

TribalHub, in collaboration with valued partner NATRC, worked to survey and gather responses from tribes across the nation. We share this valuable data in an effort to keep tribes well informed of current practices across the industry. These findings and summary are delivered by NATRC.



## 2018 Tribal Government Benchmarking Survey – Deep Dive – Tribal Governance

### Overview

During the second half of 2018, Info-Tech Research Group, in partnership with TribalNet, conducted the 2018 Tribal Government Benchmarking Survey<sup>1</sup>. In this second, of three, deep dives InfoTech's Native American Technology Research Center (NATRC) explores some of the governance challenges that are unique to tribal nations, as indicated by the benchmarking survey results.

In spite of forced removals, mass-scale genocide, and many generations of historical trauma, tribal nations persist today and actively exercise their rights to determine their own governance structures in order to serve their citizens and continuously improve their communities. The administration of tribal governments in the U.S. is an intricate system that layers the sovereign powers of a tribal nation with numerous U.S. Congressional acts related to treaties, statutes, and precedence set by public laws.

Tribal nations provide countless programs and services that are custom-tailored for their citizens and communities. There are two distinct classifications for tribal nation programs and services: *self-administration* and *self-governance*. It is vital to explore the differences between these two classifications and understand their implications in order to appreciate the results of the benchmarking survey, as they relate to tribal governance.

Self-administration occurs when tribal nations implement programs and services designed outside the bounds of sovereignty, typically by the U.S. federal government. As a result, these self-administered programs and services must answer to priorities and criteria for success that have been developed outside of the tribal nation. In contrast, self-governance programs and services are designed, implemented, and continuously refined to meet the tribal nation's own criteria for success. The self-governance model increases a tribal nation's self-determination and empowers them to channel limited resources towards the programs and services that will provide the most positive and impactful change within their communities.

To further delineate between self-administration and self-governance; the latter ensures the tribal nation actively exercises its sovereign right to incorporate culture, heritage, and social interactions into programs and services while ensuring tribal jurisdiction and sovereignty concerns remain at the forefront of its efforts. Meanwhile, self-administered programs and services tend to lean towards the further assimilation and colonization of indigenous peoples so that they fall within mainstream U.S. government expectations and standards.

A layperson may wonder why tribal nations do not forego self-administration programs and services and rely solely on self-governance program and services. "There are several obstacles to tribal self-governance based on three thematic areas that have been identified in recent years: (1) outmoded bureaucratic processes; (2) lack of federal agency coordination; and, (3) regulations and laws that prevent tribal governments from equitable access to federal programs on par with state and local governments."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This survey was offered to and completed by federally recognized tribal employees in the United States.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ncai.org/policy-issues/tribal-governance>

## 2018 Tribal Government Benchmarking Survey – Deep Dive – Tribal Governance Analysis

Tribal governance is the foundation for how the government is brought to life via acts of sovereignty. True sovereignty is not merely a treaty, statute, or law laying lifeless on a piece of paper. Sovereignty takes on its power when the community is brought to action under strong and capable leadership. When sovereign actions are initiated by competent leadership, the stewardship of resources results in increased capital infrastructure that will endure beyond electoral terms and provide a competitive advantage for many generations to come.

Tribal nations face numerous known challenges with regards to governance<sup>3</sup>. Known contributing factors that increase a tribal nation's ability to self-govern to the highest potential, include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Counterproductive/rigid federal policies and regulations: that conflict with and thwart a tribal nation's own priorities
- Imposition/use of state-level development models: which have proven ineffective in tribal communities
- Limited tribal capacity to generate/analyze local market data: for the purposes of informing strategic development solutions
- Lack of sustained, discretionary funding: with most development programs heavily reliant on outside, short-term funding sources, making it difficult to design, implement, and sustain strategic development solutions over time
- Limitations on how outside funding can be spent: which inhibits the ability to forge innovative solutions tailored to the unique development needs and priorities of the service population and the tribal nation

Of course, there are many well-known challenges to tribal nation governance, some of which are listed above, but these are not the only challenges tribal nation's face as they pursue Nation Building efforts. The findings within the 2018 Tribal Nation Benchmarking Survey shine a light on lesser-known areas within the realm of governance. These are areas that tribal nations have direct control over.

