

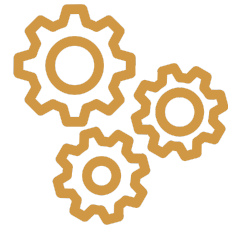


Analysis Plan

Project Name: Learning from Tribal governments' experiences with federal grant programs

Project Codes: 2311; 2408; 2409

Date finalized: 3/11/2025



Project description

Members of Native nations were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic along multiple dimensions. In 2021, Congress recognized the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on citizens of Native nations in creating the largest-ever transfer of funds to Native nations by the federal government. The purpose of this evaluation is to bring new descriptive insights into Tribes' experiences with, access to, and the implementation of three federal programs: EDA's Indigenous Communities Program (IC), ACF's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and Treasury's State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI). We intend to produce three reports to share learnings about Tribal governments' experiences for each of the programs, in addition to a cross-program synthesis analysis. Methodologically, this evaluation will be primarily qualitative and entirely descriptive. These reports will both summarize Tribes' perspectives on accessing and implementing federally-funded programs, and synthesize feedback generated from our interviews to provide concrete recommendations regarding how agencies can better serve Tribes.

The goal of this project is to build descriptive evidence to help agencies learn how to better serve Tribes as they access and implement federal programs. This project is also intended to bring to light new descriptive evidence for Tribes themselves that will highlight the experiences of applying for and/or receiving federal funding during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This set of descriptive studies does not seek to identify the impacts of these programs on Indigenous communities, and will not speak to the effectiveness of these programs on achieving their priority outcomes. Instead, these studies will highlight best practices and challenges in agency and Tribal administration of these programs. The overarching intention for these studies is to generate actionable recommendations for agency partners to improve how they engage with Tribes, as well as for members of Tribes to see their voices amplified in the report so that new insights are authentically conveyed to the federal government.

A key component of this project from the outset was the intention to incorporate structured engagement with Tribal communities throughout the research process, to ensure that the three

studies' design was co-created with their input and aligned with their priorities. Therefore, we undertook a community engagement (CE) phase that took place between June-September 2024. The CE involved several phases, including 1. stakeholder mapping and validation, 2. conducting discovery interviews with Tribal program recipients and agency administrative staff, and group feedback sessions. to provide feedback on our summary of the interview findings. This resulted in synthesis documents, containing insights that were central to our research design.

Identifying project targets

U.S. Department of the Treasury: State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI)

SSBCI provides \$10 billion in federal funding for states, the District of Columbia, territories, and Tribal governments to empower small businesses to access capital needed to invest in job-creating opportunities as the country emerges from the pandemic. SSBCI also includes a \$500 million allocation for technical assistance funding. SSBCI provides recipient jurisdictions funding for: (1) credit and investment programs for existing small businesses and start-ups, and (2) technical assistance to small businesses applying for SSBCI funding and other government small business programs. Tribal governments may use SSBCI funds to support eligible small business financing in any eligible manner they choose. This includes supporting small businesses on tribal lands, small businesses in states where tribal lands or tribal members are located, and small businesses owned by tribal members anywhere within the United States. Small business financing programs that SSBCI funds may be used to support capital access programs, loan participation, loan guarantee, collateral support, and venture-equity programs. Additional funding for technical assistance (TA) is included to provide small businesses with legal, accounting, and financial advisory services. The federally-funded SSBCI is its second round. The first round, funded in 2010, was only open to States. The fact that the second [round of SSBCI includes Tribes](#) is an important new step in Treasury's relationship with Tribal governments and a new opportunity for business development, yet presents a number of new challenges. For example, [400 Tribal governments submitted a notice of intent to apply for the SSBCI program](#), and only about [half of Tribal governments are participating in SSBCI](#).

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF): Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF), aims to assist households with low incomes, particularly those with the lowest incomes that pay a high proportion of household income for home energy, primarily in meeting their immediate home energy needs. LIHEAP is mainly funded by regular block funding provided by the Division of Energy Assistance, which sits within the Office of Community Services ([OCS](#)) at HHS. LIHEAP funding is then distributed to grant recipients, who are "states, federally recognized tribes and tribal organizations (including Alaska native villages), and territories" who can apply for LIHEAP

awards, and then distribute this funding to LIHEAP-eligible households. Tribal LIHEAP grant recipients include 153 Tribes and Tribal organization grant recipients in 22 states.¹ ACF allocated \$48 million to Tribal LIHEAP grant recipients.² Almost all Tribes and Tribal organizations that were current LIHEAP grant recipients received a supplemental award.

U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) Indigenous Communities (IC) program

The Indigenous Communities Program awarded \$100 million in federal funds to support the needs of Tribal governments and Indigenous communities. This program supported Tribes in their efforts to pursue economic development projects that would close opportunity gaps and foster economic mobility and resiliency in Indigenous communities rebuilding from the pandemic.³ These awards funded a diverse range of projects proposed by Tribal governments, including projects to support new business facilities, create infrastructure to enable business development, implement worker training and support programs, upgrade tourist attractions, field economic development planning and technical assistance programs, and support business incubation and entrepreneurship.

By design, the IC program awarded Tribal communities a high degree of flexibility in eligibility, program design, and implementation. EDA expanded the eligibility pool, allowing for-profit Tribal corporations to apply for funds, did not require that communities match funds, and provided an expansive list of eligible activities. These program changes may have allowed the funding to reach communities not typically reached by EDA's projects, as over half of all applications and award recipients were groups that had not previously participated in an EDA grant program.⁴ Specifically, "EDA solicit[ed] applications under the authority of its Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) program, which is intended to be flexible and responsive to the economic development needs and priorities of indigenous communities."⁵

High-level research questions:

Across the three programs, we have identified two core research questions, which we have further divided into more specific sub-research questions that pertain to different aspects of the program application and implementation phases.

1. What are Tribes' experiences with accessing federally-funded programs?

We first want to understand how Tribes learned about the program, decided they wanted to apply for the program, and completed the application.

- a. How do Tribes experience learning about the program?
- b. How do Tribes experience applying to [the agency] for [the program]?

¹ More information about funding to Tribal LIHEAP grant recipients can be found on the [ACF LIHEAP Clearinghouse](#).

² This \$48 million investment (see [specific funding amounts](#) for Tribal grant recipients) was only a portion of the funding that ACF distributed to LIHEAP grant recipients: ACF awarded an additional \$4.5 billion to LIHEAP grant recipients [in 2021](#), and \$900 million under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security ([CARES](#)) Act [in 2020](#).

