

## GRANT PROFILE

### COMMUNITIES OF FOCUS

The University of Arizona Board of Regents, Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities aims to improve the transition of Native youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) in their state by using a traditional and culturally responsive design appropriate for tribal communities. Specifically, the Arizona Community Collaborations for Employment (CCE) team aims to develop an indigenous transition model that the 22 federally recognized Tribal Nations in Arizona can use. The model design will allow other Native citizens to scale and adapt for use across the United States. To achieve this goal, the Arizona CCE team leverages the CCE grant to pilot their transition model in three distinct Tribal Nations located in Southern and Northern Arizona.<sup>1</sup> Each of these tribes is a unique political entity with its own culture, language, and community needs. By piloting transition plans in these diverse contexts and catering their approach to the unique needs of each tribe, the Arizona CCE team hopes to develop a transition model and share learnings forward to improve transition outcomes for all Native youth with ID/DD.

### GRANT RECIPIENT

Arizona Board of Regents, University of Arizona (Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities)

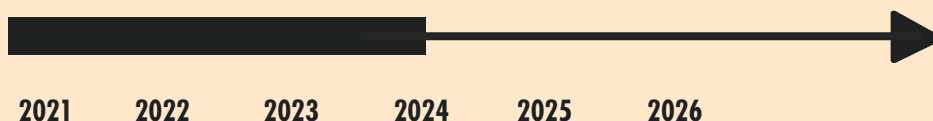
### PROJECT TITLE

Finds Their Way: Communities for Youth Transition

### ABOUT THE CCE GRANTS

Among transition age youth with disabilities, employment is associated with improved health outcomes, increased quality of life, greater opportunities for socialization and relationship development, and a greater sense of belonging.<sup>2</sup> Yet, many students and youth with disabilities do not have the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities to pursue higher education, training, and careers. To address these disparities, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) issued CCE grants to increase and enhance collaborations across existing local systems in one or more communities. CCE grants aim to maximize a seamless experience and outcome of youth with ID/DD as they transition between school and post-secondary education or competitive integrated employment (CIE) in the community. ACL awarded seven five-year CCE grants starting September 30, 2021, and ending September 29, 2026, through its [Projects of National Significance program](#). This mid-term report summarizes grant activity through February 2024.

#### CCE Mid-Term Report and Grant Timeline



<sup>1</sup> In alignment with the University of Arizona's [Tribal Consultation Policy](#), the Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities does not disclose Tribal Names and locations unless permission is provided by the Tribal Nations.

<sup>2</sup> Castruita Rios, Y., Park, S., Chen, X., & Tansey, T. N. (2023). Collaborations to Support Employment Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities. *Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Journal*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.52017/001c.72655>



## ARIZONA CCE PILOTS/COMMUNITIES (as of December 2023)

Community Name	Tribal Nation 1	Tribal Nation 2	Tribal Nation 3
Estimated Total Population <sup>3</sup>	<b>229 high school students</b>	<b>Over 100 high school students</b>	<b>612 high school students</b>

### OBJECTIVES AND FRAMEWORKS

The Arizona CCE team aims to improve outcomes for Native youth with ID/DD by increasing access to long-term CIE careers and otherwise enhancing opportunities for skill development. More specifically, the Arizona CCE grant objectives are to:

1. Establish a Cross Cultural Tribal Community Collaborative to address transition outcomes for Native Youth with ID/DD;
2. Design a Native American-led transition to employment framework for tribal youth responsive to culture and identified needs focused on improving education, post-secondary, and employment outcomes; and
3. Establish an effective, seamless, and sustainable transition approach for Native American youth with disabilities at the state and local levels.

To guide their project work, the Arizona CCE team leverages an indigenized approach of identifying and addressing challenges with youth transition using a traditional and culturally responsive design. The indigenized approach includes the use of Talking Circles<sup>4</sup> and the foundation of indigenous “ways of knowing.” This approach is guided by holistic, ecological, asset-based, and person- and family-centered frameworks.

<sup>3</sup> As reported by the Arizona CCE Team.