As illustrated in Figure 1, 37% of respondents are not convinced tribal leaders are effective, and an additional 4% of respondents were unsure of the level of effectiveness within tribal leadership. This finding creates an opportunity for consideration and improvement at the highest level of leadership within tribal nations. Effective governance requires effective oversight, strategic design, and an openness to change and innovation. The characteristics attributed to tribal leaders, shown in Figure 2, uncover multiple areas for improvement within the governance of tribal nations.

### Effectiveness of Board Members

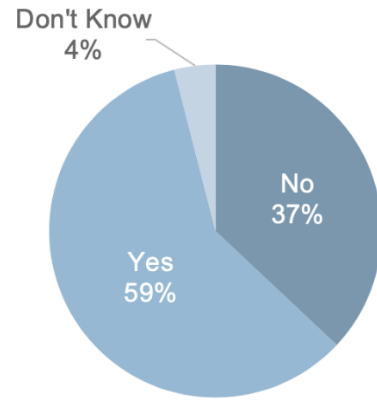


Figure 1: Effectiveness at board level. 2018 Tribal Government Benchmarking Survey

### Board Member Characteristics

- Only 50% understand the boundary between board oversight and actively managing
- Only 50% understand the strategy
- 60% do NOT tolerate dissent

Figure 2: Characteristics at board level. 2018 Tribal Government Benchmarking Survey

<sup>3</sup> [Tribal Workforce Development: A Decision-Framing Toolkit](#)

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### Solution:

The areas for improvement uncovered in the survey are squarely within the realm of control of tribal nations. Capabilities that contribute to governance effectiveness and strategy should be implemented and measured over time. One way to improve the efficiency of tribal nations is to add clarity and transparency around roles and responsibilities. Do not blur the lines between governance and management; each has a unique position to play. Confusing these responsibilities often result in wasted time and confusion around ownership<sup>4</sup>. A clear delineation between the governance provided by tribal leaders and the management of day-to-day operations will result in a greater understanding of the roles and responsibilities within the tribal nation; this will increase real and perceived effectiveness ratings.

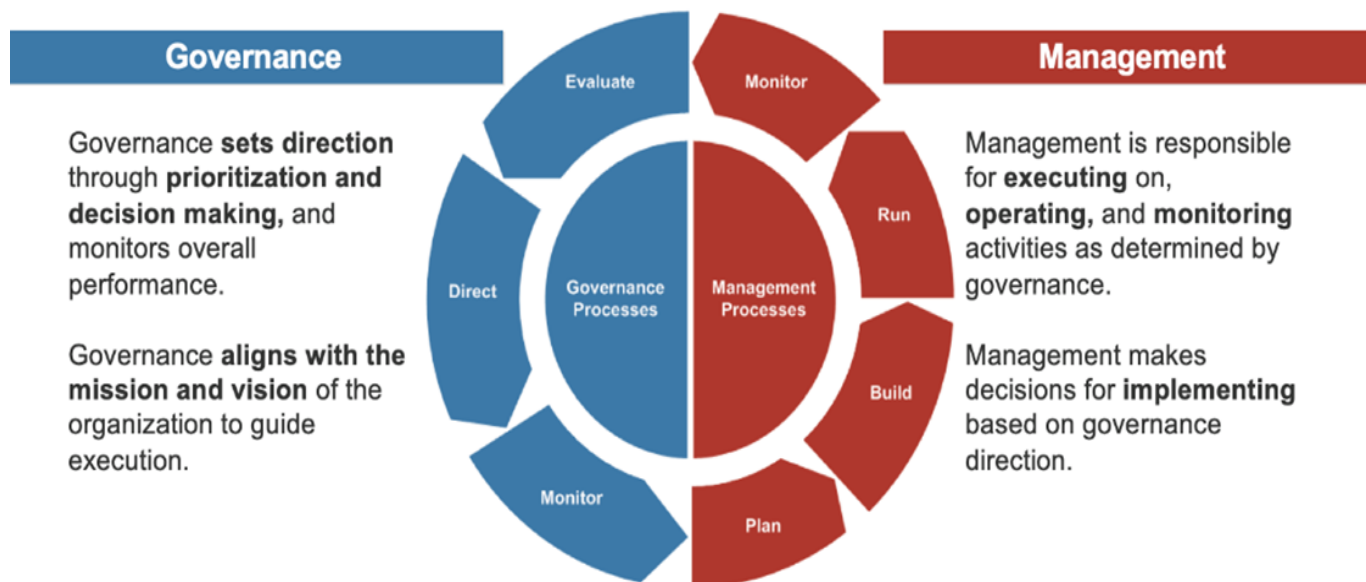


Image Source: ISACA, 2012

Figure 3: Governance & Management - Redesign IT Governance to Drive Optimal Business Results

We can further explore this concept by identifying which capabilities are contained within the governance side of the model shown in Figure 3: Provide strategic direction for the tribal nation; Ensure objectives are met; Set the risk standards or profile; and Delegate resources responsibly.

