanding practices.

Faught made partnership with tribal government one of NMDOT's seven guiding principles, stressing respect and regular consultation between governments as a means to improve transportation.

With a new Government-to-Government Relations Unit in place, NMDOT is now forming "Joint Power Agreements" across New Mexico to find a middle ground between the needs for tribal transportation and department accessibility. After decades of confrontation and miscommunication, NMDOT has reached agreements with more than half of the tribal governments, and has begun negotiations with the rest – all less than two years after The Pacific Institute training began.

Maynard said he was amazed at the progress made with the Navajo Nation. "We live in a constantly changing reality. It wasn't enough for us to create a vision; we had to transfer it to our partners."

Through listening to concerns, steady communication and creating a shared vision between NMDOT and the Navajo government, Navajo Department of Transportation established their first maintenance yard on Navajo land. With his newfound ability to quickly and effectively solve traffic concerns, on the Navajo reservation and in far reaching areas of the District, Maynard assists other NMDOT officials with similar negotiations across the state.

"We've already created 20 different partnerships with tribes," said Maynard. "Some are huge, some are small, but they're all accomplishments we couldn't have achieved before [The Pacific Institute's] the *Imagine 21* program."

The Pacific Institute, Inc. is a Seattle-based education and consulting company, delivering solutions based on applied psychology and best business practices. Since 1971, the Institute has helped individuals and organizations manage change, achieve goals, and transform culture.



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