

# Establishing Programs to Support Drug Endangered Children (DEC): Is My Community Ready?

Catching Up With COSSAP, April 2021



*This article is the first in a three-part series about institutionalizing efforts to support drug endangered children (DEC) in tribal communities, produced in partnership between the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children and the National Criminal Justice Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College. Subsequent articles will focus on implementing DEC programs with buy-in from law enforcement agencies and sustaining DEC programs after they are established.*

Communities and tribes across the nation are experiencing an increase in substance abuse—an ominous trend that is impacting children in many ways. Children are often the first impacted by drug activity within a community, yet the last identified and helped. Children living in homes where there is parental or caregiver substance abuse often experience abuse, neglect, and trauma themselves. But they are often not identified as being impacted and therefore are not given support through what is invariably a very difficult time.

Unfortunately, communities and tribes often try to address the problem in siloed and fragmented ways. Many do not know where to start, what direction to go, or how to make the greatest impact. Often, the first question is “Are we even ready to address this issue?”

How can communities and tribes know when they are ready to address substance abuse that is adversely impacting their most vulnerable population—their children? Community readiness for DEC programming can be determined by assessing several different factors including, but not limited to, the following:

- Level of awareness of the problem within the community and among professional stakeholders
- Whether or not the community and professionals recognize the issues within the community around substance abuse and its impact on children
- Whether or not the community and professionals see that the issue is bigger than one person or one discipline; i.e., do they see that they play a part in the problem or the solution? Or is it someone else’s fault or problem?
- Whether or not the community and professionals have already started implementing solutions or programs to address the problem
- Whether or not the community and professionals think they are ready for change

Substance abuse-related issues influence so many aspects of a community. The situation might feel overwhelming by the time the severity of the problem is recognized outside of siloed perspectives. That is where the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children (National DEC) can help.



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National DEC developed a **DEC Roadmap and Toolkit** ([www.nationaldec.org/road](http://www.nationaldec.org/road)) to help communities assess their substance abuse issues, develop a plan, and develop local efforts to protect children and create safer communities. The DEC Roadmap and Toolkit provides the foundation, structure, and guidance needed to identify the readiness of a community and professionals, raise awareness of DEC challenges, implement promising practices and tools for DEC, and develop a successful tribal DEC alliance. It also helps to institutionalize DEC efforts within a community to continue to address current and future issues once DEC support efforts are established. DEC brings professionals and communities together and encourages discussion and the identification of solutions.

The Roadmap and Toolkit's content is divided into three stages: Awareness, Implementation, and Institutionalization. The following is an in-depth look at how local stakeholders can leverage the Awareness stage to determine the level of community awareness of DEC and assess community readiness to implement DEC efforts.

The Awareness stage assists communities in developing awareness of the problem and getting them ready to start DEC efforts. This stage initiates collaboration among disciplines that have never sat at the table together to find solutions that work in their communities. The three steps can be happening simultaneously, working together, and building off one another.

1. **Training:** Brings education and awareness of substance abuse problems to a community and helps assess whether the community is ready to implement DEC efforts.
2. **Community Assessment and Data Analysis:** Draws on the supports and resources available, as well as needs and gaps. Provides concrete data from varying disciplines about substance abuse issues within the community and helps disciplines identify their sometimes-siloed efforts.
3. **Raising Community Awareness:** Helps the community understand specific circumstances arising from substance abuse in the area. Awareness is raised through distribution of pamphlets and flyers, emails, use of social media, public service announcements, and other media campaigns.

