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Oregon Tribal Child Care Needs Assessment



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Table of Contents

01	Executive Summary	pg. 04
	Key Findings.....	04
	Opportunities for Change.....	05
	Conclusion.....	05
02	Introduction	pg. 06
	About This Assessment.....	06
	Recognition of Tribal Sovereignty, Diversity, and Historic Underinvestment.....	06
	Child Care as a Cultural, Economic, and Community Imperative.....	07
	Data Sovereignty and Methodology.....	07
	Purpose and Intended Use.....	08
03	Oregon Tribal Landscape of Child Care	pg. 09
	Governance and Decision-Making Processes.....	09
	Variation in Capacity Across Tribes.....	10
	Tribal Participation in Publicly Funded Programs.....	10
	Operational and Structural Challenges in Tribal Policy and Grant Implementation.....	10
	Models of Streamlined Policy and Grant Infrastructure.....	11
04	Tribal Goals and Visions for Child Care	pg.12
05	Summary of CCIF Application Insights and Challenges	pg. 14
06	Tribal Barriers and Challenges	pg.18
	Public Funding Challenges.....	18
	Workforce Development Barriers.....	19
	Infrastructure and Facility Constraints.....	19
	Access and Affordability Gaps.....	19
07	Opportunities and Recommendations	pg. 20
	Build Tribal Grant and Planning Capacity.....	20
	Reform Funding Structures for Sovereignty.....	20
	Structuring Respectful Engagement from the Top.....	20
	Grow a Tribal-Led Early Childhood Workforce.....	21
	Establish a Tribal Set-Aside and/or Alternative Grant Process.....	21
	Provide Culturally Grounded Technical Assistance and Peer Learning.....	22
	Create Tribal-Specific Funding Guides and Application Tools.....	22
	Build Shared Data Agreements and Vision Alignment.....	22
	Include Insights from Tribes Who Did Not Apply.....	23

08 Toward a Tribal Data Strategy: Closing Gaps and Strengthening Future Assessments pg. 24

Building Toward Shared Tools and Practices.....24
Honoring Data Sovereignty While Enhancing Collaboration.....24

09 Conclusion pg. 26

10 Key Terms, Glossary, and References pg. 28



"I really envision childcare as our kids belong everywhere that we are, and we belong everywhere that they are. There isn't a separate distinction between school and home life, but that we are community."

- Member of the Grand Ronde tribe

Executive Summary



Video 1: An overview of Tribal child care needs

This assessment identifies urgent needs and systemic challenges facing federally recognized Tribes in Oregon delivering high-quality, culturally grounded child care. Through data analysis, community engagement, and tribal leadership input, it offers a clear path forward for equity-based investment and structural reform.

Key Findings

Infrastructure Deficits: Many Tribes lack dedicated, safe, and developmentally appropriate child care facilities. Capital funding is difficult to access and often misaligned with tribal planning timelines.

Workforce Shortages: Chronic staffing gaps persist due to non-competitive wages, lack of local credentialing, and burnout. Tribal providers often wear multiple hats, limiting program capacity.

Limited Access to Public Funding: Tribes face rigid application processes, inflexible eligibility rules, and short timelines. An acknowledgment that culturally relevant technical assistance has been fragmented and inconsistent.

Fragmented Engagement: State agencies often engage individual programs rather than Tribal governments, undermining the principles of sovereignty and co-governance.

Data Barriers: A lack of access to statewide data that is relevant or usable. There's little alignment between state reporting systems and what Tribes track.



Opportunities for Change

Establish Tribal Planning & Grant Capacity: Fund pre-development work and staff roles to support long-term planning, grant writing, and fiscal oversight within Tribal governments.

Reform Funding Structures: Create a Tribal set-aside and an alternative grant track with extended timelines, culturally aligned criteria, and simplified contracting.

Strengthen Tribal-State Engagement: Require consultation at key decision points. Coordinate agency actions through a centralized framework led by the Governor's Office.

Grow the Tribal ECE Workforce: Support community-based pathways, flexible credentialing, and mentorship rooted in Indigenous caregiving traditions.

Advance Tribal Data Sovereignty: Align metrics with tribal priorities and co-create data-sharing agreements that respect sovereignty and local context.

Conclusion

With targeted investment, authentic partnership, and policy rooted in respect for Tribal sovereignty, Oregon can ensure Indigenous children grow up in environments that reflect their cultures and communities. Strengthening Tribal child care is a strategic investment in the state's shared economic future. When Tribes are recognized as sovereign partners and drivers of rural development, the entire state benefits.

Introduction

Tribal Nations in Oregon are leading transformational efforts to support the well-being of their communities through early childhood care and education. Across the state, Tribal governments are developing infrastructure, expanding access, preserving language and culture, and advancing innovative solutions to meet the needs of Native children and families.

Oregon is home to nine federally recognized Tribes, each with its own distinct history, cultural lifeways, governance structures, and geographic setting. The nine federally recognized Tribes located within the state of Oregon include:

- Burns Paiute Tribe
- Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians
- Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon
- Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians of Oregon
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs
- Coquille Indian Tribe
- Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians
- The Klamath Tribes

In addition, Oregon is home to unrecognized Tribes, such as the Chinook Indian Nation, Celilo Wy'am, Clatsop-Nehalem Confederated Tribes, Northern Molalla, and many more. Also, numerous urban Indian populations comprise Tribal citizens from across the country. Native people living in urban centers like Portland, Eugene, Medford, and Salem include members of both Oregon-based Tribes and other federally recognized Tribes, making up a diverse, growing, and vibrant Indigenous population.

While each Tribal Nation and Native community faces unique circumstances, they share a common commitment: to ensure that Native children and families have access to affordable, culturally grounded, and high-quality child care that reflects Tribal values, supports long-term economic and workforce development, and nurtures the next generation.

As sovereign nations, Tribes are not merely providers of care; they are governments responsible for designing and delivering systems of support that reflect their community's vision for health, education, and prosperity. However, historic and ongoing underinvestment from state and federal systems has led to persistent infrastructure gaps and funding inequities, creating significant barriers to accessing grants, implementing policies, and delivering services. This is particularly true in areas like early childhood care, where disparities are further compounded by workforce shortages, outdated facilities, and limited access to flexible capital.

About This Assessment

This Tribal Needs Assessment is grounded in Tribal experiences with the Child Care Infrastructure Fund (CCIF) and uses the program as a case study to explore the broader landscape of child care access, infrastructure, and affordability in Tribal communities across Oregon. While not exhaustive of all nine Tribes' experiences, this assessment provides a critical starting point for understanding:

- The current state of Tribal child care infrastructure
- Shared goals and place-based challenges;
- Systemic barriers to funding, policy implementation, and service delivery;
- And opportunities for state-Tribal collaboration to advance more equitable access to child care.

Recognition of Tribal Sovereignty, Diversity, and Historic Underinvestment

This assessment is rooted in the understanding that:

- Tribal Nations are sovereign governments with the inherent right to self-determination and governance over their lands, people, and resources.
- Tribes vary significantly in size, financial capacity, staffing, and geographic access, affecting their ability to plan, apply for, and implement infrastructure funding at the speed



Chenoa Landry / Education Mode Lead, Future Generation Collaborative

Puyallup / Portland, Oregon

Video 2: Chenoa Landry speaks on conventional data systems

required by many state-administered grants.