³ [Indigenous Communities Fact Sheet](#).

⁴ [FACT SHEET: Indigenous Communities Fact Sheet](#).

⁵ [FY 2021 Indigenous Communities Notice of Funding Opportunities](#).

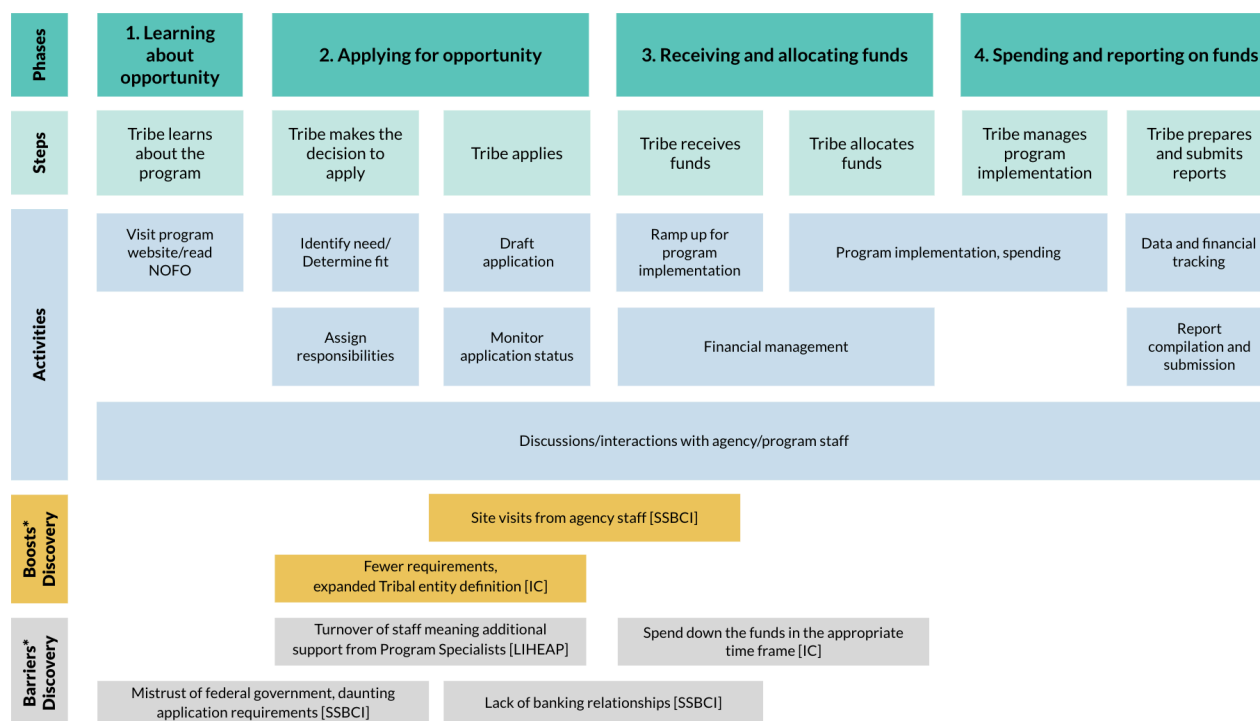
2. What are Tribes' experiences with implementing federally-funded programs?

For Tribes that received funding, we also want to learn their experience implementing the funded programs themselves.

- a. How do Tribes experience receiving program funds from [the agency]?
- b. What factors made it easier to implement the program or project?
- c. What were barriers to implementation of the program or project?
- d. Where do Tribes perceive opportunities to improve the process of delivering the program or project?

We have selected these research questions based on the following map of themes in accessing and implementing the three federally-funded programs, developed during the discovery phase of this project. The questions in both protocols are designed to explore different themes in the application and implementation process, including: learning about the program and application requirements, communication and interactions with the agency, administration burden, fit and match with community needs, and barriers to and facilitators of receiving program funds and implementing the program itself.

Figure 1. Simplified overview of Tribal journey with IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI



Preliminary evaluation design

Data collection for this evaluation will consist of qualitative data collection in the form of qualitative conversations (interviews and focus groups), open-ended, qualitative survey questions, and observations gleaned through public convenings, site visits, and open calls for feedback. We will contact all applicants – Tribes or Tribal-affiliated entities – to the three programs with an invitation to participate in our study.

Population and expected number of observations:

The population for this study is all applicants to each of the programs; “applicant” refers to the Tribe as a whole, and the position of individual participants in the study may vary across Tribes. We will seek to contact individuals who have firsthand experience with applying for and/or administering the federally-funded programs, and expect these individuals to hold positions such as Tribal Administrator or Grant Writer for the Tribes.⁶ Table 1 outlines the population size for each program. Agencies will provide OES with the full list of applicants.

⁶ In many cases, the list of program applicants will be outdated. As such, we expect an email bounce back for at least 20% of the applicant list. This figure comes from our colleagues at the Urban Institute, who had ~20% bounce back for a survey they conducted with EDA Tribal grantees from the same time period. For these cases, or other instances where we learn that the relevant individual is not receiving the survey link, we will conduct individual outreach through agency partners and Tribes to identify the correct person.

Table 1. Population size

Program	Total funded	Total unfunded	Total applicants
ACF: LIHEAP	150 ⁷	0 ⁸	150
Treasury: SSBCI Capital Program	64 ⁹	40	104 ¹⁰
EDA: Indigenous Communities	57	~ 68	~ 125
Total	271	108	379

Data collection

This study will draw on original data sources that OES will collect via the data collection efforts outlined in Table 2. Each mode of data collection will target a slightly different sample (described below). The data collection efforts are designed to complement one another analytically, as well as provide participants with sample ways to participate in the study, varying from “high touch” participation such as interviews or site visits, to “low touch” participation in the form of open calls for feedback and the survey. We intend for this approach to democratize participation in the research process.

Every applicant to each of the programs will have an opportunity to participate either in the qualitative conversations or the survey, though applicants may also opt to participate in both. We will partition the sample such that we will first purposively sample applicants for key informant interviews and focus groups, and then invite all remaining applicants to participate in the survey. Because we are only interviewing a small number of applicants, we will rely on non-random sampling to try and represent a range of experiences¹¹ with the federally-funded programs. Survey applicants may opt into participation in a follow-up interview if they are interested in discussing beyond the survey.