## TRAINING

Training is one of the first steps in the Roadmap and Toolkit Awareness stage. The Core DEC Awareness Training brings awareness to the importance and challenges of aligning the agencies and systems responsible for preventing, intervening in, and treating substance use to change the trajectories of the lives of drug endangered children and break multigenerational cycles of abuse and neglect. The training helps to show the benefits of collaboration and addresses a common response to substance use in communities: "It's not my job, not my problem." National DEC, in collaboration with the National Criminal Justice Training Center, is able to provide this training and support technical assistance to tribal Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant and Substance

### National DEC and the CSKT of Montana: Part 1

**In Montana, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) of the Flathead Nation were awarded a three-year Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation grant to develop a Community Strong Drug Endangered Children Alliance. CSKT recognized the substance abuse issues that were afflicting their tribal community, and they wanted change. They were not sure whether the community was ready, but they wanted to apply for the grant and prepare the community. The awarded grant allowed CSKT to partner with the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children (National DEC) to receive training, facilitation, and technical assistance focusing on drug endangered children. This included implementing practices learned from National DEC's work across the country and receiving continued support from National DEC as CSKT built, developed, and expanded the successful CSKT Tribal Drug Endangered Children Alliance they now have. When CSKT and National DEC started this effort, the tribal community was using a very siloed approach, disciplines were not collaborating and sharing information, and children were being impacted daily by abuse of methamphetamine and other drugs. However, CSKT had passionate individuals who had faith in their tribal community and their people.**

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Abuse Program (COSSAP) grantees and nongrantee tribal communities at no cost through funding provided by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Training can be requested through the COSSAP Resource Center COSSAP Resource Center: <https://www.cossapresources.org/Program/TTA>.

Trainings across different disciplines can help identify those who may or may not be ready to participate in a DEC alliance. This can help maintain momentum for those ready to participate, while acknowledging those who may need more time and/or training to achieve capacity to ensure that their DEC alliances will succeed.

## COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND DATA ANALYSIS

In parallel with training, tribal communities can also begin working on National DEC's Community Assessment Worksheet, which will assist them in identifying specific community issues that need to be addressed and existing resources required to support DEC efforts. The worksheet gathers and utilizes data already collected from various disciplines. Often in communities, data are collected and only shared within one discipline—missing the potential benefit of sharing and comparing data with other disciplines to obtain a comprehensive picture. National DEC's Community Assessment Worksheet assists in bridging this gap. Disciplines may include law enforcement, child welfare, health care providers, schools, treatment providers, and others.

The data can include:

- The number of arrests made that are substance abuse-related.
- Child removals due to substance abuse or drug activity.
- The number of babies born testing positive for illegal/legal/harmful substances.
- The number of children under the age of ten entering emergency rooms and testing positive for drugs.
- The number of overdoses.
- The number of children given Narcan due to drug ingestion.

Other information may include the resources available within the community, gaps in services and resources, and current policies and laws/codes that pertain to substance abuse.

The idea is to gather data that are relevant to showing the impact that substance abuse is having on the community and its people, as well as showing what activities are already taking place within the community to address the issue.

Once data are gathered, a brief, easy-to-read report is created to be disseminated widely. This report will help obtain buy-in, provide relevant information that is irrefutable, and energize those who are already interested. This report can also be used to assist in obtaining funding down the road.

### National DEC and the CSKT of Montana: Part 2

**National DEC assisted CSKT in completing a community assessment using National DEC's Community Assessment Worksheet. They gathered data from tribal police, the Polson Police Department (non-tribal police), tribal child welfare, local (non-tribal) medical hospitals, tribal treatment and services providers, and others. Gathering the data took longer than expected because of trust issues between agencies as well as between tribal and non-tribal entities. CSKT also gathered information through surveys at meetings, trainings, and other events. Through this process, National DEC and CSKT learned that the community was ready for change for its children but that they needed to know more about the risks and long-term impacts. They also learned that many resources were not being utilized in their community.**

Along with the community assessment, community and professional surveys should be developed and sent out. These more specific questions can provide insights as to how a community feels about what you are trying to do. National DEC recommends conducting several surveys over a period of time that can be answered anonymously through a Google Doc or other type of data gathering system. This will allow people to submit answers honestly and provide feedback that would not otherwise be available. A sample survey question may be "On a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being 'Strongly Agree' and 1 being 'Strongly Disagree':

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- Professionals in my community collaborate with multiple disciplines.
- Substance abuse is a problem in my community.
- Children are impacted by caregiver or parental substance abuse in my community.
- My community is addressing issues around drug endangered children.
- My community wants help in addressing issues around drug endangered children.
- I am ready to get involved and help in DEC efforts in my community.