- Gaps in early learning infrastructure and funding are the result of longstanding disparities in how resources have been allocated to and accessed by Tribes. These challenges are not due to a lack of vision or capacity within Tribal Nations, but rather reflect a history of resource distribution that has not always aligned with or fully supported Tribal priorities. Recognizing and addressing these gaps is essential to advancing equity and honoring Tribal sovereignty.

Child Care as a Cultural, Economic, and Community Imperative

In Tribal communities, child care is more than a service—it is a central pillar of cultural survival, workforce development, and intergenerational community health. Access to child care allows Tribal employees to remain in the workforce, supports retention of Tribal government and enterprise staff, and provides vital opportunities for language immersion and cultural transmission for young children.

Investment in Tribal child care is also an investment in:

- Economic development is achieved by creating jobs and supporting parents to work or pursue training.
- Health and well-being, through culturally rooted early childhood investments that strengthen individual potential and collective community well-being over time.
- Cultural reclamation, by embedding Indigenous knowledge, language, and worldview in early learning.

Data Sovereignty and Methodology

This assessment is grounded in the principles of Tribal data sovereignty—the inherent right of Tribal Nations to govern the collection, ownership, access, and application of their data. In honoring these principles, special attention has been given to the unique cultural, social, and governance contexts of Tribal communities, particularly in relation to child care and early childhood development.



Information included here has been gathered through:

- Engaging in ongoing conversations and correspondence with Tribal child care leaders, early childhood advocates, and Tribal administrators across sectors such as economic development, education, and health and human services.
- Analysis of CCIF grant applications;
- Publicly available state and federal data sources; and
- Direct input and feedback from Tribal governments and parents, caregivers, tribal leaders, tribal elders, early childhood educators, social service providers, cultural and language specialists, economic and planning representatives, and community organizations shared with explicit permission.

Data interpretation has been approached through a Tribal-first lens, which acknowledges that conventional data systems and metrics often overlook or misrepresent Indigenous perspectives on child well-being, family strength, and developmental success. This assessment centers Indigenous knowledge and values in defining what quality care and thriving families look like in Tribal contexts.

We recognize the need for culturally responsive approaches to data collection and analysis, especially when working with families and young children. This includes respecting community-defined indicators of well-being, ensuring data use benefits the communities it describes, and upholding trust, transparency, and informed consent throughout the process.

Purpose and Intended Use

This assessment is not a comprehensive evaluation of all Tribal early learning systems. Rather, it serves as an initial tool to:

- Recognize Tribal leadership and readiness in childhood care;
- Identify shared priorities and place-based needs across rural and urban settings;
- Highlight systemic barriers, including funding timelines, contracting delays, and rigid eligibility requirements.



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Oregon Tribal Landscape of Child Care

Across Oregon, child care deserts are a pressing issue, particularly in rural and frontier areas where the supply of licensed care falls significantly short of demand. According to the Oregon Early Learning Division's Child Care Deserts Map (2022), more than half of Oregon's census tracts qualify as child care deserts, with rural communities disproportionately impacted. Tribal Nations, many of which are located in or serve these rural regions, are uniquely positioned to address this gap. As documented by the Oregon Tribal Government Employment and Economic Impact Study (ECONorthwest, 2022), Tribes are frequently among the top three employers in their counties, playing a central role in regional economies and providing critical infrastructure, social services, and community stability.

Despite their economic and community leadership, Tribal governments face distinct challenges in expanding child care infrastructure. These include difficulty accessing capital funding, misalignment between federal/state funding timelines and Tribal governance processes, and a lack of culturally responsive licensing pathways. Additionally, many public funding structures were not designed with Indigenous knowledge systems or sovereign governance in mind, further complicating program implementation and compliance.

Tribal Nations in Oregon operate as sovereign governments with governance structures, policy frameworks, and land use regulations that reflect their distinct histories, geographies, and the priorities of their elected leadership. Unlike the private sector, Tribes view early childhood care as a core governmental function, emphasizing the well-being of their communities over profit. This perspective often contrasts with mainstream child care models that treat early learning as a privatized business enterprise. For Tribes, the provision of child care is integral to ensuring the health, sustainability, and cultural preservation of their communities.

Despite these priorities, Tribes face significant barriers to building and expanding child care

systems. Systemic underinvestment from both federal and state systems, combined with complex governance processes and challenges in accessing funding, creates considerable obstacles. The diversity among the nine federally recognized Tribes (and unrecognized Tribes) in Oregon further adds to the complexity, as each Tribe has different capacities, needs, and goals when it comes to early childhood programs. As a result, early childhood services across Tribal communities vary widely in scope, delivery, and effectiveness, often depending on the resources available and the local leadership's ability to navigate the challenging landscape of funding, policy, and infrastructure development.

Governance and Decision-Making Processes

Unlike many non-Tribal entities, Tribes navigate a complex internal governance structure when approving new programs or applying for funding. This often includes coordination with Tribal Councils, executive leadership, legal counsel, and community engagement, all while ensuring alignment with long-term strategic goals. These processes are rooted in Tribal sovereignty, accountability, and cultural values. Policy development, for example, may require multiple readings, resolutions, legal vetting, and alignment with federal trust land obligations. This decision-making complexity can result in delayed program rollouts and slow response times to funding opportunities.

When participating in public programs like Preschool Promise or Oregon Prenatal-to-Kindergarten (OPK), Tribes must also navigate complicated procedures. While some Tribes have successfully engaged with state-run initiatives, others find the administrative hurdles, including reporting requirements, cumbersome. Tribes may also face challenges with land use regulations in connection with early childhood infrastructure development. Coordination with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) or other federal agencies on land-use decisions further complicates and lengthens development timelines.



Variation in Capacity Across Tribes

Tribes located in Oregon differ greatly in their size, geographic territory, and resource availability, resulting in varying capacities to support and expand early childhood care. Some tribes like the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation have recently (within the last five years) established infrastructure and significant resources to house and develop early childhood programs. In contrast, Tribes like the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians face challenges such as limited facilities, fewer staff, and expansive service areas, making it difficult to expand services in the face of growing demand.

Additionally, there are significant differences in the geographic location and service areas of Tribes, which affect the scope and scale of child care services they can provide. Some Tribes serve large urban areas, such as the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, whose child care programs extend to Salem and Portland, while others serve more rural or remote regions. For example, some Tribes provide child care services to larger communities that include both Tribal citizens and the broader non-Tribal population, while others focus exclusively on the needs of their Tribal membership.

Tribes with limited physical infrastructure or remote locations may lack dedicated community spaces where they can implement early childhood programming. This lack of space often leads to compounded barriers, including the inability to create culturally relevant programs or accommodate large numbers of children. These Tribes may also struggle to meet the growing need for child care services, as they lack the capacity to attract long-term investments for facility expansion or workforce development.

Tribal Participation in Publicly Funded Programs

In Oregon, only one Tribe currently participates in Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK), while three Tribes participate in the Early Childhood Equity Fund and three Tribes participate in Preschool Promise. Five Tribes receive Tribal Head Start funding, though this is administered directly by the federal government and does not involve

the Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC).

Participation in public funded programs is shaped by systemic barriers that include: rigid program structures, often not aligned with tribally designed program models, and limited state-level support. In addition, state-administered funds are limited in their ability to match Tribes' federally negotiated indirect cost rates. Participation varies based on a Tribe's governance structure, internal capacity, and readiness to navigate state-managed funding systems. However, delays or barriers to Tribal participation in funding opportunities significantly exacerbate the challenges above, compounding the already critical barriers related to insufficient infrastructure.

