



THE HARVARD PROJECT ON AMERICAN INDIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Enhancing Government to Government Relationships Intergovernmental Affairs Department The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (Grand Ronde, Oregon)

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The Grand Ronde Intergovernmental Affairs Department has achieved positive intergovernmental relationships by pursuing a five-pronged strategy of communication, education, cooperation, contributions and presence. By establishing a department whose primary function is to interact with other governments on a government-to-government basis and by locating it in Salem, the capital of Oregon, the Tribe has solidified its recognition as a sovereign with federal, state, local and other tribal governments.

Interaction with other sovereign governments is a fundamental function of tribal government, and the capacity to fulfill this responsibility is a necessary attribute of self-determination. Perhaps no tribal government appreciates this more than that of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde (CTGR). Today, the 5,000-citizen nation is a political and economic powerhouse in the Northwest, but this has not always been the case. As a result of the U.S. government's "termination" policy, which was a formal attempt by the Congress to end the special relationship between the government and the tribes, in 1954, the Confederated Tribes were stripped of their political sovereignty and control over their land base. This was the darkest period in the Tribes' history, and the U.S. government did not recognize their existence again until 1983.

Upon re-affirmation of their sovereign status, the CTGR faced the critical task of nation-building. Having endured 29 years of termination, a central part of this task was to produce internal governing capacity. That is, the Tribes needed to develop an effective government bureaucracy and organize government programs that would help meet tribal citizens' most pressing socio-economic needs. At the same time, the CTGR's leaders realized that nation-building required investments in external capacity. They knew that strong ties with outside jurisdictions would both establish the legitimacy of the CTGR with other governmental authorities and help protect the sovereignty that they had fought so hard to re-establish. Thus, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Tribes positioned themselves as a key actor in local, regional, state and federal policy affairs. In 1997, the CTGR took their commitment to enhancing external government relations to an even higher level by creating a new government institution to oversee external relations – the Grand Ronde Intergovernmental Affairs Department.

The Intergovernmental Affairs Department's overarching responsibility is to interact with other jurisdictions and to facilitate Grand Ronde's government-to-government relationships. The Department works to raise public awareness, build coalitions, inform tribal, state and federal

legislation, and engage in public sector partnerships on behalf of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. A five-pronged strategy of communication, education, cooperation, contribution and presence guides the Department's specific initiatives and activities in each of these areas.

The Intergovernmental Affairs Department is directly staffed by two tribal employees. Their work is complemented by the efforts of skilled outside professionals who are employed on a contract basis (in particular, the Department engages a lobbying group and a public relations firm). Together, the tribal employees and contractors comprise a unique "legislative team," whose substantial knowledge of both tribal and non-tribal government improves the Department's problem-solving capabilities and results in an increased flow of information between the CTGR and other governments. Through teamwork, the Department is able to produce and distribute a wealth of educational material about the Tribes to policymakers and the public, and reach out to and support important non-tribal institutions and individuals, thus creating allies and partners for the CTGR. An impressive example of these efforts involves candidates for the Oregon State Legislature. The Department invites every candidate to tour the Grand Ronde Reservation, meet tribal leaders, and interact with tribal members. If the candidates become legislators, they have a better vision of how their decisions affect the Tribes.

The sophistication of Grand Ronde's strategy and organizational approach is especially evident in their efforts to respond to and influence state and federal legislation. The Department uses a legislative tracking system to monitor bills and initiatives that could affect the Tribes' jurisdiction and presents a categorized list to the Tribal Council every two weeks. Council members rank the listed items in order of policy priority and turn the information around to the Intergovernmental Affairs staff, who then work with the Council's five-member Legislative Committee to craft specific strategies for addressing these key external legislative initiatives. The system keeps the Council well informed, allows them to concentrate resources on high priority issues and results in targeted, proactive advocacy. Equally advantageous for state legislation is the fact that the Intergovernmental Affairs Department is headquartered in Salem, the capital of Oregon. Being physically in the midst of this fast-paced legislative environment helps ensure that Grand Ronde's intergovernmental affairs representatives can provide substantive input in a timely manner.

The results of the Department's work are remarkable. As its leaders predicted 20 years ago, carefully tended external relations have shored up the CTGR's sovereignty and leveled the playing field in the nation's interactions with other governments. At the state level, which is undoubtedly the arena of Grande Ronde's greatest success, the number of bills emerging from the Oregon State Legislature that the Tribes viewed as potentially damaging dropped from 19 in 1997 to only 3 in 1999. Tribal leaders visiting government offices on official business are no longer treated as ordinary Oregon citizens with requests for services, but as representatives of a respected independent government. Similarly, the state government increasingly views the CTGR as a partner in the resolution of important regional issues, which is an important win in this era of federal devolution. Grand Ronde's collaboration with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality in the successful and publicly acclaimed Portland Harbor Cleanup is but one noteworthy example of such partnerships.

In addition to enhancing relationships with state authorities, the Intergovernmental Affairs Department has succeeded in promoting better relationships with the federal government and with other tribal governments. For instance, on June 9, 1999, the CTGR entered into a Collaborative Stewardship Agreement with the U.S. Forest Service. This joint forest management arrangement, which recognizes the technical and administrative expertise of

the Grand Ronde government and its staff, is a direct result of the Department's efforts. The Intergovernmental Affairs Department's success in building fruitful inter-tribal relationships is evident in the fact that, when charting their own interactions with the State of Oregon, other tribes draw on the Department's expertise. Likewise, members of the Oregon Legislative Commission on Indian Services have noted that the Grande Ronde Intergovernmental Affairs Department has been a great benefit to all Oregon-based tribes.

The reasons for the Grand Ronde Intergovernmental Affairs Department's success are varied and instructive. Critically, the Department works with the Tribal Council to prioritize issues and then concentrates its financial and personnel resources on those priorities. In all of its activities, the Department consciously abides by its strategy, which is designed to both influence the short term (especially through well-placed community and political contributions) and to change minds over the long term (especially through its education and outreach work). Finally, the Department is successful because its staff studies and uses recognized techniques for political communication.

In creating the Intergovernmental Affairs Department, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde chose an innovative approach to dealing with other governments, surrounding communities and the general public – and the choice has paid off. The Department's educational campaign, increased public relations efforts and more effective communication with other governments have not only put the CTGR on an equal footing with other governments operating in the region, but also helped re-establish the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde as a self-governing sovereign.

Lessons:

- Tribal governments stand to improve their intergovernmental relationships by coordinating and prioritizing public relations messages and concentrating tribal resources on top issues.
- Tribal governments can increase their credibility by forging strong partnerships with other governments. The devolution of responsibilities from the federal government to state governments increases the opportunities for and the necessity of tribal collaboration with subnational governments.
- A legislative tracking system that monitors all bills and initiatives that could affect tribal governments can be a powerful tool for decision makers in Indian Country.

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