VI. ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE ALASKA NATIVE EMPLOYMENT

Here we look at some of the organizations that are specifically intended to help improve Alaska Native hire.

Alaska Human Resource Investment Council

The Alaska Human Resource Investment Council (AHRIC) was established by law in 1995 to replace three previous councils: the Alaska Job Training Council, the Governor's Council on Vocational Education, and the Employment Security Advisory Council. AHRIC is the lead state planning and coordinating entity for federal, state, and local employment training and human resource programs. The council provides coordinated oversight of job training programs throughout the state to ensure effective and efficient training leading to jobs for Alaskans.

While AHRIC does not operate any programs, it oversees and makes policy decisions for more than 17 state, federal, and local employment training and education programs in Alaska. The FY98 appropriation to operate these 17 programs in Alaska totaled more than $64 million in federal and state funds. The 22-member council is appointed by the governor, and includes the lieutenant governor and the commissioners of Labor, Commerce, Education, Community and Regional Affairs, and Health and Social Services. Other members represent business and labor organizations, Native organizations, educational institutions, and employment service providers.

According to the council’s executive director, the staff and council members have worked well with the Knowles/Ulmer administration on many issues. These include: (1) working with the Department of Health and Social Services on welfare reform implementation and welfare-to-work activities; (2) working closely with the Governor’s Jobs and Training Policy Cabinet; (3) participating in the Governor’s Working Group to Improve Local Hire in the Oil Industry; and (4) assisting with the Governor’s Marketing Alaska strategy and Quality Schools initiative. In addition, AHRIC helped the state acquire federal funds to improve workforce development in three areas: (1) a $7.2 million U.S. Department of Labor One-Stop Career Center grant; (2) a $3 million U.S. Department of Commerce Manufacturing Extension Partnership grant, to bolster Alaska’s value added production; and (3) a $2.6 million U.S. Department of Education grant for Alaska’s School-to-Work Initiative.

Tribal Employment Rights Offices

In 1977, several federal agencies sponsored a Conference on Indian Employment Rights in Warm Springs, Oregon, so tribes could discuss how to use their sovereign powers as tribes to regulate and control employment on Indian reservations. As a result of this conference, 12 tribes in the Lower 48 decided to form Tribal Employment Rights Offices (TEROs). In 1978 these tribes formed the Tribal Employment Rights Planning Committee to encourage and help tribes form new
TEROs. Since then, the organization has been restructured into the Council for Tribal Employment Rights (CTER). The council is an Indian owned and operated non-profit corporation, governed by a fourteen-member Board of Directors representing seven TERO regions: Alaska, Pacific Northwest, Dakota Coalition, Rocky Mountain, Southwest, Southern Plains, and Eastern. The council provides training and implementation assistance on-site, over the telephone, by mail, and in regional TERO seminars, conferences, and workshops. It also publishes reference manuals, including *Alaska Native Preference in Employment and Contracting*.

The Cook Inlet Native Association was the first Alaska Native organization to initiate an Alaska Native Employment Rights Office in the early 1980s. Currently, about 150 Alaska tribes are covered by TERO ordinances. The acronym, TERO, is used interchangeably for Tribal Employment Rights Office, Officer, and Ordinance. Most tribes have a Tribal Employment Rights Office, staffed by a Tribal Employment Rights Officer whose duties include assuring compliance with the tribe’s Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance. The purpose of the TERO ordinance is to enable tribes to regulate and control all economic activity on tribal lands or in Indian Country. The ordinance usually provides for an Indian preference in employment, contracting, subcontracting, and the purchase of goods and services. It generally applies to all employers for all private employment, and all federally-funded or federal aid contracts, on reservations.

Most tribes in the Lower 48 are located on reservations and charge a TERO fee, which pays for recruiting, screening, referrals, job counseling, compliance work, cultural diversity workshops, and other services the TERO provides to employers. Alaska tribes use language in several federal statutes as a basis for their TERO ordinances. The Tanana Chiefs Conference’s TERO Office, for example, cites the following: PL 93-638 Sec.7(b); Buy Indian Act (24 U.S.C.47); Title VII – Civil Rights Act, Section 703(i); and Executive Order 11246. Alaska TEROs can also negotiate professional fees, based on the fact that tribes are providing services that save the state or other employers money.

**Alaska Native Coalition on Employment and Training**

The Alaska Native Coalition on Employment and Training (ANCET) is made up of 16 regional, non-profit Native organizations that operate employment and training programs. These are programs authorized under a variety of laws (including, for instance, the Job Training Partnership Act). The programs are funded by several federal agencies—including the departments of Health and Social Services and Labor and the Bureau of Indian Affairs—as well as the state government. ANCET operates employment and training programs in both urban and rural areas.

The group meets quarterly to talk about regional employment issues and maintains employee data banks on the Internet. According to the TERO officer for the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes, ANCET also develops strategies for improving delivery of employment and training services, especially in hard-to-reach rural areas. ANCET was
also involved, according to the TERO officer, in raising the issue of Alyeska Pipeline Service Company’s failure to meet the terms of its Native hire agreement (see discussion in Chapter III).

ANCET is currently trying to improve its working relationship with AFN and is hoping AFN will recognize it as a special committee to deal with employment and training issues. It is also considering whether to broaden its membership to include smaller tribal government offices which also operate federally-funded employment and training programs.