Operational and Structural Challenges in Tribal Policy and Grant Implementation

Securing funding through the Child Care Infrastructure Fund (CCIF) is a critical step for Tribal Nations working to address child care needs, but receiving the award is only the beginning. Once awarded, Tribes face numerous implementation challenges tied to both internal governance and external constraints, many of which are not adequately accounted for in state-administered grant programs.

The applications often have short turnaround windows that conflict with the time needed for Tribal Council review and resolution, internal planning, and cross-departmental coordination, however, once awards are announced, slow-moving state contracts can delay project launch, leaving Tribes with little time to meet construction deadlines, or be ready for a phase two application. Additionally, CCIF's reliance on Lottery Bond dollars limits use to capital facilities costs only. That means no administrative support, no planning dollars, and no feasibility studies, functions that are essential to launching infrastructure projects, particularly in Tribal governments where planning capacity may be under-resourced. Without flexible dollars to support predevelopment, some projects stall before they even begin.

Furthermore, Tribal Nations must often align state rules with Tribal Employment Rights Ordinances (TERO), Indian preference hiring policies, and other self-governance regulations. These overlays

may require additional legal review, public notice, or internal processes before a contract can be executed. For construction on trust land, federal oversight adds another layer of complexity. Projects may require land-use approval or environmental review from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which can significantly extend timelines and create dependencies that state agencies may not fully understand. These aren't delays due to inefficiency, they are essential steps to uphold Tribal sovereignty and federal trust responsibilities.

Tribes also face challenges related to maintaining program sustainability and workforce retention. The demand for culturally relevant child care services continues to grow, yet many Tribes struggle to maintain a stable workforce due to the underfunding of early childhood programs, low wages, and limited access to training and development opportunities. Additionally, increased investment in state-funded programs—which outpace the growth of federally funded programs that not all Tribes participate in—creates competition for an already limited labor pool. These gaps in workforce development and resource allocation can hinder the long-term success and scalability of early childhood programs.

Models of Streamlined Policy and Grant Infrastructure

Some Tribes in Oregon have developed more integrated internal systems to navigate grant and policy complexities more efficiently. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, for example, has implemented a coordinated, interdepartmental approach to managing funding opportunities and aligning them with broader strategic goals.

The Tribe's internal grants team, consisting of staff with expertise in community development, engineering, grant coordination, and fiscal oversight, reviews all new opportunities through a shared lens of community impact, feasibility, and alignment with Council priorities. One of the tools that supports this process is a standing Grant Review Board, which uses a pre-approved checklist to evaluate proposals before they are submitted to the Grand Ronde Tribal Council. The checklist includes draft narratives, budgets, demographic data, and a review of strategic

alignment. "When we submit to go onto Council's agenda... we typically submit the draft narrative, any data and demographics, the budget, as well as our checklist." This structure helps build consistency and institutional memory while keeping the Tribal Council informed and engaged in grant forecasting and prioritization. Regular meetings with the Council are used to preview anticipated opportunities and to make decisions proactively, rather than in reaction to short deadlines. After experiencing staffing transitions, the team also invested in a more centralized and transparent grant tracking system to support continuity. "We created a checklist," one staff member explained. "It really pulls out what the grant is, how much we're going after, what match there is, are there any FTE positions that are linked to that?" This system allows for easy tracking of match requirements, staffing impacts, and the long-term financial sustainability of each opportunity.

Together, these practices represent a promising model for other Tribal Nations and offer a blueprint for how strategic internal capacity—paired with centralized data and regular leadership engagement—can improve access to funding and reduce administrative burden.



Tribal Goals and Visions for Child Care



Jesse Jackson / Education Programs Officer
Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians / Roseburg, Oregon

Video 3: Jesse Jackson speaks on Tribal visions for child care

Across Oregon, Tribal Nations are envisioning child care systems that are deeply embedded in community priorities, cultural knowledge, and long-term visions for sovereignty and well-being. While there are many shared values, such as a commitment to cultural continuity, family wellness, and educational opportunity, each Tribe brings a distinct history, structure, and vision to this work. Tribal child care is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor; rather, it is an expression of self-determination shaped by geography, governance, language preservation goals, and intergenerational priorities. Many Tribes are also enhancing accessibility within their facilities to better support children with disabilities.

The Cow Creek Tribe, for instance, exemplifies this commitment by prioritizing inclusive design in their child care facilities to comply with the

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Their plans, if funded, include installing accessible external doors, ramps, and other modifications to eliminate physical barriers, along with implementing robust fire suppression systems and enhanced safety protocols to create a secure environment for all. This proactive approach not only promotes community safety but also highlights the Tribe's dedication to nurturing a protective space for children.

Many Tribes are working to build care models that not only meet the practical needs of families but also restore and revitalize what colonization attempted to erase: the language, land-based knowledge, and kinship systems that have sustained Tribal communities for generations. In this spirit, several Tribal CCIF applications describe aspirations to grow new generations

of fluent Native language speakers over the next decade—goals that are inseparable from early childhood investments. These Tribes view early care and learning as the earliest and most impactful site for language reclamation, cultural education, and community healing.

Beyond language and culture, Tribes are also advancing child care strategies that contribute to shared economic prosperity, particularly for Native women and mothers who are disproportionately impacted by the absence of affordable, high-quality care. By increasing access to child care, Tribes aim to remove a major barrier to employment, education, and entrepreneurship for caregivers. In doing so, they are creating economic mobility pathways that ripple outward, benefiting entire communities.

Many tribes also emphasize in their CCIF applications the need for wraparound services that support the whole family. These services include on-site health and behavioral health care, parent education, elder mentorship, and trauma-informed practices that reflect the unique strengths and challenges of Native communities. There is a clear vision to integrate child care into a broader system of care, where families don't just drop off their children, but where the entire household is supported in ways that reinforce cultural values and intergenerational wellness.

Tribes are also reclaiming and reimagining the physical spaces where child care takes place. For example, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) have proposed transforming the July Grounds—a historically significant site—into a child care and cultural learning space, signaling a broader effort to return community-owned land and infrastructure to the service of children. Across multiple applications, Tribes are demonstrating that the design of facilities matters: children deserve to grow and learn in environments that reflect their identities, histories, and relationships to place.

Workforce development is another key focus. Some Tribes have outlined plans to become subject matter experts for early childhood education training, partnering with local community colleges to ensure that Native voices are shaping curriculum and credentialing. These partnerships aim not only to increase the number of Native

educators but also to shift the broader child care system toward models that honor Indigenous knowledge.

Importantly, Tribes recognize that their child care systems must be able to serve youth both within and beyond reservation lands or designated service areas. Whether children live in rural Tribal communities or in urban centers like Portland, they deserve access to culturally affirming care grounded in their Nation's values. For example, the Coquille Indian Tribe offers a Child Care Assistance Program designed to support the affordability of high-quality child care options for Tribal youth ages 0–12. This program is available to enrolled members regardless of where they reside, reflecting the Tribe's commitment to serving its citizens statewide. Similarly, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz operate Head Start sites beyond their reservation boundaries, ensuring that children in multiple locations can benefit from early education rooted in cultural teachings. Across Oregon, Tribes also routinely seek to serve children from other Tribal Nations, understanding child care as a collective responsibility grounded in kinship and reciprocity.

In all of this, Tribal staff are clear: children must be recognized as vital citizens, worthy of investment, protection, and support at every level of government. They must not be an afterthought in economic planning or infrastructure development. Rather, they should be centered in every effort to rebuild and reimagine what's possible for Tribal communities.