Table 2 summarizes the data collection strategies that we discuss in greater detail below.

⁷ There were 150 Tribes who received LIHEAP funding when ARP funding was introduced. The number of Tribes who receive LIHEAP funding each year varies each year, but typically remains around 150. [\[Source\]](#)

⁸ ACF is not aware of any Tribes who apply who do not receive funding. In order to receive LIHEAP funds, Tribes must be a federally or state recognized Tribe, submit a LIHEAP Model Plan to ACF (which includes how they will meet the assurances) and comply with the grant terms and agreements.

⁹ As of 10/15/24.

¹⁰ 582 Tribal governments were eligible to apply for SSBCI [\[source\]](#). Over 400 Tribal governments submitted a notice of intent to apply [\[source, source\]](#). Treasury received 108 applications from Tribal applicants to the Capital Program. 101 of these were submitted by individual Tribal governments. 7 were submitted on behalf of consortiums that collectively represented 182 Tribal governments [\[source\]](#). As of 10/15/24, there were 104 applicants.

¹¹ We have not yet decided on the criteria for inviting applicants to participate in either interviews or focus groups. Some criteria may include regional diversity, representation among different types of Tribes (federally-recognized vs. state-recognized, Native Hawaiian), diversity in the types of projects that were funded, diversity in the size of the Tribe that applied, and other similar characteristics. These selection decisions will be made on a program-by-program basis. We have, however, decided that we will not invite Tribes who participated in the Discovery interviews to participate in the study qualitative data collection. These Tribes will still receive an invitation to complete the survey.

Table 2. Summary of data collection strategies

Data collection method	Survey	Interviews	Focus groups	Site visits
Sample and sample size	Sent to all applicants Anticipated response rate: 20% Total: ~60	Up to 8 per program Total: 24	5 participants per focus group 3 groups per program Total: 45	1 – 2 site visits 1 – 2 groups per program Includes program participants only
Sampling strategy	Sent to all applicants who do not participate in interviews or FGs ¹²	Purposive, with key informants No overlap between interviews + FGs	Purposive, with key informants No overlap between interviews + FGs	Purposive, with key informants
Purpose	Establish average experiences across a larger sample	Generate rich data on mechanisms, experiences, etc. with additional nuance and cultural awareness and context	Same as Interviews, but with a different group dynamic that allows for multiple perspectives to be shared at once	Conduct “deep dives” into specific and tailored experiences that particular Tribes faced
PRA required	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not in this case ¹³

Site visits¹⁴

OES proposes to conduct up to three site visits for each program (9 site visits total across the three programs), where we will engage in discussions with Tribal leadership and program staff. These site visits will allow us to be in person with the Tribes as a respectful practice of establishing trust while engaging with Tribes. We envision conducting 1–2 separate trips, each of which will allow us to visit multiple Tribes based on clusters of Tribal communities in similar areas (see [Appendix 3](#) for more details on possible itineraries to cover more ground in one trip). Note that we have compiled multiple possible itineraries, and will only execute on 1–2 of these trips.

¹² This includes applicants who were invited to participate in an interview or focus group, but never responded to the interview.

¹³ If we were to interview more than 9 Tribes, this type of information collection would be subject to PRA approval. We are specifically designing our site visits so that they do not rise above the threshold that would require PRA approval.

¹⁴ Additional details on the site visits can be found in [Appendix 3](#).

This method has been identified as one that is seen as less extractive and focuses more on the relational aspect of Tribal engagement. The site visits will allow us to feature a more diverse set of experiences to learn about unique contextual factors, possible barriers and facilitators to applying and implementing government-funded programs, as well as best practices for administering these programs. Some example topics for these discussions include:

- What is important to understand about your community?
- What is unique about your experience in applying and implementing government funded programs?
- What have you learned about other tribes' decisions not to apply to the federally-funded programs in our study?
- What were the facilitators/barriers in implementing SSBCI / IC / LIHEAP?
- What would you like us to be able to share about your Tribe's experience with government funded programs?

Timing of site visits with other activities

We expect to carry out the site visits in the short term (late winter or early spring of 2025), without waiting for the PRA approval for the other data collection activities (this is why we expect to carry out no more than 9 such visits). The purpose of these site visits is independent from the other data collection activities, for the most part. As noted above, this activity has a primary purpose of building in-person relationships with a handful of Tribes, to mitigate what might otherwise fall into a common pattern of writing about Tribes' experiences without meeting them. It is likely that these activities will have some implications for any subsequent data collection: for example, being able to establish rapport with the Tribe for an ask to participate in a qualitative interview later in the data collection phase.

Site selections

We will rely on purposive sampling to select which communities we will visit. We will take the following factors into account when selecting locations.

- *Limited to Tribes that have been awarded and/or applied for program funding:* We will only conduct site visits with Tribes who (1) received program funding, and (2) applied for but did not receive program funding. We do not include Tribes who did not apply for program funding. Limiting in this way is due to several considerations:
 - 1. Tribes who received program funding: Tribal staff will have full insights with regards to the various stages of the program process, including applying, receiving funding, and implementing their programs.
 - 2. Tribes who applied for but did not receive program funding: Tribal staff will not have insights with regards to receiving funding and implementing the programs, but will nonetheless have important insights about the application process; in

particular, their perceptions of what prevented them from being awarded funding (that we may not learn about by just focusing on the first group).