Sending the surveys to a wide variety of professionals and community members is ideal. Often, communities must think outside the box as to how to get people to complete and/or return surveys. Specific strategies may include having the survey available at an already-scheduled event, offering an incentive to complete the survey, or asking tribal councils and leaders to encourage others to take the survey.

While information is compiled and analyzed, National DEC encourages the use of National DEC's Identifying Key Disciplines & Individuals to Assist DEC Initiatives Worksheet. This resource helps to identify those who should be included in the DEC alliance and those who have the skills, access, knowledge, and experience necessary to enable the alliance to address the issues identified in the assessment.

All of these steps will help in identifying where the community and professionals are on the issues surrounding substance abuse in their community. They will also initiate forward momentum to build on community strengths and values that already exist, fill any gaps that have been identified, and enable stakeholders to come together to make the community a safer place for children and families.

## RAISING COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Raising community awareness of substance abuse is often the next step but is also a continuous process. There are many avenues that can be taken to provide information to the community. These include conducting trainings, hosting town hall meetings, distributing pamphlets and flyers, sending out emails, posting information on social media, developing online training, creating public service announcements, and utilizing billboards and signs. The idea is that people absorb information differently and at different times; therefore, you must be adaptable by leveraging multiple channels to get information out there and at a variety of times.

### **National DEC and the CSKT of Montana: Part 3**

**CSKT provided a lot of information to the tribal community in various forms. They started by conducting the Core DEC trainings for many disciplines across the reservation and surrounding communities.**

**CSKT also developed pamphlets and one-pagers utilizing National DEC's format and examples.**

**CSKT played a radio ad that National DEC created and put up billboards, in order to get people's attention and inform them of drug endangered children.**

**CSKT surveyed the community to see where they needed to fill gaps and to determine how engaged the community was in efforts.**

**All of these helped in meeting the community where it was to move DEC forward in a way that fit this community.**



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National DEC meets communities where they are. Some communities are in the initial stages, where there is no awareness and nothing is being done to address the problems. In comparison, some communities are in more final stages of readiness and may already have made community members aware, provided some training, implemented DEC promising practices, and gotten many people involved. Most communities are somewhere in between these two stages. Either way, National DEC will assist communities in working their way through the DEC Roadmap and Toolkit and setting up DEC efforts in a way that works for them. This is not a cookie-cutter approach; rather, it is tailored to each community to meet its needs in a way that considers culture, community-specific issues, previous work within the community, current work within the community, and the people themselves.



## National DEC and the CSKT of Montana: Footnote

### A few important points to note about CSKT:

- **CSKT conducted several professional and community surveys, learning more information from each.**
- **Their level of community awareness increased through marketing campaigns and outreach and continual trainings.**
- **The community acknowledged its substance abuse problems and, more important, appreciated the solutions being offered through the CSKT Tribal DEC Alliance; community members were engaged and wanted to be part of the movement.**

# Implementing Programs to Support Drug Endangered Children in Tribal Communities: Getting Buy-In From Law Enforcement

Catching Up With COSSAP, August 2021



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*Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College. The first article, [Establishing Programs to Support Drug Endangered Children: Is My Community Ready?](#) appeared in the April 2021 issue of [Catching Up With COSSAP](#). The third article will focus on sustaining DEC programs after they are established.*

Once a community or tribe has started training and raising awareness about DEC, what strategies can be used to bring people to the table? More specifically, how is buy-in from law enforcement agencies obtained? These are real questions asked and concerns faced by many communities.

Let us start with understanding more about DEC efforts to build collaborative relationships between disciplines and, most importantly, having law enforcement involved as a key stakeholder.