Finally, there is a shared aspiration that future systems of funding will not force Tribes to compete for basic child care resources. Instead, Tribes envision guaranteed, stable, ongoing funding mechanisms which Tribes can rely on to invest in expansion, workforce, etc, and that recognize their legal status, unique needs, and vital role in rural development. In this model, Tribes would no longer be compelled to fight for piecemeal support, but would instead serve as full partners in designing and delivering early childhood systems that are resilient, rooted, and ready to grow the next generation of leaders.



Summary of CCIF Application Insights and Challenges

Across the first two rounds of Oregon's Child Care Infrastructure Fund (CCIF), a total of eight applications were submitted on behalf of seven Tribes. One of these applications came from Lil Turtles Retreat, a Tribal enterprise licensed by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). While this business operates in alignment with Tribal priorities, it is not a governing Tribal Nation itself. CTUIR did not submit a separate application. Altogether, the applications requested over \$6.2 million in infrastructure support, reflecting the substantial and growing need for early childhood investment in Tribal communities. The proposed projects ranged from small-scale planning efforts to major new facility construction, illustrating the varied starting points and aspirations of Tribes working to close persistent gaps in care access.

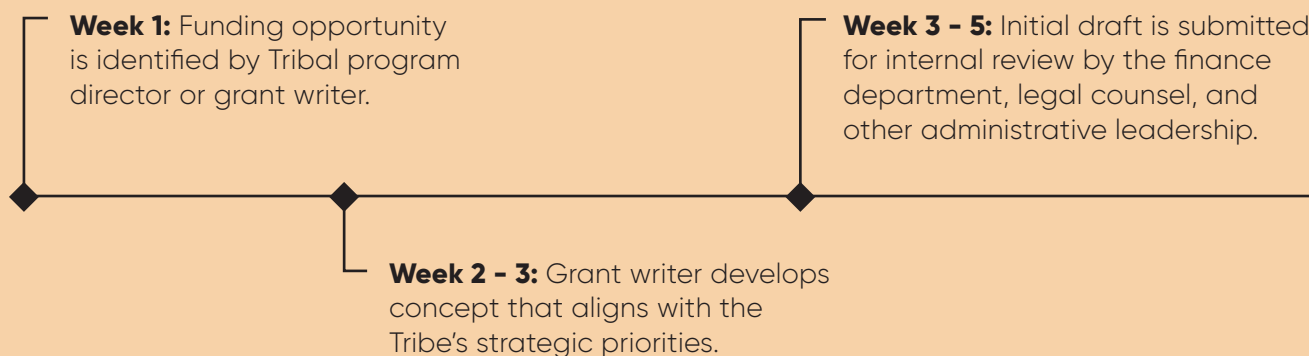
In Round 1, five Tribes—Coquille Indian Tribe, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Confederated Tribes of Siletz, Burns Paiute Tribe, and Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde—submitted applications totaling \$2.27 million. Funding awards were issued to all but one, with projects focused on both early-phase planning and minor facility renovations, as well as a major capital construction effort in Grand Ronde. In Round 2, three additional applications from

Warm Springs, Cow Creek, and Lil' Turtles (a Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation tribally licensed child care center) all sought support for substantial construction or renovation projects for a total of \$4,015,327 requested. Their applications illustrated a deepening commitment among Tribes to create long-term, culturally centered infrastructure for early learning and care.

The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs requested and were awarded \$1.9 million for major renovations from the Child Care Infrastructure Fund in Round 2 to renovate its aging facility and preserve 131 child care slots for the local community. Renovation plans include new flooring and paint, upgraded windows, plumbing replacement, and construction of a new commercial kitchen to ensure a safe, efficient, and fully functional early learning environment. This project builds on recent upgrades such as new classroom flooring, HVAC, roofing, and security systems, ensuring continued high-quality care for Warm Springs families.

A closer examination of these submissions reveals several key trends. First, project readiness varied widely. Some Tribes were clearly shovel-ready, proposing fully scoped construction projects with cost estimates and timelines in place. Others

Tribal Internal Approval Process for Grants (pg. 14 - 15)



submitted planning-focused proposals, aiming to conduct needs assessments, secure architectural renderings, or align internal governance before launching capital work. This variability suggests that Tribes are at different stages in their child care infrastructure journeys and would benefit from technical assistance and phased funding structures tailored to those unique entry points.

As one Tribal applicant noted, *"I believe the timing was crucial to our success with this project. It has been in the works for a long time, and we conducted a feasibility study to assess the childcare needs of the tribe, both for members and employees, and to explore potential growth within the program. This assessment considered whether the center would function more as a typical private childcare facility or focus more on programs like Head Start and preschool."*

The way we designed the project involved initially constructing the shell of the building. We obtained pricing from contractors to build just the exterior—walls, windows, doors, and roof—without finishing the interior, as we lacked the funding for that. We planned to leave it as a shell with the understanding that we would later seek funding to complete the interior once we determined the need for more classrooms.

When we found out we were successful in securing funding, I was able to negotiate with the contractor to finish the work on those interior classrooms. This process did not replace any existing dollars; rather, the contract was structured to anticipate the need for interior finishing down the line. We initially expected this to happen three to four years

later, but the timing aligned perfectly, enabling us to secure funding and immediately instruct the contractor to proceed with the interior work.

In terms of challenges, we encountered few obstacles. The main issue was finalizing an agreement that took longer than we had anticipated. My understanding is that this delay stemmed from the need to reach consensus on certain language within the agreement, particularly concerning sovereign immunity and indemnification, which can complicate negotiations with tribal governments compared to other agencies. This made it necessary to invest additional time in finalizing the agreement before we could allocate the funds."

Notably, the majority of funding requests through rounds 1 and 2—over \$6.3 million—were for major renovation or new construction, while only a small fraction was aimed at planning or repair. This imbalance speaks to the urgent need not just to maintain facilities, but to build them from the ground up in response to persistent and widespread child care deserts across Tribal lands. Tribes are seeking to meet this need not through incremental adjustments, but through visionary projects that integrate cultural revitalization, workforce development, and community sustainability alongside child care delivery.

Tribal applications also consistently emphasized goals that extended beyond physical infrastructure. Proposals envisioned spaces that would serve as community anchors: places to revitalize language and traditional lifeways, to train Indigenous early childhood educators, and

Week 5 - 10: Proposal must be submitted to Council agenda for Tribal Council approval, which may require a two-week notice period since Council may only meet once a month. If a grant submission deadline falls days before the next scheduled Council meeting or Council agendas have already been finalized, staff must wait another month to present the proposal.



Valeria Atanacio / Owner, Native Mama Scholars

Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde / Grand Ronde, Oregon

Video 4: Valeria Atanacio speaks on Indigenous child care education

to support multigenerational caregiving rooted in Native knowledge systems. This holistic approach to early learning is often at odds with the current design of infrastructure funding programs, which tend to favor Western center-based models and business-oriented metrics of return on investment. As one Tribal applicant noted, child care in their community is not seen as a revenue generator, but as a critical service for family stability, cultural continuity, and future economic participation.

However, the process of applying to CCIF has also illuminated systemic challenges that hinder Tribal participation. Many Tribes faced significant barriers in meeting the compressed timelines imposed by the first two funding rounds. In Round 1, Tribes were given only 45 days to prepare and submit applications. This was an insufficient window given the multiple layers of internal governance, council approvals, and interdepartmental coordination required to greenlight any new initiative. Round 2 shortened this window even further to 30 days, compounding these difficulties. Several well-positioned Tribes were ultimately unable to apply, not for lack of need or vision, but because their governance timelines were not respected in the

state's application design.