- 3. Tribes who did not apply for program funding: Attempts to visit Tribes who did not apply for funding may be unacceptable to these communities (e.g., they may not understand the rationale for us asking them about a program they did not apply for). Logistically, it would also be challenging to identify Tribes who may have considered but did not apply for funding.
- *Geographical representation*: Making efforts to engage with Tribal communities from diverse regional areas for inclusion is different from representative sample selection, which seeks to represent a broader population and generalize findings. The project team has undertaken a mapping exercise to identify the cross-sections of program participation across the US. When seeking geographic representation for the site visits, we will consider the following:
 - Which Tribes participated in the discovery phase?
 - What Tribes were approached but did not respond in the discovery phase?
 - What Tribes have the agencies communicated should be given priority that we did not engage in the discovery phase? (this occurred during the discovery phase)
 - Are there any areas across the country that we have not attempted engagement with a Tribe?
- *Applied to multiple programs vs one*: We will prioritize areas where the Tribes have applied to multiple programs to maximize efforts during the site visits. In selecting locations where a Tribe has applied to multiple programs, it provides the opportunity to meet with several people across the three programs in one location instead of traveling to multiple locations to speak with multiple people. This distinguishing factor is only applicable to the site selection process and not the analysis. Any data collected at sites where Tribes have applied to multiple programs will be done so on a program-only basis and not analyzed for the perspective of applying to multiple programs.
- *Prioritizing communities and having back up locations*: In selecting sites, it is ideal to select multiple locations in order to have a pool of Tribes to engage with in the event the site visits are not possible at certain locations. This pool should be organized by first, second, and third choice based on the geographic location and applied to multiple programs criteria. We have identified 3 areas (Seattle, Albuquerque, and Oklahoma City) as “first choice” areas to engage with based on the above criteria of geographic location and Tribes who have applied to multiple programs. In the event the Tribes in one of these areas are not available for a site visit, it would be ideal to have a few additional areas selected for “second choice” sites to consider engaging with. Having these “second choice” locations identified will help avoid delays in moving the site visits forward.

Interviews and focus groups¹⁵

The interviews and focus groups will provide rich insights to convey a more nuanced understanding of experiences with applying for and implementing federally-funded programs. Qualitative data collection will also allow for the research team to incorporate Indigenous worldviews directly into the final reports, which would not be possible through the use of purely quantitative methods. Interviews will be led by the OES Tribal Engagement Fellow, and will be recorded and transcribed to allow for future synthesis. We will then use qualitative coding, thematic grouping, and journey mapping to generate insights from the interview and focus group data.

Recruitment

Recruitment for interviews and focus groups will be conducted for the three programs using convenience sampling. This is because, apart from the connections built with Tribes who took part in CE during discovery, we will not have pre-existing connections with Tribes and thus will be largely reliant on our agency partners to connect us with potential participants. While convenience sampling runs the risk of having a non-diverse sample, reliance on partner agencies is crucial to our research for a variety of reasons: 1. they have the best knowledge in relation to each of the three programs what is occurring at each Tribe, who the best contacts are, and local contextual factors that we may be unaware of; and 2. given their existing relationships with Tribal recipients, they can help connect us to potential participants where we would not be able to do so otherwise, and help to encourage participation. However, we'll also aim to capture a diverse range of experiences, with the following criteria in mind:

- Geographical location: From a range of Tribal locations across the country (see: [OES Tribal Engagement Site Visit Planning](#))
- Size of Tribe: Small, medium and large Tribes
- Took part in discovery phase: We will prioritize Tribal participants who did not take part in CE during discovery, in order to promote parity of participation in this research, and ensure that we are capturing a diverse range of voices. Moreover, CE participants helped to inform the research design, so excluding them in primary data collection is crucial where possible

Survey¹⁶

The survey will be sent to all applicants of the three federally-funded programs that do not participate in the interviews and focus groups. We intend to field a non-statistical survey that is designed to ensure that representatives from all eligible Tribal governments – those eligible to apply to one of the three programs we study – are able to participate in our study. The survey provides an alternative mode of study participation that may be less burdensome for respondents

¹⁵ The draft interview protocol can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

¹⁶ The draft survey instrument can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

than participating in an interview or focus group, while still providing the full population an inclusive opportunity to participate in our study. Principles of the Indigenous Evaluation Framework (Urban Indian Health Institute, 2018) encourage researchers to collaborate with participants and to ensure participants have ample opportunity to share their perspectives. As such, the survey is part of a broader effort to facilitate participation, and will complement the information collected through other means. The survey will not be used to draw generalized inferences about the characteristics of those who did not respond or were not sampled.

We will provide basic descriptive statistics¹⁷ of the responses to the survey, and will report content analysis of the open-ended questions. We may also select illustrative quotes from the open-ended questions to feature in the report.

Anticipated utilization of results and findings

Action supported by this research: This evaluation focuses on three programs implemented during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the results of this evaluation will not be used to make decisions about the specific programs we study, but rather about future, similar programming. We hope that the agencies will use this evidence to improve ongoing and future programs that serve Tribal communities. Our research is designed to identify both best practices and opportunities for improvement with respect to how large federal funding programs are administered in Tribal communities, limiting ourselves to improvements that can be made within each program's mandate. To maximize the likelihood of agency engagement with our recommendations, we have signed an MOU with each of the program teams, in which they have committed to "Using the findings to work together with OES to identify methods to further support Tribes to most effectively access and use current and future programs."

Required stakeholder involvement/notification: We will share the results in a final descriptive report with agency staff. Agency staff, as well as the Tribal communities with which we collaborate, will need to be informed about the project results once we have concluded our research.


¹⁷ In the event of a lower than expected survey response rate, we may decide to omit basic descriptive statistics in the report. While we do not expect high engagement with the survey, we anticipate that the survey provides an additional platform for which Tribes can participate in this research.

Appendices



Appendix 1: Survey instrument

Information sheet/Consent form

What is the purpose of this research?

- This research is being conducted by the Office of Evaluation Sciences ([OES](#)), based at the General Services Administration ([GSA](#)). We will use this research to learn about Tribes' experiences with LIHEAP . This is a federal government study independently led by OES.
- We thank you for considering this opportunity to share your experience and supporting us. We hope our research improves these programs for your community.

What will happen if I participate in this research?

- This survey will ask you a series of questions generally related to your Tribe's experience with LIHEAP .
- We will ask about your position and Tribe you work for, but we will not ask for any additional personally identifiable information. We will never use your name or other personally identifiable information in summarized findings that are shared in the final research report.
- The findings from this study will be summarized in a final report. The final report will be available on OES's website.
- Your survey data will remain private within the research team. Only we will have access to your responses. We may share a small selection of individual responses in one of several reports that we will publish on the OES website. These responses will not be shared alongside any identifiable information about you or your Tribe.
- You don't have to answer any questions that may be uncomfortable for any reason.
- There is no foreseeable risk to sharing your thoughts and you can stop the survey at any time.
- There are no direct benefits to participating in this research. Your participation will help federal agencies learn about Tribal governments' experiences with LIHEAP .

If I have questions, who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact the research team at [add email address].

If you would like to report a research-related injury, please contact:

[IRB institution]

[To add: PRA approval from OMB, the OMB control number, and the burden estimate.]