## Evolution of DEC Efforts

DEC efforts began years ago with a focus on saving children from exposure to harmful chemicals produced by methamphetamine labs. Law enforcement officers usually responded to these cases and, if children were present, were assisted by child welfare social workers. Children were often removed from dangerous environments while offenders were referred to prosecutors and courts for criminal charges. This approach provided children who were living in dangerous

drug homes with a safe living environment and medical care at a perilous time, ideally before there was an explosion, chemical ingestion or chemical exposure, or overdose. But times have changed. Today, there are fewer meth labs, while use of heroin, fentanyl and other opioids, marijuana, and alcohol has become more frequent, impacting children in different ways. In response, DEC efforts have evolved, with the overall goal of ensuring the safety and well-being of children across the nation. These changes include:

1. Inviting more disciplines to participate in DEC efforts.
2. Expanding the risk spectrum of youth exposed to drugs, substance misuse, and other risky drug activity.
3. Understanding that identification of DEC can come from any discipline.
4. Understanding the impact on children of all activities associated with drugs and other substances.

DEC efforts now involve representatives from all disciplines, including law enforcement officers, child welfare providers, fire/emergency medical services personnel, judicial staff members, medical personnel, teachers and school personnel, service providers, treatment facility providers, and many more. The overarching belief is that the more people involved and educated about DEC, the more likely that children who are at risk will be identified. DEC efforts are no longer a reactive response; they are proactive, beginning with education and progressing to the identification of children at risk or in need, provision of intervention and other services, and support for children and their families.

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## Role of Law Enforcement

So where do law enforcement agencies fit in and why are they essential to DEC efforts? First, law enforcement officers often encounter children and families during their most vulnerable moments, which may serve as opportunities to provide help. But officers also see children and families in situations that many other disciplines are not able to see. For example, they may enter a house with a search warrant and observe several people injecting drugs with needles; they may see a couple passed out on the floor in the bedroom while their children play video games in the living room. Following such encounters, law enforcement officers are able to provide information and evidence, including pictures, videos, and interviews, to other disciplines. This information subsequently enables community service disciplines to intervene and provide services that are best able to help children and families.

### Case Study, Part One: CSKT Tribal DEC Alliance

In Montana, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' (CSKT) Tribal DEC Alliance leader, Melanie Smith, was able to develop relationships with the different police agencies around the reservation by going in person and talking about drug problems and how they were affecting children. She shared the impacts that drug problems were having on the reservation and invited officers to meetings with the DEC Alliance and community stakeholders. By attending meetings, officers could see how disciplines were working together, how they identified gaps, and helped one another to come up with effective responses to challenges. As new law enforcement officers came to the table, they could see firsthand the effectiveness of the alliance. Even though they were new or not yet officially members, they could share their issues and concerns and get ideas and direction from the alliance, producing better outcomes for children and the community.

Law enforcement officers hold the key to gathering and collecting drug use and drug-related data within the community. Law enforcement data can be used to assess community needs and develop strategic plans to create comprehensive and community-based tribal responses, which, in turn, can serve as the basis for a strong tribal DEC alliance. A tribal DEC alliance is able to define protocols around what types of information may be shared with its members, institutionalizing confidentiality through memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and partner agreements.

Law enforcement officers also provide a different perspective on how the community and children are impacted and can suggest a variety of ideas about how to solve the problems. They can also provide support to service providers who are entering homes that may be dangerous.

So, the tough question is, what is the best way to engage tribal law enforcement agencies in DEC efforts in order to make substantive changes that benefit children and their families?