To better understand this barrier, consider a typical internal process for a federally recognized Tribe preparing to apply for a grant. First, a program director or grant writer identifies the opportunity and begins developing a concept that aligns with the Tribe's strategic priorities. This draft must then undergo internal review, which often involves multiple departments such as finance, legal, and administration, and ultimately requires formal approval by the Tribal Council, the governing body of the sovereign nation.

Tribes generally must obtain Council approval before submitting any grant application. However, some Tribal Councils often meet only once a month, and agendas are typically finalized in advance. If a grant opportunity is identified after the agenda is set or if Council's schedule is already full, the proposal may not be heard until the following month. That delay alone can push the process back four to six weeks. In some cases, especially for higher-dollar or more complex proposals, additional community consultation or revisions may be required, adding even more time.

In total, the internal process from initial concept to formal Council resolution can easily take four to eight weeks or more, even under ideal conditions. When funding opportunities have short turnaround times or inflexible deadlines, Tribes are often effectively excluded, not due to lack of interest or readiness, but because the system does not account for sovereign governance timelines.

When state programs impose a 30–45 day application window, they effectively exclude Tribes that follow these required governance protocols. These are not administrative delays or capacity gaps, they are expressions of sovereignty, accountability, and due diligence. Without intentional design that respects and aligns with Tribal governance timelines, well-resourced and highly motivated Tribal governments will continue to be sidelined from critical funding opportunities. Compounding these timing issues are the barriers inherent in State-Tribal contracting processes. The Coquille Indian Tribe, for example, experienced a 2–3 month delay between being awarded a planning grant in Round 1 and executing their contract with Business Oregon. This delay cut into the time needed to complete project milestones, rendering them ineligible or underprepared for subsequent funding opportunities. When planning delays caused by state systems prevent a Tribe from qualifying for construction funding, the program itself becomes a barrier, effectively penalizing Tribes for structural inefficiencies beyond their control.

There is also a growing recognition that many funding structures remain misaligned with Tribal models of early learning. While traditional child care business models and programs prioritize factors like cost-efficiency, scalability, and revenue generation, Tribal child care programs often prioritize community wellness, cultural instruction, and flexible, family-based models of care. These approaches may not fit neatly into center-based paradigms or traditional return-on-investment frameworks, but they are no less effective; in many cases, they are the only models that truly reflect the needs and values of Tribal families.

Within the CCIF scoring rubric, Program Type and Priority Population comprise the largest portion of the total score. This category evaluates how well applicants' programs align with strategic priorities related to service delivery models and the

populations served. Scoring also included specific operational metrics such as licensing status, enrollment capacity, and program infrastructure. For Tribal applicants, however, licensing status is not an equitable qualifier. Tribal Nations, as sovereign governments, are not required to be licensed by the state and may operate under their own licensing systems. Evaluating Tribal programs based on state licensing standards can create additional barriers and does not accurately reflect the legitimacy or quality of Tribal early learning programs. This means Tribal programs often cannot fully compete on operational grounds despite their strong community alignment, cultural relevance, and readiness. While the CCIF scoring system felt more inclusive than many of the traditional care models that fit state-established benchmarks, this point still inadvertently limited Tribal applicants' ability to maximize their scores. Understanding this dynamic is essential for funders and policymakers committed to designing equitable funding mechanisms that honor the unique service models and operational realities of Tribal child care programs.

The combination of data gaps, rigid eligibility criteria, and underrepresentation in funding formulas continues to disadvantage Tribal applicants. In many cases, there is insufficient state-collected or recognized data to illustrate the scale of unmet need in Tribal communities, especially when that need is expressed in forms that do not match dominant paradigms of child care provision. The absence of this data can result in underinvestment, as Tribes are left to prove their need without access to comprehensive, community-specific evidence.

Despite these barriers, Tribal engagement with CCIF remains strong. Based on technical assistance provided throughout Rounds 1 and 2, we anticipate applications from at least six Tribes in Round 3, including new and returning applicants such as The Klamath Tribes, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, Coquille Indian Tribe, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and Burns Paiute Tribe. This continued interest reaffirms the importance of child care infrastructure investment in Indian Country—and the urgency of ensuring that future rounds are more accessible, responsive, and equitable.



Tribal Barriers and Challenges

Tribal communities across Oregon face persistent, systemic barriers in accessing and leveraging public funding for early childhood care and education infrastructure. These challenges, while complex, often stem from a lack of alignment between mainstream funding structures and the sovereign governance, cultural values, and operational realities of Tribal Nations.

Public Funding Challenges

- Rigid Timelines and Application Cycles:** Many grant programs, such as the Child Care Infrastructure Fund (CCIF), operate on short application and implementation timelines that conflict with tribal governance processes, including the need for Tribal Council resolutions, interdepartmental coordination, and community consultation. These processes are essential to upholding tribal sovereignty and financial stewardship, but are often misaligned with rigid state timelines.
- Lack of Indirect Cost Coverage:** CCIF and similar state-administered grants do not provide indirect cost recovery, leaving tribes to cover essential administrative, facility, and compliance-related expenses out of pocket. This exclusion disproportionately burdens tribal programs already operating with limited, unrestricted funds.
- No Planning or Feasibility Support in Later Rounds:** While Round 1 of CCIF included planning grants, subsequent rounds eliminated this opportunity. This has left tribes unable to prepare fully scoped, costed, and community-vetted proposals—effectively excluding those not already resourced or shovel-ready.
- Limitations of Lottery Bond Dollars:** Lottery bond funds, often used to back state capital investments, come with additional restrictions, including fixed draw schedules and strict timelines that do not reflect the realities of rural construction, supply chain challenges, or tribal governance procedures. The result is a use-it-or-lose-it dynamic that creates risk for tribal entities.
- Fragmentation in Public Engagement:** A central and persistent challenge facing Tribal Nations is the fragmentation in how public agencies engage with them. While some Tribes may designate program staff or department leads to participate in cross-agency working groups or advisory processes, this engagement often occurs after key decisions have already been made, rather than as part of a formal consultation process. Too often, state agencies engage with individual tribal programs, such as a Head Start center or Health & Human Services department, as though they were equivalent to municipal departments or local nonprofits. This approach, even when well-intentioned, can bypass or dilute tribal government decision-making authority, overlooking the unique legal status and sovereignty of Tribal Nations. As a result, Tribes are frequently positioned as service delivery partners rather than as co-equal governing bodies and strategic collaborators in shaping statewide systems and outcomes.

Access and Affordability Gaps

- **Eligibility Misalignment:** State subsidy programs such as Preschool Promise and Baby Promise often exclude working tribal families due to income eligibility thresholds that do not reflect rural or reservation-area economies, where household incomes may exceed limits but still fall short of affordability.
- **Transportation and Logistics:** Families in rural and frontier tribal communities face significant travel burdens, including lack of vehicles, limited transit, and dispersed service areas. These challenges create real barriers to enrollment and daily attendance.
- **Child Care Deserts:** Counties like Douglas and Lake are classified as “severe child care deserts,” with more than three children for every licensed slot. In these areas, the lack of options disproportionately affects tribal families and particularly those with infants and toddlers.