[To add: Add a "badge" to the footer that summarizes compliance with PRA, control number and its expiration date to the top right corner]

[To add: IRB approval details]

Consent (1 question)

[R]¹⁸ Q1. Do you agree to participate in this survey?

- Yes
- No [if no is selected, the survey will end]

Eligibility (2 questions; or 3 questions for those who are not eligible to move forward)

We are interested in understanding your Tribe's experiences with ACF's LIHEAP Program . LIHEAP is a federal program that many Tribes applied for and received over the past three years. [LIHEAP-specific: LIHEAP is a federal program that many Tribes apply for and receive to help low-income households with meeting their home energy needs. Since 2021, LIHEAP grant recipients, including Tribes, received additional funding through the American Rescue Plan.]

To be eligible to participate in this survey, you must have direct knowledge of your Tribe's experiences with applying for and/or implementing LIHEAP .

[R] Q2. What is the name of the Tribe you work for?

- [Open-ended text box]

[R] Q3. Did your Tribe apply to LIHEAP ?

LIHEAP specific: Did your Tribe apply to LIHEAP during the 2021 program year (when additional federal funding was made available)?

1. Yes

¹⁸ This denotes if the response will be Required [R], Encouraged [E], or Optional [O] in Qualtrics. Respondents will not be able to proceed without answering required responses. They will receive a message encouraging them to complete the question before moving on for encouraged responses. For optional responses, they will be able to move on without answering the question without any prompting.

2. No
3. Not sure

[R] Q4. Which of the following answers best describes you? Please select all options that apply.

1. I have direct knowledge of my Tribe's experiences with applying to the program.
2. I have direct knowledge of my Tribe's experiences with administering the program.
3. **[Mutually exclusive of #1 and #2]** I do not have direct knowledge of my Tribe's experiences with applying to or administering the program. *[If 2 is selected, the survey will end with Q4a]*

[For participants who responded 2 or 3 to Q2, or 3 to Q3 only] ->

[O] Q5a. Thank you for your response. At this time, we are only seeking participants with firsthand knowledge of applying for and/or administering LIHEAP ▾.

We would be grateful if you would provide us with the contact information of anyone at your Tribe who does have firsthand knowledge of LIHEAP ▾. Please enter their contact information (name and email address) in the text box below.

You may also use the text box below to leave us any questions or feedback.

- [Open text response]

Main survey

Demographics (3 questions)

This section will ask you some basic questions about your position at **[TRIBE]**¹⁹ your Tribe.

[E] Q5b. What is your job title at **[TRIBE]**? (E.g., Tribal Administrator, Program Specialist)

- [Open text response]

[E] Q6. How long have you worked on LIHEAP ▾ with **[TRIBE]**?

- [Dropdown response with list of options]
 - 0-6 months
 - 7-11 months
 - 1-2 years
 - 3-4 years
 - *[LIHEAP only]* 5 years or longer
 - I don't know/I'm not sure

¹⁹ Note that anywhere that this instrument says **[TRIBE]**, it will be a field that is pre-populated based on their response to Question 2.

Accessing and applying (5 questions; or 6 for those not eligible to move forward to implementation section)

This section will ask you a set of questions that focus on your experiences with **applying to LIHEAP** .

[R] Q7. Did **[TRIBE]** receive funding from **LIHEAP** ?

- Yes *[participants who choose this option will proceed to Q8-11, and skip to Q12b]*
- No *[participants who choose this option will proceed to Q12a, and the survey will end]*

[E] Q8. Thinking about **[TRIBE]**'s experience with **applying for LIHEAP** , please rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale from 1 = *do not agree* to 5 = *agree strongly*.²⁰

- Relative to other government programs, it was easy for our Tribe to apply to this program.
- Relative to other government forms or programs, the application for **LIHEAP** was complex.
- Our Tribe was confident that we met the eligibility requirements for the program.
- Our Tribe will apply to **LIHEAP** in the future.

[E] Q9. Thinking about **[TRIBE]**'s decision to apply for **LIHEAP** , which factors did your Tribe consider when applying? For example, think about the following areas:

- Program requirements
- Tribe's priorities and areas of need
- Program eligibility requirements
- Tribal decision-making processes

Please describe your response below however you see fit, e.g., as a paragraph, in a few sentences, or using a bullet point list.

- [Open text response]

[E] Q10. Did **[TRIBE]** experience any challenges when **applying** to the program? For example, think about the following areas:

- Clarity of application requirements
- Ability to compile relevant information needed for the application
- Length of application form

Please describe your response below however you see fit, e.g., as a paragraph, in a few sentences, or using a bullet point list.

²⁰ Scale values are:

1 = Do not agree

2 = Agree a little

3 = Agree somewhat

4 = Agree a lot

5 = Agree completely

9 = No opinion / no answer

- [Open text response]

[E] Q11. Was there anything that ACF did that was especially helpful to [TRIBE] when applying to LIHEAP ? For example, think about the following areas:

- Did the agency provide tailored support for your Tribe when applying?
- Was guidance clear enough?
- Did the agency offer one-to-one support to help with troubleshooting or questions?
- Did the agency organize peer network support (e.g., convenings with staff applying to the program from other Tribes)?

Please describe your response below however you see fit, e.g., as a paragraph, in a few sentences, or using a bullet point list.

- [Open text response]

[E] Q12. We'd love to hear from you about what ACF could have done to make applying to LIHEAP easier. Please describe ways federal agencies could have made this process easier. For example, think about the following areas:

- How can the agency improve the way applications are designed for Tribes in the future?
- How can support be tailored or improved for Tribes?
- Are the application requirements flexible enough for your Tribe?
- Could application reporting requirements be improved?

Please describe your response below however you see fit, e.g., as a paragraph, in a few sentences, or using a bullet point list.

- [Open text response]

[For participants who responded 'No' to Q7 only] ->

[E] Q12a. You indicated that [TRIBE] applied but did not receive funding for LIHEAP . In your own words, please explain why [TRIBE] did not receive funding. For example, think about the following areas:

- Were the eligibility requirements clear or unclear?
- Did you receive feedback from the agency on your application?

Please describe your response below however you see fit, e.g., as a paragraph, in a few sentences, or using a bullet point list.

- [Open text response]

[E] Q13a. Has this experience impacted [TRIBE]'s decision to apply to this and other similar programs? If so, how?

Please describe your response below however you see fit, e.g., as a paragraph, in a few sentences, or using a bullet point list.