## DEC Approach Training

The National Alliance for DEC uses the DEC Roadmap and Toolkit ([www.nationaldec.org/road](http://www.nationaldec.org/road)) to assist communities and tribes in getting buy-in from different disciplines, including law enforcement. The DEC Roadmap and Toolkit is divided into three stages: awareness, implementation, and institutionalization. Let us focus on the implementation stage, which addresses barriers to obtaining buy-in from stakeholders to support development and implementation of solutions to support DEC. The implementation stage encourages professionals and communities to move from awareness to action. This action piece comprises DEC Approach Training; identifying, developing, and implementing DEC promising practices; engaging leadership and stakeholders even when that becomes difficult; and disseminating information to others. This stage is also the start of the process of bringing together a small group of professionals to serve as a DEC alliance. As a

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result, tribal law enforcement officers will have experience and understanding working with cultural and traditional practices—valuable knowledge for a tribal DEC alliance. The officers will benefit from established relationships with tribal leaders and can invite them to trainings and meetings.

The DEC Approach Training was developed to help address the challenges and the needs of DEC. This training outlines a multidisciplinary strategy designed to change the trajectory of a child’s life through recognition of a common vision; ongoing collaboration between disciplines, as well as with community members; and ongoing changes in practices, policies, and other changes intended to increase the likelihood of better outcomes for DEC. The DEC Approach trains practitioners to form community-based partnerships across multiple disciplines and to effectively collaborate according to their mutual interests, resources, and responsibilities.

This is a stage when communities will begin to look at developing promising practices (or utilizing existing ones). These may include the development and/or utilization of checklists, publications, and tools that assist disciplines in their current jobs. The National Alliance for DEC has developed many of these resources to assist communities in their implementation efforts.

At this point, it is important to start engaging leadership and stakeholders to begin the institutionalization stage of DEC efforts. Making a list of potential partners and advocates for DEC efforts is important. By now, many stakeholders should already be involved, but there might be other disciplines that have not been engaged that will be important moving forward. This is the stage to brainstorm ideas regarding getting those disciplines involved. Here are some questions to consider when it comes to engaging tribal law enforcement:

### Case Study, Part Two: CSKT Tribal DEC Alliance

The CSKT Tribal DEC Alliance continued conversations with law enforcement frequently, talking about ongoing DEC concerns. This created opportunities for different disciplines and law enforcement agencies to see the alliance in action and participate in local trainings. For those who were not completely on board with the alliance, trainings were a game changer. Through support from a nearby city in Montana, many law enforcement officers were sent to the National Alliance for DEC national conference. There, these officers were able to gain insight into the trauma-informed approach of DEC efforts. The conference helped provide the awareness and education needed for officers to become fully committed to the CSKT DEC Alliance’s efforts.

1. Why do you want law enforcement involved in DEC efforts? What can they bring to the table? How can DEC efforts benefit from their involvement? Showing law enforcement officers how efforts would benefit from their involvement will be important. Developing tribal community-specific materials, such as pamphlets or infographics, to demonstrate how law enforcement can participate in the program will be helpful. Officers may not understand how they can assist, so explain how their evidence and information can benefit other disciplines and how sharing information can provide insight for other disciplines to be able to help at-risk children.
2. How can law enforcement benefit from getting involved? Showing law enforcement how they can benefit should help in obtaining their buy-in. Explain what is in it for them: preserving culture and traditional tribal values; accessing information from other disciplines for their own cases and investigations; developing partnerships with more agencies that can assist their investigations; helping more children by helping other disciplines; getting children help and intervention earlier; and stopping the multigenerational cycles of substance abuse as well as child abuse and neglect.



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3. What is it you would like them to do? Everyone who gets involved will need to know what is expected of them and how they can help. This might be in the form of sharing information and evidence with other disciplines, having someone assigned to sit on the DEC alliance, signing an MOU for a response protocol, or developing tools to assist children and families. These will be community-specific, depending on local needs.

## Conclusion

As should be clear now, law enforcement officers can bring significant value to a DEC alliance, which, in turn, affords better protection for children, based on early recognition of problems and intervention for children and families. Take the time to educate and include law enforcement officers in DEC trainings and efforts. When they see and understand that DEC alliances embody the philosophy of “I make you stronger and you make me stronger,” their buy-in will be quick to come, and the community will benefit from the collaboration of all disciplines.