Infrastructure and Facility Constraints

- **Space Limitations:** Tribal early learning centers often operate in severely limited facilities and struggle to keep pace with growing community demand. These constraints may hinder their ability to meet essential safety standards, accommodate increasing enrollment, and provide culturally vital programming—such as language immersion, seasonal teachings, or indoor gross motor activities—that support holistic child development.
- **Cost and Scope Gaps:** Funding awards often cover only a portion of project costs, forcing tribes to scale back or delay projects. For example, one tribe received \$2 million toward a facility with a projected cost of \$4.2 million, leaving a critical funding gap with limited access to bridge financing.
- **Delayed Execution:** Even when grants are awarded, internal governance processes—critical for fiscal integrity—can delay fund acceptance, hiring, and project launch. These delays are frequently misinterpreted as lack of readiness, when in fact they reflect responsible sovereign governance.

Workforce Development Barriers

- **Workforce Credentialing:** Challenges between state systems and the unique structure of Tribal early learning environments mean that some Tribal communities operate outside of the traditional licensed center model, which creates challenges when accessing professional development resources through the Oregon Registry Online (ORO). Navigating ORO can be especially difficult for providers in tribal communities, where cultural models of care may not align with state credentialing pathways. This creates significant barriers to workforce advancement, credentialing, and access to funding or support tied to compliance.
- **Recruitment and Retention Challenges:** Geographic isolation, limited housing, and low compensation contribute to chronic staffing shortages, especially in rural and frontier communities. Substitute pools and administrative support are especially thin, impacting consistency and quality of care.
- **Disconnect from Tribal Knowledge Systems:** Current workforce systems do not fully recognize or integrate Indigenous knowledge, language, and caregiving philosophies. This leads to a narrow definition of qualification and discourages participation from community members who are otherwise deeply capable caregivers and educators.



Opportunities and Recommendations

Fragmented public agency engagement with Tribal Nations, particularly in early childhood infrastructure and funding systems, presents both a critical challenge and a powerful opportunity for systemic change. The following recommendations aim to move beyond surface-level inclusion and toward structural equity rooted in sovereignty, cultural responsiveness, and government-to-government relationships

► Build Tribal Grant and Planning Capacity

- **Establish a Tribal Planning and Implementation Fund** to support feasibility studies, site planning, cost estimation, and community engagement in advance of infrastructure proposals.
- **Fund ongoing grant writing and fiscal administration positions** within tribal governments, rather than limiting support to consultants or short-term contracts.

► Reform Funding Structures for Sovereignty

- **Integrate indirect cost recovery** into all infrastructure and operational grants.
- **Allow for multi-year planning and implementation windows** that align with tribal governance processes.
- **Create braided funding guidance** that helps tribes blend public and private dollars in a way that respects their fiscal sovereignty.

► Structuring Respectful Engagement from the Top

To resolve this fragmentation, there is a critical need for a clear, standardized order

of operations for state agencies and the Governor's office to follow when working with Tribal Nations. This structure should be rooted in existing tribal consultation policies, but go beyond mere compliance to foster authentic, durable partnerships. Key elements include:

- **Mandated Government-to-Government Consultation at Key Decision Points:** Before funding priorities, program rules, or implementation timelines are finalized, formal government-to-government consultation with Tribal governments must occur, not just advisory program staff.
- **Statewide Interagency Tribal G2G Consultation Framework:** A unified policy that ensures all agencies understand the sovereignty of Tribes, their governance structures, and how to formally initiate formal government-to-government consultation. This avoids inconsistent, duplicative, or conflicting agency-level approaches.
- **Governor-Level Accountability and Coordination:** The Governor's Office must take an active role in ensuring alignment across agencies and in holding departments accountable for failing to uphold Tribal consultation standards.
- **Investment in Tribal Capacity for Co-Governance:** Rather than viewing capacity as a problem to be solved with one-off training, the state should invest in supporting Tribes' ability to lead and co-design systems through multi-year partnership agreements, ongoing funding mechanisms, and support for intertribal collaboration.
- **Prioritization of Tribally-Led Infrastructure Planning:** Tribes should not only be eligible for infrastructure funding, they should be invited to set terms through formal G2G consultation for how it is

structured and administered, particularly in sectors like child care, housing, workforce, and broadband, where sovereignty and community wellbeing intersect.

In sum, to increase meaningful engagement with Tribal communities and address systemic processes that may hinder participation—this requires a cultural and structural shift in how state systems view and work with Tribal Nations. Respecting sovereignty must begin with clear, enforceable consultation pathways, recognition of tribal governance, and a rebalancing of power that positions Tribes as partners, not just recipients. A centralized, accountable structure for tribal-state engagement will be foundational to this shift.

► **Grow a Tribal-Led Early Childhood Workforce**

- **Invest in “Grow Your Own” pathways** for early childhood educators rooted in tribal knowledge, language, and caregiving practices.
- **Support credentialing flexibility and parity for tribal-based training programs**, including those focused on oral tradition, cultural immersion, and intergenerational care.
- **Expand mentorship, apprenticeship, and community-based training options** that allow for skill development without requiring relocation or major financial burden.

The goal of early childhood investment in tribal communities cannot be compliance alone. It must be the affirmation of sovereignty, culture, and the right to raise Indigenous children in environments that reflect who they are. When state investments are designed with tribal leadership, tailored to cultural systems, and grounded in trust-based partnership, the result is not just improved child care access—it’s nation-building.

► **Establish a Tribal Set-Aside and/or Alternative Grant Process**

To ensure equitable access to public funding and uphold government-to-government relationships, the state should institutionalize a dedicated Tribal funding structure that reflects the realities of Tribal governance.

- **Dedicated Tribal Set-Aside of Funds:** Reserve a fixed percentage of infrastructure and programmatic funding for the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon. Allow flexible use across both capital development and capacity building—planning, staffing, permitting, and internal consultation.
- **Parallel Tribal Application Track:** Design a culturally responsive application process with tailored eligibility criteria, extended timelines, and alternative deliverables that recognize Tribal planning processes. Include support for submissions at various project stages, from feasibility to implementation.
- **Streamlined State-Tribal Contracting Procedures:** Develop standing Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs), templates tailored to each Tribes with agreed upon language, and principal contracts or contract templates agreed to by each Tribe to accelerate the path from award to disbursement, especially for recurring funds like CCIF.
- **Extended and Respectful Application Timelines:** Release funding announcements at least two months in advance. Provide a 90-day window for Tribal applicants to ensure time for council resolutions, cultural consultation, and internal approvals—key expressions of Tribal sovereignty.
- **Formalized Tribal Consultation Frameworks:** Convene a standing Tribal advisory council to co-design program rules, evaluation metrics, and reporting standards. Require early and ongoing consultation at all stages of state-funded programs impacting Tribal communities.



► Provide Culturally Grounded Technical Assistance and Peer Learning

Too often, technical assistance is delivered through Western systems that fail to honor Indigenous knowledge or governance. A reimagined TA approach must center culture, sovereignty, and lived experience.

- **Indigenous-Led TA and Mentorship:** Fund networks of Native child care professionals, business advisors, and infrastructure experts to lead TA delivery. Ensure these providers are resourced to deliver regionally relevant, culturally specific support.
- **Peer Learning Cohorts and Story-Based Learning:** Facilitate learning environments where Tribal child care providers can share best practices, challenges, and innovations through storytelling and relational exchange. Recognize these formats as valid and valuable professional development.
- **Support Licensing or MOUs for Child Care Licensing Division services and Long-Term Business Planning:** Offer tailored assistance for Tribes navigating licensing, business models, and sustainable operations. This includes community engagement, site selection, cash flow planning, and workforce development—all aligned with Tribal visions and values.