- [Open text response]

Implementing (4 questions)

This section of questions will focus on asking you more about your experiences with implementing or administering LIHEAP ▾.

[E] Q14b. Thinking about [TRIBE]'s experience with implementing LIHEAP ▾, please rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale from 1 = *do not agree* to 5 = *agree strongly*.²¹

- Our Tribe felt adequately supported by ACF ▾ throughout implementation of LIHEAP ▾.
- The guidance provided for implementation of LIHEAP ▾ was adequate.
- Our Tribe has sufficient support from the agency to meet reporting requirements.
- Compared to other government forms and programs, the reporting requirements for LIHEAP ▾ are complex.
- [ICP only] The funding amount was sufficient for our Tribe to execute the program successfully.

[E] Q14b. Did LIHEAP ▾ meet [TRIBE]'s needs and/or expectations? For example, think about the following areas:

- Were there uncertainties about what you could use the funding for?
- Was it worth it to apply to the program?

Please describe your response below however you see fit, e.g., as a paragraph, in a few sentences, or using a bullet point list.

- [Open-ended text response]

[E] Q15. What challenges (if any) did [TRIBE] face when implementing LIHEAP ▾?

For example, think about the following areas:

- Flexibility of program requirements
- Unique aspects of your Tribal context

²¹ Scale values are:

1 = Do not agree

2 = Agree a little

3 = Agree somewhat

4 = Agree a lot

5 = Agree completely

9 = No opinion / no answer

- Federal agency support for implementation

Please describe your response below however you see fit, e.g., as a paragraph, in a few sentences, or using a bullet point list.

- [Open text response]

[E] Q16. Was there anything that ACF ▾ did that was especially helpful to [TRIBE] when implementing LIHEAP ▾ ? For example, think about the following areas:

- Did the agency provide tailored support for your Tribe when setting up the program?
- Did the agency offer one-to-one support to help with troubleshooting or questions?
- Did the agency organize peer network support (e.g., convenings with staff working on the program in other Tribes)?

Please describe your response below however you see fit, e.g., as a paragraph, in a few sentences, or using a bullet point list.

- [Open text response]

[E] Q17. We'd love to hear from you about what ACF ▾ could have done to make [TRIBE]'s experience with implementing this program easier. Please describe ways federal agencies could have made this process easier. For example, think about the following areas:

- How can the agency improve the way programs are created for Tribes in the future?
- How can support be tailored or improved for Tribes?
- Are the program requirements flexible enough for your Tribe?
- Could reporting requirements be improved?

Please describe your response below however you see fit, e.g., as a paragraph, in a few sentences, or using a bullet point list.

- [Open text response]

Final section/concluding thoughts (1 question)

[O] Q18. Is there anything else about your experience with LIHEAP ▾ that you would like us to know?

If so, please describe your thoughts below.

- [Open text response]

[O] Closing statement

Thank you for participating in our survey! If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints, you can contact the research team at oes@gsa.gov.

Our research team is also conducting open-ended interviews to learn more about applying for or implementing LIHEAP . If you would be interested in participating in an interview, please leave your email address below. A member of our team will be in touch.

- [Open text response]

Appendix 2: One-on-one and group interview protocol

Questions of interest

1. What are Tribes' experiences of accessing federally-funded programs?
2. What are Tribes' experiences of implementing federally-funded programs?

Welcome greetings

Hello, our names are [Facilitator's names], and we're here to speak with you today as part of the efforts the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) is working on to learn about Tribes' experiences with access to and the implementation of three federal programs: EDA's Indigenous Communities Program (IC), ACF's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and Treasury's State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI). Our goal is to include as many voices from Tribal communities as possible to create an authentic set of examples of Tribes' experiences working with the federal government. We value hearing from you and want to ensure that the stories told are reflective of your experience and are told in ways that are beneficial to other Tribal communities and federal agencies.

Facilitator: To begin, can you share your name and describe your role within your Tribe/Tribal consortia?

- **Facilitator probe if not mentioned:** Can you describe your involvement with the planning and administering of [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]?
 - **Facilitator probe for LIHEAP interviewees if not mentioned:** Did you work on administering LIHEAP when the additional federal funds were received?
-

What are Tribes' experiences accessing federally-funded programs?

How did Tribes experience learning about [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]?

1. How did your Tribe first learn about [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]?
 - a. Possible probes, as needed:
 - i. *Online, word of mouth, regular contact with the agency, at a conference, etc.*
2. How well did [EDA/ACF/TREAS] share information about [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]? Can you share any examples of what types of communication worked well, or what could have been improved?
3. If [EDA/ACF/TREAS] were to provide a new opportunity, similar to [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI], would you change anything about how they inform Tribes about it?

How did Tribes make the decision to apply for [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]?

1. Why did your Tribe decide to apply for this program?
 - a. Possible probes, as needed:
 - i. *What did you hope to accomplish with these funds?*
 - ii. *Did you have any concerns or reservations about applying for the program?*
2. Were the application guidelines easy or difficult to understand?
 - a. Possible probes, as needed:
 - i. *Did your Tribe have any challenges providing the data or information required in the application?*

What did Tribes experience when applying for [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]?

1. Could you walk us through the process of applying for IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI? How was the application experience?
 - a. Possible probes, as needed:
 - i. *Did your Tribe receive any support from the agency with the application? (E.g., regular calls, webinars, in-person visits, technical or other forms of additional assistance)*
 - ii. *How would your Tribe describe the quality of the support provided*
 2. What could be changed about the application process for [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI] or similar federal programs in the future?
-

What are Tribes' experiences implementing federally-funded programs?

How do Tribes experience implementing [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]?