<sup>4</sup> Talking Circles are an indigenous traditional format of group discussion (akin to focus groups of particular community members) that has been utilized for centuries, including by the Arizona CCE team for other tribal-focused disability programs. Talking Circles are a “Practiced-Based Evidence” approach with generations of successful communication and partnership outcomes.



## STATE AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Variations in youth transition outcomes occur, in part, due to varying demographic, economic, political, and historical factors in each state. The following factors provide valuable context for the external conditions in which the Arizona CCE team implements their grant.

Since there are 22 distinct Tribal Nations in Arizona, the Arizona CCE team must design and implement CCE initiatives in a way that is culturally responsive to each tribe's unique context. For example, the Arizona CCE team must be intentional in establishing their partnerships within each Tribal Nation. Each Tribal Nation operates as its own political entity; therefore, the Arizona CCE team works closely with Tribal Council leadership to not only understand the needs of each tribe, but also to implement initiatives collaboratively. Likewise, the Arizona CCE team recognizes the variation in population makeup in each tribe, as they vary in size and contain multiple schools with diverse needs. In addition, each Tribal Nation has its own distinct culture, rich with their own unique languages and traditions. For example, each of Arizona's first three pilot communities includes two to three languages spoken within the community — English, indigenous language, and Spanish. The Arizona CCE team works to empower Native youth in tribes in a way that respects and enhances their traditions, for example, by hosting conversations through traditional Talking Circles.

Throughout the grant period, the Arizona CCE team experienced turnover in key personnel roles, both internally among their grant team and externally among their grant partners and communities of focus. As working with Tribal Nations requires trusting relationships, the resulting staffing constraints stalled certain grant activities. To mitigate the impact of staffing challenges, the Arizona CCE team worked extensively with their pilot communities to build trust and establish lasting partnerships over the first two years of the grant.

## GRANT ACTIVITIES BY STAGE



### COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE PILOT

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Each CCE grant established a community collaborative pilot – a broad range of diverse community partners involved in all aspects of the grant and representing stakeholders across developmental disabilities, education, advocacy, and employment settings.

#### *Community Collaborative Structure*

The Arizona CCE grant's community collaborative includes full and regional collaborative meetings and a steering committee that guides and advises on their project approach.



## ► Full and Regional Collaboratives

The Arizona CCE team designed their Cross-Cultural Community Collaborative as an opportunity to bring together all their partners. In the first two years of the grant, the collaborative met quarterly. As their work shifted toward their pilot communities, and to adapt to staffing changes, the Arizona CCE team now meets annually with all of their partners. The annual meetings coincide with the annual American Indian Youth Disability Summit and provide an opportunity for staff to showcase activities at each of their pilot sites and discuss feedback on any changes to their approach. The Arizona CCE team also meets with regional collaboratives of partners on an as-needed basis. The team continues to monitor for any additional changes they may need to make to their collaborative structure.

## ► Steering Committee

The Arizona CCE team's steering committee engages diverse members, including project staff, a tribal community consultant, an Elder Advisor, the director of their key partner Diverse Ability Incorporated, and youth leaders.

## *Community Collaborative Members, Roles, and Diversity*

The Arizona CCE team's community collaborative includes a diverse array of members, including representatives from American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Training and Technical Assistance Center, the tribal inclusive post-secondary program, tribal Elders, tribal non-profit organizations, tribal government departments, school personnel, provider organizations, an assistive technology program, and area employers. A key grant partner is Diverse Ability Incorporated, an Arizona nonprofit that fosters youth leadership initiatives. Diverse Ability Incorporated and the Arizona CCE team engage Native Arizona Youth Leaders in grant activities. For example, Diverse Ability Incorporated invited Native Youth Leaders to serve on the planning team for the American Indian Youth Disability Summit, held in April 2023, and two Native Arizona Youth Leaders presented specifically on the *Finds Their Way* project.

## *Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned*

Within the first two years of the grant, the Arizona CCE team fostered strong partnerships and collaboration with their partner tribes, in particular by fostering youth engagement and leadership. Recent internal and external staffing changes led the team to reassess their planned activities and engagement approaches in the second half of their grant. While the Arizona CCE team reestablishes partnerships in their communities of focus, they also consider how their community collaborative structure and approach can evolve to meet current project and partner needs.



## LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS



Landscape analyses for the CCE grants aim to assess community resources, strengths, needs, and gaps related to providing consistent and seamless services for youth with ID/DD and their families that promote opportunities for CIE, post-secondary education, and independent living.

### *Landscape Analysis Approach*

The Arizona CCE team took a two-pronged approach to their landscape analysis, starting with a statewide landscape analysis and then focusing specifically within each community.

#### ▶ **Statewide Analysis**

The Arizona CCE team first completed a statewide landscape analysis for Native youth in transition, with the goal of collecting data on the common issues and transition barriers that affect all Arizona tribes. The Arizona CCE team engaged partners from tribal communities, disability service providers, state agencies, and Tribal VR to collect data through a variety of sources, including state and partner data, school district input, tribal community visits, and surveys. The team also employed Talking Circles to engage diverse individuals across tribal affiliations and roles in group discussions with one another. Drawing on these data to create a statewide landscape analysis, the Arizona CCE team then developed an employment transition plan template for pilot communities to use for their community-specific analyses.

#### ▶ **Community-Specific Analyses**

Using the employment transition plan template, pilot communities assessed the availability of local resources, services, and supports to create community-specific analyses. This data collection facilitates the development of individualized transition plans, as the communities identified the relevant partners, resources, state agencies, and other organizations that serve as valuable assets for Native youth transitioning in their regional areas.

As the Arizona CCE team continues to work with their pilot communities for transition plan development and implementation, they will further develop their community-specific landscape analyses with input from Native youth on their goals, strengths, and barriers. The Arizona CCE team hopes the indigenized approach to their community-specific analyses will offer a wide range of supports for Native youth at the family and community levels, among tribal and state agencies, and beyond.



## ***Landscape Analysis Findings***

The statewide landscape analysis revealed common themes in the resource gaps affecting Native youth in transition, including a lack of diverse job opportunities on tribal lands, transportation barriers in non-urban tribal areas, few opportunities for self-advocacy and skill development, and inadequate communication channels between health and provider organizations who serve individuals with disabilities. The Arizona CCE team leverages these findings to inform and tailor their project activities within their pilot communities.

Although the Arizona CCE team continues to cater their project activities based on additional community-level data collection, the team developed initial initiative frameworks in collaboration with their pilot communities. Currently, the Arizona CCE team works in partnership with the pilot communities to develop a transition curriculum and activities based on each of their identified needs and existing infrastructure. In one Tribal Nation, for example, the team identifies strategies to help the school district expand upon existing pre-employment transition services.

## ***Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned***

The Arizona CCE team prioritizes collecting data for their landscape analysis in a culturally responsive manner to ensure their activities apply to diverse Native youth. In this respect, the team's use of Talking Circles with diverse tribal members allowed for broad data collection on the array of barriers impacting transition outcomes for Native youth. Additionally, the pilot community Tribal Nations identify their own needs, so the Arizona CCE team works collaboratively with the Tribal Nations to design initiatives. The Arizona CCE team views the landscape analysis as an ongoing process and hopes to engage the perspectives of more Native youth in their landscape analysis activities moving forward.



## **TRANSITION PLAN**

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### ***Transition Plan Development and Implementation***

Informed by landscape analysis findings, CCE grant recipients must develop and implement transition plans to address the needs of youth with ID/DD and their families. Each grant recipient develops and implements a unique transition plan approach, tailored to their community or communities' needs, to achieve their intended outcomes.

### ***Transition Plan Development Approach***

The Arizona CCE team developed an employment transition plan template for each of their pilot communities to assess and document the availability of local resources, services, and supports available to Native youth



as they transition. The transition plan templates guide each community to conduct their landscape analysis and create their own individualized transition plan by documenting community and cultural strengths and assets, as well as the challenges, needs, and gaps for Native youth with disabilities to attain CIE. The broader template allows communities to integrate their indigenous perspectives in the transition plans to situate students within their family, school, culture, and community contexts.