► Create Tribal-Specific Funding Guides and Application Tools

The complexity of navigating public funding remains a significant barrier for many Tribes, especially when processes are misaligned with cultural and governance norms.

- **Storytelling-Based Templates and Toolkits:** Develop application templates that center storytelling and allow for narrative expression of need, intent, and impact. Include visual tools and oral history-based formats where appropriate.

- **Culturally Relevant Compliance Resources:** Design compliance materials that honor traditional knowledge systems and tribal definitions of quality, impact, and accountability. Where state requirements conflict with cultural practice, offer reconciliation strategies.
- **Tribal Case Studies and Model Proposals:** Share successful examples of Indigenous-led infrastructure and child care initiatives. Include insights into funding strategies, cultural integration, and intergovernmental partnership.

► Build Shared Data Agreements and Vision Alignment

The absence of shared data systems between Tribes and the state prevents meaningful measurement and alignment. A co-developed framework must respect data sovereignty while enabling statewide insight.

- **Aggregate, Non-Extractive Data Practices:** Support the development of aggregate-level data sharing agreements with Tribes that respect cultural protocols and governance over information.
- **Shared Metrics and Visioning Processes:** Facilitate cross-tribal and interagency processes to define shared goals, outcome indicators, and statewide benchmarks, while allowing space for localized expression and community context.
- **Co-Creation of Data Sharing Agreements:** Collaborate with each Tribal Nation to develop individualized data sharing agreements that reflect Tribal governance structures, community priorities, and consent-based protocols for data use and interpretation.
- **Tribal Data Sovereignty and Governance Policies:** Invest in the development and recognition of Tribal data governance policies that define how data is collected, stored, accessed, and shared in alignment with Tribal law and sovereignty.

- **Proper Identification of Tribal Peoples:**

Ensure state systems move beyond racial proxies and enable proper identification of Tribal affiliation in data collection efforts, allowing Tribes to accurately monitor service access and outcomes for their citizens and descendants.

► **Include Insights from Tribes Who Did Not Apply**

Understanding why some Tribes choose not to participate in public funding programs is as important as evaluating those who do. These insights reveal structural, cultural, and operational barriers the state must address.

- **Structured Listening Sessions with Non-**

Applicant Tribes: Conduct respectful outreach to understand decision-making factors. Issues may include misaligned timelines, reporting burdens, lack of eligible projects, or distrust due to past experiences.

- **Integrate Insights into Future Design:**

Use these findings to adjust eligibility requirements, revise funding strategies, and better align application timelines with Tribal planning calendars. Inclusion is not enough—design must reflect the full range of Tribal realities.

"I wish I had a Native specific child care in the Portland area because I want my child to feel comfortable being who they are. It is important to me that the people I leave my children with have an understanding of our culture and ways of being around our kids. Especially when it comes to things like their hair. I have had to have difficult conversations with previous providers about how our hair is sacred and not to have other kids or adults fixing or playing with their hair."

- Community Member Testimonial

Toward a Tribal Data Strategy: Closing Gaps and Strengthening Future Assessments

This assessment lays a foundational picture of the diverse realities, strengths, and barriers that shape early childhood systems in Oregon related to the nine federally recognized Tribes. To support future planning and deepen collaboration between Tribes and the State, a shared but sovereign-aligned data strategy is essential. This section outlines a proposed direction to guide that work.

As this assessment draws from the knowledge, stories, and priorities of Tribes that participated in this assessment, it becomes clear that meaningful change in early childhood systems cannot be separated from how we approach data. Data is often viewed as technical, but in the context of Tribal child care, it is deeply relational—it shapes how need is understood, how funding is distributed, and whose stories are legitimized in public systems.

Across interviews, listening sessions, and Tribal review, a common thread emerged: the desire for stronger, community-rooted tools to tell the story of early care and education in ways that reflect both cultural integrity and infrastructure realities. Tribes expressed interest in developing more robust internal capacity to collect and manage their own data—not to conform to state templates, but to advocate more powerfully for what their children and families need.

This is not a call for uniformity or forced alignment. It's an invitation to reimagine what a Tribal data approach could look like—one that honors sovereignty, centers cultural care models, and offers shared value across governments.

Over the next two years, there is an opportunity to explore this work collaboratively, without rushing or over-promising. Several ideas surfaced during

this process that could guide early steps.

Building Toward Shared Tools and Practices

Some Tribes are already developing their own systems for tracking enrollment, staffing, and capital needs. Others expressed a desire for light-touch supports, such as shared survey templates, planning calculators, or simple dashboards, that could reduce reporting fatigue while supporting local grant writing and program planning. These tools wouldn't be standardized or mandated, but adaptable, offered as optional scaffolds that reflect Indigenous ways of knowing.

There was also interest in having space to learn together. A few Tribal staff noted the isolation they experience as data leads or grant writers and suggested that peer learning circles or informal cohorts could help normalize the challenges of early childhood reporting, especially when those metrics often don't match Indigenous caregiving philosophies.

Honoring Data Sovereignty While Enhancing Collaboration

Throughout this process, there was careful attention to sovereignty—not only in what data is collected, but in how it's interpreted and shared. Tribes made clear that data collection should not be extractive, and that technical assistance must begin with a relationship, not compliance.

Some Tribal leaders also saw potential in creating a more formal structure for co-developing future assessments. Perhaps through a Tribal-led data advisory group that could provide gentle coordination across governments, suggest improvements to state processes, and hold space for deeper, longer-term conversations about how we measure care, quality, and impact.

In the short term, the focus may be less about launching new systems and more about building trust and shared understanding. This could include:

- Convening a few working sessions between DELC's Office of Tribal Affairs unit and Tribal early childhood staff to explore interest in co-developing basic tools or metrics.
- Supporting Tribes who want to document unmet family demand or child care facility conditions with technical assistance grounded in community values.
- Exploring opportunities for joint learning about workforce trends, especially around compensation, burnout, and retention.

Over time, these small, relational investments could lay the foundation for a larger Tribal data strategy—one that strengthens Tribal infrastructure without imposing standardization, and that positions Oregon as a model for what respectful, sovereign data partnerships can look like in early childhood systems.



"Lil' Turtles Retreat is more than just a daycare—it's a lifeline for working families in our community, offering a safe, loving environment where children can grow and thrive. As a parent, I've seen my children blossom under their care, supported by staff who treat every child like their own."

- The Peek Family

Conclusion

Building a fair and just early childhood system in Oregon means recognizing and correcting longstanding disparities in how Tribal Nations are resourced and supported. It means moving beyond one-size-fits-all approaches and investing in ways that respect each Tribe's unique priorities, values, and visions for their children and families.

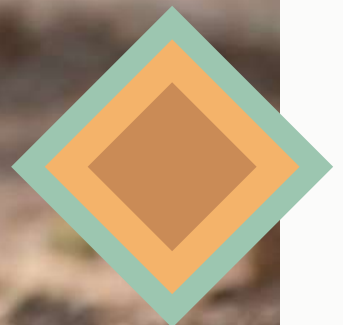
This assessment highlights a consistent pattern: fragmented engagement from state agencies has created real barriers to funding, decision-making, and meaningful participation in statewide planning. These are not minor misalignments; they reflect a failure to uphold Oregon's government-to-government commitments with Tribes.

Correcting this requires more than policy tweaks. It demands coordinated, respectful engagement; transparent systems for collaboration and accountability; and sustained support for Tribal-led solutions. Fairness means giving Tribes the tools to determine their own paths. Whether through capital investments, caregiver support, language revitalization, or other locally defined priorities.