1. Could you walk us through the process of implementing IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI? How was the experience with program implementation?
 - a. Possible probes, as needed:
 - i. *Did the agency provide any support to help your Tribe implement the program? (E.g., in-person visits, working groups, other forms of additional assistance)*
 - ii. *If yes, what was the quality of the support they provided?*
2. What could be changed about the process of implementing [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI] or other similar federal programs in the future?
3. **Program-specific implementation questions:**
 - a. **LIHEAP:**

- i. Can you tell us a little bit about any successes or difficulties with creating Model Plans and program funding allocations?
 - ii. Can you tell us a little bit about any successes or difficulties allocating LIHEAP funds to households?
- b. **Indigenous Communities:**
 - i. Can you tell us a little bit about any successes or difficulties during the process of getting disbursements for the IC program from EDA, and the process of spending that money to implement the project?
- c. **SSBCI:**
 - i. Can you tell us a little bit about any successes or difficulties your Tribe or consortia had obligating and spending the first tranche of SSBCI funding?
- 4. Can you tell us a little bit about how gathering the information required for [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI] reports has gone so far?
 - a. **LIHEAP facilitator additional follow-up prompt:** For example, what is your experience of submitting the Household Report form, Quarterly Report data?
- 5. **Program-specific implementation questions:**
 - a. **LIHEAP:**
 - i. Are there any flexibilities that your Tribe incorporated when determining the eligibility of households during years of additional funding?
 - ii. What would your Tribe change (if anything) about the process of prioritizing LIHEAP households?
 - iii. What would your Tribe change (if anything) about the allocation of funding to LIHEAP households?
 - iv. What would your Tribe change (if anything) about outreach?
 - b. **Indigenous Communities:**
 - i. Was the final program close to what your Tribe has envisioned?
Interviewer note: Change "program" to be tailored to the specific project for the Tribe.
 - c. **SSBCI:**
 - i. What would your Tribe change (if anything) about SSBCI?

LIHEAP additional funds [if relevant]

1. Can you tell us a little bit about receiving the additional federal funding?
 2. What were the key LIHEAP components your Tribe spent the additional federal funding on?
-

Closing

Thank you for sharing your insights and for taking the time to speak with us today. Your perspective has truly deepened our understanding. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like to add or discuss that we didn't ask about directly?

Once again, we sincerely appreciate your time and contributions to understanding the experience of Tribes engaging with the federal government. Thank you.

Group interview protocol

Introduction

Thank you for being here today, and we want to extend our gratitude to you for speaking with us as part of the efforts the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) is working on to learn about Tribes' experiences with access to and the implementation of federally funded programs. Our names are [Facilitator's names], and we will be guiding our discussion. Our purpose today is to gather insights from individuals such as yourself to better understand the experiences and perspectives of individual Tribal recipients (or Tribal consortia) in accessing and implementing the federally funded programs. Your participation is incredibly valuable to us, and we're truly grateful for your willingness to share your insights so that the results are grounded in your lived experience and are useful for your community.

Our goal is to include as many voices from Tribal communities as possible to create an authentic set of examples of Tribes' experiences working with the federal government. We value hearing from you and want to ensure that the stories told are reflective of your experience and are told in ways that are beneficial to other Tribal communities and federal agencies. We thank you for considering this opportunity to share your experience and supporting us in trying to improve these programs for your community.

Outline

Our agenda for today will kick off with introductions and establishing group norms. Then we will have dedicated time to explore your experiences with access and implementation. This will include questions on access and learning about and deciding to apply, followed by a deep dive on implementation to learn about unique aspects of this experience.

Before we start, we want to emphasize that everything discussed here is confidential. We will be recording the session for note-taking purposes, but all feedback will be anonymized. This session is about your perspectives and insights, and we want you to feel comfortable sharing openly.

Welcome greetings

Before we dive into our work today, I'd love for us to take a moment to introduce ourselves and share a bit about our cultures. This is a space for us to celebrate where we come from, acknowledge the diversity in the room, and learn from one another.

To start, I invite you to share your name, the Tribe or community you are part of, and something meaningful about your culture that you would like to share with the group. This could be a tradition, a value, a greeting in your language, or anything that feels significant to you. The goal

here is to create a welcoming atmosphere and connect on a deeper level as we begin our work together."

I'll go first. My name is [Facilitator's Name], and I am part of [Facilitator's Tribe/Community]. One thing that's meaningful to me is [Facilitator shares a tradition, value, or greeting]. I appreciate how this part of our culture keeps us connected and grounded, and I carry it with me in all my work.

Now, I'd love to hear from each of you. Feel free to share as much or as little as you're comfortable with.

Today's goals and broader context

Today, our primary goal is to ensure that we have accurately captured your Tribe's experience in working with the federal government through [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]. One of the significant advantages of working in a group setting is the opportunity to clarify key points, discuss differing opinions, and leverage the diverse perspectives we all bring to the table as we consider priorities and trade-offs from multiple angles.

Based on what we've heard so far, we expect some differences in how Tribal perspectives view the main value of our research. We aim to center your priorities while being mindful of what is feasible for the agency to address.

Questions of interest

1. What are Tribes' experiences of accessing federally-funded programs?
2. What are Tribes' experiences of implementing federally-funded programs?

Co-designing group norms

I want to start by recognizing that each of us brings unique perspectives, values, and experiences to this session. As we begin, it's important that we establish group norms that will help guide us throughout our discussions.

Purpose of the exercise: Our aim is to create a shared set of norms that reflect our collective needs. These norms will help us create a safe space where everyone can participate meaningfully and respectfully. It's important that we all contribute to these norms because they should reflect the diversity of this group. Some ideas to start might include:

- **Cultural humility:** Recognize that we each bring different perspectives and may have cultural blind spots. Different perspectives are valuable, and it's okay to disagree, but it's important to address differences with courtesy and an open mind.
- **Respectful listening:** Listen actively and respectfully to others without interrupting. Everyone's voice is important, and giving full attention to the speaker helps foster a respectful environment. When expressing disagreement, do so respectfully and constructively.

- **Equal participation:** Ensure everyone has the opportunity to speak and contribute. If you have spoken at length, consider stepping back to allow others to share their thoughts.
- **Use 'I' Statements:** Speak from your own experience using 'I' statements. This helps in expressing personal perspectives without generalizing or speaking for others.
- **Responsibility to each other:** By participating in this group, we have a responsibility to take care of one another. Let's ensure we are creating a safe space, productive conversation, and meaningful time together.

Thank you all for your thoughtful contributions. The norms we've discussed today will help guide us in creating a space that feels inclusive, safe, and supportive for everyone. Let's take these norms to heart and hold each other accountable in a spirit of care and respect as we move forward.

What are Tribes' experiences accessing federally-funded programs?

How did Tribes experience learning about [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]?

4. How did your Tribe first learn about [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]?
 - a. Possible probes, as needed:
 - i. *Online, word of mouth, regular contact with the agency, at a conference, etc.*
5. How well did [EDA/ACF/TREAS] share information about [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]? Can you share any examples of what types of communication worked well, or what could have been improved?
6. If [EDA/ACF/TREAS] were to provide a new opportunity, similar to [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI], would you change anything about how they inform Tribes about it?