Tribal nations can leverage Info-Tech's proven 4-step process, shown in Figure 4, to assess their governing bodies to determine the areas of improvement that are

- 1 Identify All Governing Bodies**  
 Some bodies govern intentionally, and some govern through habit and practice. Outline all bodies that take on an element of governance.
- 2 Create a Governance Structure Map**  
 Configure the structural relationships for the governing bodies using the structure map.
- 3 Reveal Strengths and Weaknesses**  
 Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the governance structure, authority definitions, processes, and membership.
- 4 Establish Governance Guidelines**  
 Based on the **SoBC**, express clear and applicable guidelines to improve on the weaknesses while retaining the strengths of your governance framework.

Figure 4: Assess the Governance Framework

<sup>4</sup> [Redesign IT Governance to Drive Optimal Business Results](#)

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necessary in order to achieve improved results, while retaining tribal self-determination.

To effectively implement a practical governance framework, a tribal nation needs to analyze what makes up the governance framework and determine how the components can be applied to their unique governance challenges. There are four major elements of the governance framework, as listed in Figure 5.

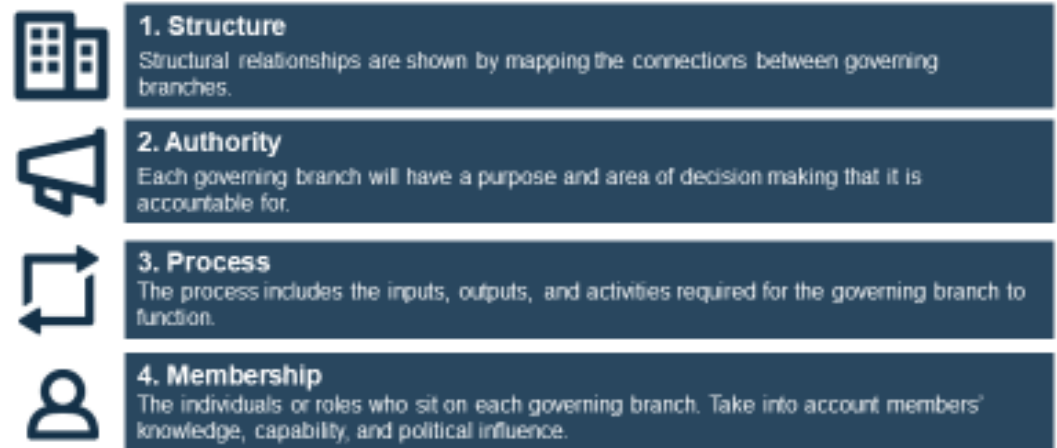


Figure 5: Governance Framework Elements

Ultimately, each tribal nation must leverage the business acumen it has gained from traditional knowledge, its self-determination, and self-governance to determine the best future state for its unique situation. Info-Tech provides research, as shown in Figure 6, that facilitates meaningful discussions and decision-making processes that will lead to an optimal future state design for a unique and scalable tribal nation governance structure.