The National Alliance for DEC, in partnership with the National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC) of Fox Valley Technical College, is able to provide training and technical assistance (TTA) to tribal COSSAP grantees and non-grantee tribal communities that are ready to implement the DEC Approach. The National Alliance for DEC and NCJTC are also able to provide technical assistance to tribes needing assistance with achieving law enforcement buy-in and multidisciplinary and community stakeholder engagement. TTA services are available at no cost through COSSAP TTA funding provided by the Bureau of Justice Assistance and can be requested through the COSSAP Resource Center at <https://www.cossapresources.org/Program/TTA>.



# Institutionalizing Support for Drug Endangered Children in Tribal Communities: How to Sustain It in an Ever-Changing World

Catching Up With COSSAP, October 2021



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*National Criminal Justice Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College. The first article, [Establishing Programs to Support Drug Endangered Children: Is My Community Ready?](#) appeared in the April 2021 issue of *Catching Up With COSSAP*. The second, [Implementing Programs to Support Drug Endangered Children \(DEC\) in Tribal Communities: Getting Buy-In From Law Enforcement](#), appeared in the August issue.*

Now that you have assessed your readiness to undertake a program to support drug endangered children (DEC) in the [awareness stage](#) and have started the [implementation stage](#), what is next? The next step is institutionalizing and sustaining your DEC efforts, because we want to do everything we can to ensure a healthy community for our children. They are our future.

**What does institutionalizing efforts mean?** By adding DEC support to other customary responses to substance misuse—including those by tribal law enforcement, child welfare services, and other service providers—institutionalization helps create a standard. Knowing how to identify and intervene on behalf of drug endangered children are important steps; once they are accepted as best practices and are used in all cases, DEC efforts have been institutionalized.

## Tribal DEC Alliance: A Case Study

National DEC worked with a tribe, called Tribe A for this case study, to provide DEC training on its reservation. After the training, National DEC began to schedule follow-up calls to provide technical assistance (TA) for setting up a local DEC alliance. Tribe A declined the TA, thinking it did not need to formalize its efforts. After the training, Tribe A made a few changes in how child welfare organizations looked at their DEC cases, and a few law enforcement officers started looking for children during traffic stops. Police officers also reached out more regularly to child welfare services.

One year later, National DEC received an email from Tribe A asking for help again as things had not changed and DEC were becoming more prevalent and impacted more frequently. Tribe A witnessed more babies being born testing positive for illegal drugs and an increase in drug-related arrests, but services were not working together to address those needs. National DEC conducted more training, and Tribe A agreed that TA was necessary to make and sustain the changes needed. National DEC worked with Tribe A to set up a DEC alliance whose efforts were institutionalized and sustainable.

After three years of working with National DEC, Tribe A now has a tribal DEC alliance that meets regularly, active memoranda of understanding (MOUs), a community assessment and action plan, collaboration between services, and much more. Since its DEC efforts are now institutionalized, Tribe A is looking at implementing promising DEC practice tools such as Handle With Care and QR codes (see National DEC's Promising Practices for Helping Drug Endangered Children at [www.nationaldec.org](http://www.nationaldec.org) for more information).

Institutionalized efforts in Tribe A have helped its DEC alliance come together, address issues, and find solutions. And it will continue to do so for years to come as its efforts are now sustainable.

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**Why do we want to institutionalize efforts?** If DEC efforts are not institutionalized as part of everyday practice by professionals in communities, local responses to substance abuse become fragmented and are not consistent in their application or effects. This means that they will be unlikely to last and that children will continue to suffer, families will continue to be torn apart by addiction, and communities will continue to be impacted by trauma and crime. Institutionalization formalizes efforts to address issues over time, even when issues around substance misuse and addiction change down the road.

**How do you institutionalize efforts?** [National DEC](#) helps communities and tribes implement and sustain their DEC efforts through its DEC Roadmap and Toolkit.