How did Tribes make the decision to apply for [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]?

3. Why did your Tribe decide to apply for this program?
 - a. Possible probes, as needed:
 - i. *What did you hope to accomplish with these funds?*
 - ii. *Did you have any concerns or reservations about applying for the program?*
4. Were the application guidelines easy or difficult to understand?
 - a. Possible probes, as needed:
 - i. *Did your Tribe have any challenges providing the data or information required in the application?*

What did Tribes experience when applying for [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]?

3. Could you walk us through the process of applying for IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI? How was the application experience?
 - a. Possible probes, as needed:
 - i. *Did your Tribe receive any support from the agency with the application? (E.g., regular calls, webinars, in-person visits, technical or other forms of additional assistance)*
 - ii. *How would your Tribe describe the quality of the support provided*
 4. What could be changed about the application process for [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI] or similar federal programs in the future?
-

What are Tribes' experiences implementing federally-funded programs?

How do Tribes experience implementing [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI]?

6. Could you walk us through the process of implementing IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI? How was the experience with program implementation?
 - a. Possible probes, as needed:
 - i. *Did the agency provide any support to help your Tribe implement the program? (E.g., in-person visits, working groups, other forms of additional assistance)*
 - ii. *If yes, what was the quality of the support they provided?*
7. What could be changed about the process of implementing [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI] or other similar federal programs in the future?
8. **Program-specific implementation questions:**
 - a. **LIHEAP:**
 - i. Can you tell us a little bit about any successes or difficulties with creating Model Plans and program funding allocations?
 - ii. Can you tell us a little bit about any successes or difficulties allocating LIHEAP funds to households?
 - b. **Indigenous Communities:**
 - i. Can you tell us a little bit about any successes or difficulties during the process of getting disbursements for the IC program from EDA, and the process of spending that money to implement the project?
 - c. **SSBCI:**
 - i. Can you tell us a little bit about any successes or difficulties your Tribe or consortia had obligating and spending the first tranche of SSBCI funding?

9. Can you tell us a little bit about how gathering the information required for [IC/LIHEAP/SSBCI] reports has gone so far?
 - a. **LIHEAP facilitator additional follow-up prompt:** For example, what is your experience of submitting the Household Report form, Quarterly Report data?
10. **Program-specific implementation questions:**
 - a. **LIHEAP:**
 - i. Are there any flexibilities that your Tribe incorporated when determining the eligibility of households during years of additional funding?
 - ii. What would your Tribe change (if anything) about the process of prioritizing LIHEAP households?
 - iii. What would your Tribe change (if anything) about the allocation of funding to LIHEAP households?
 - iv. What would your Tribe change (if anything) about outreach?
 - b. **Indigenous Communities:**
 - i. Was the final program close to what your Tribe has envisioned?
Interviewer note: Change “program” to be tailored to the specific project for the Tribe.
 - c. **SSBCI:**
 - i. What would your Tribe change (if anything) about SSBCI?

LIHEAP additional funds [if relevant]

3. Can you tell us a little bit about receiving the additional federal funding?
 4. What were the key LIHEAP components your Tribe spent the additional federal funding on?
-

Closing

Thank you for sharing your insights and for taking the time to speak with us today. Your perspective has truly deepened our understanding. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like to add or discuss that we didn't ask about directly?

Once again, we sincerely appreciate your time and contributions to understanding the experience of Tribes engaging with the federal government. Thank you.

Appendix 3: Additional details on site visits

Tribal participants

At each site visit, we will engage program staff and Tribal leadership, as they will be the most familiar with accessing and implementing federally-funded programs. We will access the program staff by acquiring contact information through our agency contacts as the first point of contact in the Tribal community. Once we have established communication with the program point of contact, we can request information about the Tribal leadership as needed based on the initial conversations with the program staff and their thoughts on the Tribal leadership's knowledge of accessing federally-funded programs. The Tribal leadership may not have a lot of knowledge and this knowledge may reside solely with the program staff. Once initial communication has begun, we will aim to have 2-3 conversations with the point of contact to schedule and coordinate activity for the site visit. These calls will provide the opportunity to begin relationship building with the point of contact prior to conducting the site visit.

Engaging citizen beneficiaries of the programs (e.g. households who receive energy support from LIHEAP, or who use a community center funded by ICP) are outside the scope of this study. In addition to being outside of the scope, the level of effort needed to engage community members is beyond the capacity of the project team within the timeframe available to complete the study. Engaging community members requires identifying local staff to support getting information out and coordinating the activities, significant planning and preparation for on site activities specifically public convenings or listening sessions, the people resources needed on site to execute the event successfully, funds for travel for participants, and light refreshments to have available and accommodations of the participants include those with physical limitations, transportation challenges, and childcare.

Site visit logistics

Travel - traveling to a location where there are multiple Tribes in relative close proximity who have applied to the three programs would allow for multiple sites to be visited within a short period of time. A location to fly in to and then rent a car to drive to multiple locations across 2-3 days would be ideal. The ground travel would need to be limited to reach the location within 2-3 hours of drive time from the main location that was flown into (a hub and spoke model). Seattle, Oklahoma City, and Albuquerque could all enable us to visit with multiple tribes in the area who applied for a full spectrum of programs. See [this map](#) for a list of possible sites.

Scheduling - an example of a travel schedule could look like the outline below (Pacific Northwest communities).

	Month/Date		Month/Date		Month/Date	
Morning	9:00 am - 12:00 pm Skokomish Tribe		9:00 am - 12:00 pm Muckleshoot Tribe		9:00 am - 12:00 pm Suquamish Tribe of Port Madison Reservation	
Afternoon		1:00 pm - 4:00 pm Nisqually Tribe		1:00 pm - 4:00 pm Muckleshoot Tribe		1:00 am - 4:00 pm Suquamish Tribe of Port Madison Reservation
Program	SSBCI	IC	LIHEAP	SSBCI	LIHEAP	SSBCI

Appendix 4: Constructing sample of program recipients for survey sampling

The sample for this study consists of all recipients of the LIHEAP, ICP, and SSBCI. The following public links were used as sources to build the sample:

- [LIHEAP recipients](#)
- SSBCI NOI and application submitters, [here](#) and [here](#)
- [ICP recipients](#), viewable by filtering column H to “ARPA - Indigenous Communities Program”