## ***Transition Plan Characteristics and Activities***

Transition plan activities for the Arizona CCE grant vary by pilot community. Their first three pilot communities began selecting and designing their transition plan activities, and one pilot community began implementation.

### **▶ Tribal Nation 1**

The pilot site team conducted an in-depth analysis of current resources and transition activities in their school district to develop a transition curriculum specific to this community's students. Based on this analysis, the Arizona CCE team collaborates with the Tribal Nation School District to design a credit-bearing high school class and after-school activities for students with ID/DD planning for transitions.

### **▶ Tribal Nation 2**

In addition to developing a transition curriculum, the pilot team identifies strategies to address capacity issues at their Tribal Education Department to support transition staff with high caseloads. The Arizona CCE team collaborates with the pilot community to address these concerns.

### **▶ Tribal Nation 3**

The pilot team is expanding on the pre-employment transition services in their schools provided by the Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities and the tribal government/school district. While looking to introduce more pre-employment transition service sites on tribal lands, the pilot team engages a more indigenized approach to these transition services funded by the state VR system.

The Arizona CCE team also conducts activities across communities related to youth engagement. The team will leverage their employment transition plan template to observe the full transition process for one to two youth within each pilot community to identify transition obstacles. In addition, the team launched the Youth-to-Youth Webinar series. Led by grant partner Diverse Ability Incorporated, in collaboration with Native Arizona Youth Leaders, the Youth-to-Youth Webinar series is a virtual forum in which indigenous youth discuss skills and opportunities, such as leadership, self-advocacy, and employment. In addition to empowering Native youth with skill development and self-advocacy skills, the webinar series helps the Arizona CCE team engage more youth perspectives in their data collection activities.



## Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Internal and external staff turnover paused the implementation of some transition activities at the Arizona pilot sites. In response, the Arizona CCE team devoted significant time and effort toward rebuilding relationships to ensure they have strong partnerships and trust as a foundation for their work.

Within the past year, the Arizona CCE team especially focused on fostering youth engagement in their project. In addition to the Youth-to-Youth Webinar series, which received positive feedback from participating Native youth, the Arizona CCE team also engaged youth at the Youth Leadership Forum, held at a tribal college in June 2023. Hosted by grant partner Diverse Ability Incorporated, the forum discussed topics such as self-determination, informed decision-making, leadership, and disability history and culture. Three Native Arizona Youth Leaders facilitated the event, which included additional content specific to Native American culture and history.



Each grant recipient will use process and summative evaluation techniques to analyze the delivery of project activities and determine the project's success in meeting intended outcomes.

## Methodology and Approach

The Arizona CCE team designed their evaluation as a collaboration with their pilot communities, driven by community values, experiences, and needs. The Arizona CCE team received advice from a tribal Elder with extensive VR experience when designing their evaluation approach. With their expertise and guidance, the Arizona CCE team chose to measure data points that represent meaningful community outcomes, such as data on the number of youth obtaining transition services per site and their post-secondary education and CIE outcomes. The team also employs an evaluation coordinator, who attends project activities like Talking Circles to listen to the perspectives of Native participants and collect activity feedback, such as perceptions of the activity's cultural responsiveness.

Beyond informing activities within their pilot communities, the Arizona CCE team hopes their evaluation findings can serve as an educational tool about collaborating with tribes, helping to promote better policies within Arizona that enhance collaboration between the state, tribes, and schools. The Arizona CCE team conducts specific policy-related activities, such as meeting with the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy on a monthly basis to discuss inclusion activities for Native populations with disabilities.





## *Intended Outcomes*

The Arizona CCE team tracks progress toward their intended outcomes in multiple ways, including surveys, Talking Circles, tracking new agreements with employers and new hires, and secondary data from pilot sites. They began collecting data for most intended outcomes and have some data for some outcomes, while other data will be available by the end of the grant.

### **LOOKING AHEAD**

- In collaboration with Native Arizona Youth Leaders, the Arizona CCE team is planning the fourth annual American Indian Youth Disability Summit in April.
- In addition to working with their three current pilot communities, the Arizona CCE team is exploring a potential fourth pilot community in partnership with a Tribal Nation representing a different geographic location within the state.