**ANCSA Human Resources**

ANCSA Human Resources is an organization formed several years ago and made up of the members of each Native for-profit organization and the ANCET members (described above). Roughly 35 to 40 members constitute the organization, but only about half actively participate. The group is looking for ways to boost participation.

The group meets quarterly and attempts in a number of ways to improve job and training opportunities for Alaska Natives. In conjunction with Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, it holds what has been rated as the most successful annual job fair in Alaska. It is investigating the potential for developing a statewide data base of Alaska Native workers; it is also looking for ways of improving recruitment methods for Native workers.

At the upcoming AFN convention, the group plans to discuss where to concentrate its efforts. One of the issues under consideration is whether the non-profits should continue focusing on training programs and the for-profits on actually getting jobs for Natives.

**Alaska’s People**

Alaska’s People, Inc. is a non-profit affiliate of Cook Inlet Region, Inc. (CIRI). It is chartered to promote employment and training for Natives in Alaska. Formed through the combined efforts of CIRI, Cook Inlet Tribal Council, and Peak Oilfield Service Company, it opened in April 1996. So far Alaska’s People has placed more than 2,400 Native workers, at no cost to the workers or their employers. The organization has three funding sources: (1) Peak Oilfield Service Company, which is owned by CIRI and Nabors Drilling; (2) Cook Inlet Tribal Council, which receives federal compacting dollars through PL 102-477; and (3) Alaska Temporary Assistance Program’s welfare reform funding.

Alaska’s People has eight employment specialists to assist employers—either at the organization’s Anchorage office; over the telephone; or at the employer’s own business location. These specialists continually review their database of more than 4,000 job seekers, to ensure that candidates with the proper qualifications are informed of employment opportunities. The executive director reports that he receives 40 to 50 faxes a day from employers with job requests.
The staff then checks the database and refers appropriate resumes to the company. The executive director estimates that Alaska’s people places approximately 150 people per month.

Alaska’s People provides employers with qualified personnel from the following fields: administration; banking; construction; customer service; health care; management; mining; oil and gas exploration and production; professional and clerical; public relations; technical; and trade and craft. It has developed strong connections with many of its customers, according to the executive director. “Companies like peak Oilfield Services, Alaska Native Medical Center, Cominco Alaska, Inc., Providence Hospital, VECO, ARCO, Alyeska, BP, Carrs, GCI and NANA Corporation at Red Dog Mine are key to our success.”

Recruitment, screening, and evaluation of targeted candidates for apprenticeship and training programs are also available. Alaska’s People and CITC also offer counseling to help job seekers with organization and planning before they apply for jobs. Help with resume preparation and suggestions about interview techniques are also available. Some job seekers are referred for training or encouraged to take advantage of national and union apprenticeship programs or grants and scholarships.

Of the Alaska Natives in the database, 90 percent live in Anchorage, the Mat-Su Valley, or on the Kenai Peninsula. The applicants from rural Alaska tend to be the skilled workers, according to the executive director.

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**Center for Economic Development**

The Center for Economic Development (CED) is one of some 67 economic development centers throughout the country that were established in the mid-1960s as part of the Johnson administration’s War on Poverty. The Alaska center is funded through the Economic Development Administration (EDA) in the Department of Commerce and is part of the University of Alaska’s Technical Assistance Program.

CED focuses on rural development. Much of its work consists of conducting feasibility studies. For instance, CED is currently doing a feasibility study for Metlakatla and Annette Island. These communities have a contract with the state of Washington to can their salmon; the communities want to know whether they could do their own canning and packaging to replace more than 40 jobs they lost when a local cedar mill shut down. They would like to convert the mill into a cannery.

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1This is not intended as a comprehensive description of the ways the Center for Economic Development could help Alaska Native ventures.
In a previous study, CED examined the potential for restoring the historic St. Joseph’s Church in Nome. The owner, a local gold company, had said it was willing to transfer title to the city, if the building could be restored and preserved for use as a tourist attraction. This project received $1.2 million from EDA for five years of restoration work that has now been completed, according to the CED director.

Another CED project was examining how to replace the building for the Shishmaref Tannery. The tannery started in 1991 with a grant to the local IRA council, but the two-story structure that housed the tannery was inappropriate for tanning. Workers had to haul hides and chemicals up to the second floor, resulting in frequent spills and other difficulties. The CED put together a business plan for the tribal council to build a new building. Because the village lost 25 feet in front of the building to a Chukchi Sea storm last year, the new structure is a modular building with wheels that can be moved.

Tannery sales have increased by 25 percent in the past year. The tannery has spawned a number of cottage-industry spin-offs such as skin sewing and making seal skin slippers, hats, and ruffs. The tannery has also done some custom tanning, as well as tanning hides from outside Alaska. Other activities are in the planning stage. Local management has improved steadily and is highly competent, according to the CED director.

Work at the tannery complements subsistence activities. Four full-time employees are all local residents who work 8 to 5, five days a week. One of the co-managers has been there since the beginning. Fifteen seal skin-slipper sewers and 25 headers also work for the tannery. These craftspeople work flexible hours that accommodate subsistence activities. The newly expanded business plan calls for an additional 15 seal-skin sewers, 10 beaders, and 4 factory workers.