During this stage, professionals, communities, and tribes can use the National DEC Roadmap and Toolkit to:

1. Continue to connect with National DEC and the [National Criminal Justice Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College](#) for information, TA, updated training opportunities, and other resources and support. DEC training and technical assistance (TTA) is available to Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP) tribal grantees at no cost through Bureau of Justice Assistance-supported TTA funds and can be requested through the COSSAP Resource Center: <https://www.cossapresources.org/Program/TTA>. National DEC's website, <https://www.nationaldec.org/>, also provides many tools and resources.
2. Continue to train and raise their awareness of the issues surrounding DEC. Ongoing training is important as there are always new professionals and new community members who need information to support children.
3. Continue to provide training on the DEC approach to bringing stakeholders together to discuss a common vision, collaboration, and change as they relate to DEC.
4. Conduct local DEC development training and facilitation to assist in developing an alliance and to work through problems.
5. Have local professionals become certified DEC trainers to provide ongoing training.
6. Establish effective communications with all tribal programs, the community, and tribal leaders.
7. Institutionalize and share promising DEC practices and evaluate their effectiveness. This may include the development of protocols (see National DEC's Protocol Development Worksheet at <https://www.nationaldec.org/institutionalization>); bylaws; and MOUs.
8. Work with leaders on policy support as it pertains to DEC efforts. This could be in the form of tribal resolutions or legislation.
9. Conduct regular meetings with the multidisciplinary alliance to develop rules, agendas, and subcommittees as necessary; identify goals and objectives; develop solutions; and address issues that arise in order to sustain progress.
10. Continue to assess DEC efforts on all levels to maintain effectiveness and safety for children and families.

## Benefits of Institutionalized DEC Efforts:

- Provide a foundation for responding to challenges facing DEC
- Provide a framework for responding effectively to issues that may arise down the road
- Provide long-term solutions instead of short-term reactions
- Build trust across disciplines and throughout the community
- Increase support not only for professionals but also children and families

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## What does this all mean for my community/tribe?

Institutionalization means that DEC efforts within a tribal community *are possible*. It is possible to respond effectively to challenges facing DEC on an ongoing basis. It is possible to bring disciplines together on a long-term basis. It is possible to work collaboratively on every level to effect change for children and their families. Not only can you influence change now; by institutionalizing efforts and thereby making them sustainable, the impact of your work will continue for years to come.

National DEC's work with Tribe A's DEC alliance (see case study on first page) helped institutionalize its efforts in several ways. First, MOUs were developed and signed between agencies to formalize efforts. Second, tribal DEC alliances were formed that brought numerous disciplines and leaders together on a regular basis. National DEC helped Tribe A complete a tribal action plan that contained both short- and long-term goals and objectives. At each DEC alliance meeting, the group discussed progress toward goals and next steps. When issues arose, DEC alliance members helped to work through them and find solutions that fit the tribe and community. The continued progress of the DEC alliance toward its goals brought a sense of accomplishment to the group and the tribe. Utilizing the Roadmap and Toolkit, National DEC walked the alliance through the steps needed to become a successful, functioning tribal DEC alliance.

Institutionalizing DEC efforts in tribal communities can be challenging at times due to several factors, including staff turnover (including those in leadership roles) and limited staffing and resources to keep up with regular workloads while trying to maintain the momentum of DEC initiatives. One way to overcome these challenges is to document DEC efforts by:

- Ensuring that MOUs between stakeholder agencies are concluded.
- Memorializing practices and incorporating them as policies.
- Tracking DEC alliance membership.
- Developing meeting agendas and keeping meeting minutes.

It is important to include these steps as part of a tribal action plan or as part of a DEC alliance's goals and objectives. A history of where you came from and how you got there can be valuable to a DEC alliance, especially for succeeding generations of alliance members.

We hope this three-part series provided a practical foundation as you move toward helping change the trajectory of children's lives and breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect.