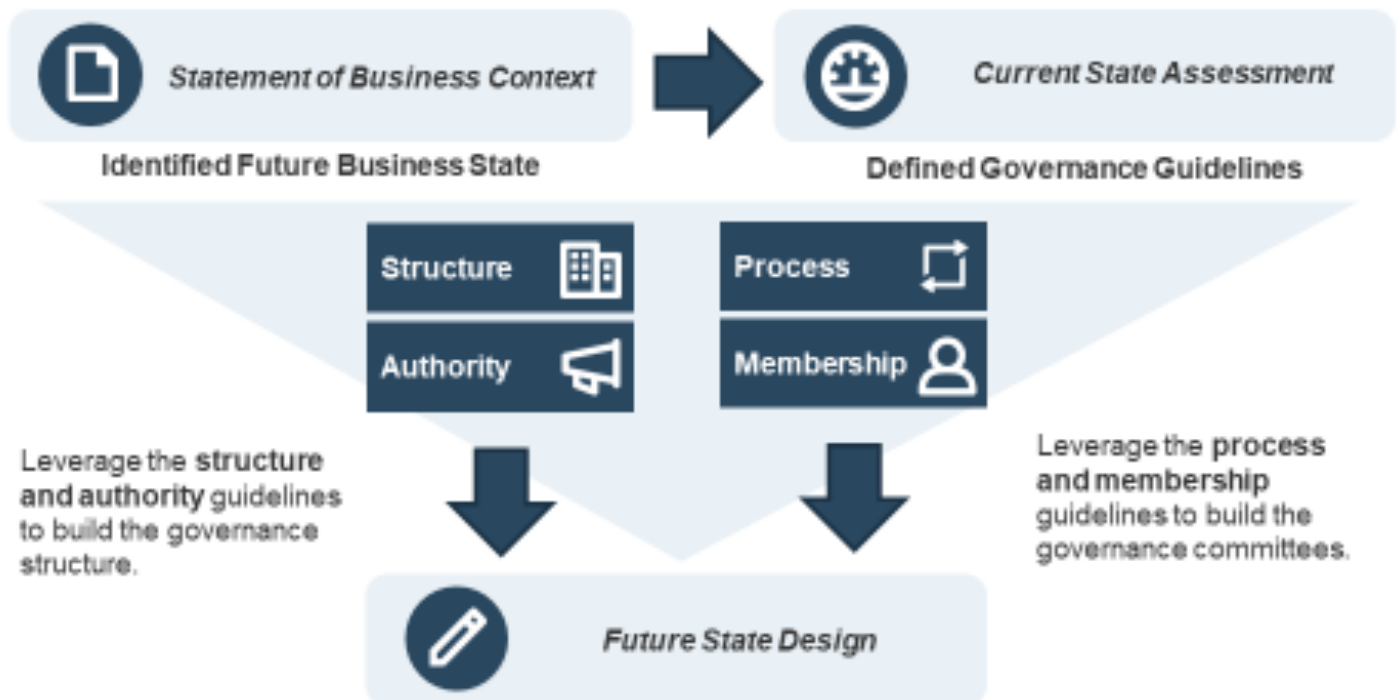


Figure 6: Implement a Governance Framework Redesign

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Linda Marie Arredondo was born in Kansas, under the Full Moon of the Big Bear. She is a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation (CPN). Prior to joining Info-Tech, Linda Marie served as the Director of Information Technology for her own tribe. In this role, Arredondo provided oversight for the design and management of technology infrastructure for CPN's executive, government and judicial branches. Additionally, Arredondo provided IT governance and oversight for CPN's gaming, hospitality, enterprise, industrial, and healthcare initiatives. Linda Marie Arredondo has 20+ years of successful IT leadership experience. Arredondo gained this experience while leading IT organizations in a variety of industries, including government, finance, healthcare, enterprise, and emergency management. Arredondo received a Bachelor of Science degree in Business, summa cum laude, from St. Gregory's University in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

About the Native American Technology Research Center (NATRC):

Info-Tech's Native American Technology Research Center (NATRC) focuses on providing practical and tactical advice for CIOs, VPs and Director level IT professionals who serve tribal nations. Evaluating vendors and products specific to the needs of tribal nations is a revolutionary way to help evaluate current and future technology. Increased value and accelerated results can be realized by combining NATRC's research publications with analyst calls and consulting services that leverage best practices across four major IT focus areas: IT/Business Alignment, Applications, Infrastructure and Risk Management.

About Info-Tech:

With a paid membership of over 30,000 members worldwide, Info-Tech Research Group ([www.infotech.com](http://www.infotech.com)) is the global leader in providing tactical, practical Information Technology research and analysis. Info-Tech Research Group has an eighteen-year history of delivering quality research and is North America's fastest-growing full-service IT analyst firm.

About TribalHub:

After 20 years of service dedicated to Native American government, gaming/hospitality, enterprise and health industries, TribalHub leverages extensive industry experience to offer a set of products and service divisions through TribalHub's four core operational divisions; TribalFocus, TribalValue, TribalWise and the long-standing TribalNet. Bringing all of this together is the TribalHub membership; connecting industry vendors and Native American organizations and enterprises with benefits and discounts within every division of the TribalHub family.