Child care is not just a service, it's a foundation for community strength, cultural continuity, and future leadership. When Tribal communities lead the design of their own systems, and when state structures align to support rather than constrain them, everyone benefits.

The recommendations throughout this report point to what's possible when trust, respect, and follow-through guide our actions. Oregon has the resources and responsibility to act. What's needed now is the will to walk alongside Tribal Nations, to uphold commitments, and to help create the conditions where every Native child can thrive in a system that is not only inclusive, but truly just.





Key Terms, Glossary, and References

For Use in Oregon's Tribal Child Care Needs Assessment and Planning Efforts

Core Concepts in Tribal Governance and Sovereignty

- **Tribal Sovereignty:** The inherent authority of Tribal Nations to govern themselves, including over child care systems, funding decisions, and educational programming.
- **Self-Determination:** The right of Tribes to determine their own pathways for development, education, and care services, free from external control.
- **Government-to-Government Relationship:** A legally recognized relationship between Tribal Nations and the State of Oregon, affirmed in Executive Order 96-30, based on mutual respect and coordination between sovereign entities.
- **Tribal Nation:** One of the nine federally recognized sovereign Tribal governments in Oregon, each with its own leadership, laws, and service structures.
- **Data Sovereignty:** The right of Tribal governments to control how their community data (e.g., child enrollment, program outcomes) is collected, accessed, and used.
- **Consultation vs. Engagement**
 - **Consultation:** Formal, structured dialogue between sovereign governments before decisions are made.
 - **Engagement:** General outreach or feedback efforts. Engagement does not replace consultation.

Child Care Policy and Infrastructure Terms

- **Child Care Desert:** A region where the demand for licensed child care slots exceeds supply—often by a ratio of 3:1 or worse. Many Tribal communities are located in extreme child care deserts.
- **Community-Based Child Care:** Child care programs created within Tribal communities, typically incorporating language, culture, and kinship caregiving models.
- **Modular/Classroom Portables:** Prefabricated or mobile classrooms used to expand child care services in remote or resource-limited Tribal areas.
- **Tribal Child Care Infrastructure:** The physical, technological, and administrative foundations (buildings, utilities, transportation, broadband) that support Tribal child care programs.
- **Tribal Early Learning Programs:** Includes Early Head Start, Tribal Head Start, Preschool Promise, Tribal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), and informal or culturally grounded care systems.
- **Wraparound Services:** Family supports (transportation, nutrition, behavioral health, case management) that enhance child and family success in care settings.

Funding Structures and Grant Access Models

- **CCIF (Child Care Infrastructure Fund):** Administered by Business Oregon, the Child Care Infrastructure Fund is a competitive statewide grant focused on providing funds for the establishment, expansion, and improvement of child care facilities across the state.
- **Tribal Set-Aside:** A dedicated portion of funding is specifically reserved for Tribal Nations to access without competing in broader applicant pools.
 - **Non-Competitive Set-Aside:** Funding is distributed to eligible Tribes based on a formula or eligibility, with minimal application burdens. Common in federal programs like Weatherization Assistance.
 - **Semi-Competitive Set-Aside:** Tribes apply for funding within a reserved pool and are reviewed against each other, not non-Tribal entities.

- **Tribal-Only Competitive Funding:** Competitive grants are restricted to Tribal applicants. Proposals are scored but only against other Tribes.
- **Hybrid Approach:** Combines guaranteed base funding with optional competitive tiers. Tribes may receive foundational support with opportunities for add-on funding.

Culturally Responsive Practices and Support Services

- **Culturally Responsive Technical Assistance (TA):** TA led by Native professionals that uplifts Indigenous values, languages, and caregiving systems in program planning and compliance.
- **Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS):** Oregon's child care quality measurement tool. Many Tribal programs adapt or opt out of QRIS to maintain alignment with cultural quality definitions.
- **Urban Indian Community:** Indigenous individuals living outside reservation lands, often in urban centers like Portland or Eugene, who may rely on urban Indian organizations for child care and support services.
- **Kinship Care:** A caregiving model rooted in Indigenous traditions where extended family members and community networks share the responsibility of childrearing. Often foundational to Tribal early childhood systems.

Key State and Tribal Definitions

- **Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC):** The Department of Early Learning and Care (DELIC) provides child care licensing and health and safety monitoring through the Child Care Licensing Division. They also administer the state's preschool and early learning programs, supports infant-toddler care, funds professional learning services for childcare across communities and provides funding for childcare assistance to qualifying families. DELIC also has team members in their Office of Tribal Affairs.
- **Business Oregon:** Business Oregon is the state's economic development agency. The Business Oregon Commission oversees the agency's activities to ensure a coherent, integrated approach to economic development and a continuous policy direction that can transcend changes in executive and legislative leadership.
- **Tribal Member vs. Descendant**
 - **Tribal Member:** An enrolled citizen of a federally recognized Tribe.
 - **Descendant:** A person with Tribal heritage who is not formally enrolled in a Tribe but may still maintain cultural and community connections, and in some cases, be eligible for certain services. Some Tribes have formal processes to recognize and register descendants—often referred to as Tribal Descendants, Enrolled Descendants, or Recognized Descendants—which may include documentation or eligibility for specific programs.

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Executive Summary

This assessment identifies urgent needs and systemic challenges facing federally recognized Tribes in Oregon delivering high-quality, culturally grounded child care. Through data analysis, community engagement, and tribal leadership input, it offers a clear path forward for equity-based investment and structural reform.

Key Findings

- **Infrastructure Deficits:** Many Tribes lack dedicated, safe, and developmentally appropriate child care facilities. Capital funding is difficult to access and often misaligned with tribal planning timelines.
- **Workforce Shortages:** Chronic staffing gaps persist due to non-competitive wages, lack of local credentialing, and burnout. Tribal providers often wear multiple hats, limiting program capacity.
- **Limited Access to Public Funding:** Tribes face rigid application processes, inflexible eligibility rules, and short timelines. An acknowledgment that culturally relevant technical assistance has been fragmented and inconsistent.
- **Fragmented Engagement:** State agencies often engage individual programs rather than Tribal governments, undermining the principles of sovereignty and co-governance.
- **Data Barriers:** A lack of access to statewide data that is relevant or usable. There's little alignment between state reporting systems and what Tribes track.

Opportunities for Change

- **Establish Tribal Planning & Grant Capacity:** Fund pre-development work and staff roles to support long-term planning, grant writing, and fiscal oversight within Tribal governments.
- **Reform Funding Structures:** Create a Tribal set-aside and an alternative grant track with extended timelines, culturally aligned criteria, and simplified contracting.
- **Strengthen Tribal-State Engagement:** Require consultation at key decision points. Coordinate agency actions through a centralized framework led by the Governor's Office.
- **Grow the Tribal ECE Workforce:** Support community-based pathways, flexible credentialing, and mentorship rooted in Indigenous caregiving traditions.
- **Advance Tribal Data Sovereignty:** Align metrics with tribal priorities and co-create data-sharing agreements that respect sovereignty and local context.

Conclusion

With targeted investment, authentic partnership, and policy rooted in respect for Tribal sovereignty, Oregon can ensure Indigenous children grow up in environments that reflect their cultures and communities. Strengthening Tribal child care is a strategic investment in the state's shared economic future. When Tribes are recognized as sovereign partners and drivers of rural development, the entire state benefits.