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NPAC Enters Historic Partnership with New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions to Strengthen Native Workforce Development

First-of-its-kind agreement expands collaboration, data sharing, and access to workforce opportunities for Native communities statewide

Albuquerque, NM — Native Professional Advancement Center (NPAC), powered by the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), today announced a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions (NMDWS)—marking a historic step forward in strengthening workforce development pathways for Native communities across the state.

The agreement formalizes a growing partnership between NPAC and NMDWS to expand access to workforce training, improve data coordination, increase co-enrollment in workforce programs, and align resources to better serve Native job seekers in Albuquerque, Gallup, Farmington, and beyond. **This agreement represents the first time a Native-led organization has entered into a formal MOU of this kind with the Department of Workforce Solutions.**

“This MOU represents a powerful step toward building a more inclusive and effective workforce system in New Mexico—one that recognizes the strengths, needs, and potential of Native communities,” said Darius Lee Smith, Executive Director of NPAC and the National Indian Youth Council. “For over 65 years, NIYC has been at the forefront of advancing opportunity and self-determination for Indigenous people. This partnership ensures that Native workers are not just included in New Mexico’s economic future—but are central to it.”

Through this agreement, NPAC and NMDWS will collaborate on a range of strategic initiatives, including:

- Expanding workforce data sharing and integration to better reflect Native workforce participation
- Increasing referrals and co-enrollment between state and Native workforce programs
- Strengthening access to apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship opportunities
- Coordinating training, professional development, and cross-agency learning
- Collaborating on outreach, events, and funding opportunities

The MOU also establishes formal points of contact across key regions and creates opportunities for NPAC representation within the State Workforce Development Board.

*“This partnership is about more than coordination—it’s about transformation,” said **Deanna Aquiar, Director of Programs and Development at NPAC.** “For too long, Native workers have faced systemic barriers to accessing workforce opportunities. By working directly with the state to align systems, share data, and expand pathways, we are building a model that is more responsive, more equitable, and more effective for the communities we serve.”*

The collaboration builds on existing relationships through the Native Workforce Partners coalition, a network of Tribal Nations, Pueblos, and organizations working to strengthen Native workforce systems across New Mexico.

Sarita Nair, Cabinet Secretary of the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, emphasized the importance of the partnership in advancing the state’s workforce vision:

*“This agreement reflects our shared commitment to building a workforce system that works for all New Mexicans,” said **Nair.** “By partnering with NPAC, we are strengthening our ability to reach Native communities with meaningful opportunities, improve coordination across programs, and ensure that our workforce strategies are inclusive, data-informed, and responsive to the needs of our state.”*

The MOU comes at a critical time, as workforce systems across the country face uncertainty and increasing demand for skilled workers. By proactively establishing this partnership, NPAC and NMDWS are positioning New Mexico as a leader in collaborative, community-driven workforce development.

Founded in 1961, the National Indian Youth Council—now operating as NPAC—has spent more than six decades advancing Indigenous self-determination through workforce development, education, and advocacy. Today, NPAC continues that legacy by connecting Native individuals to high-growth industries, removing barriers to employment, and building pathways to long-term economic mobility.

*“This is about building a system that reflects who we are as a state,” added **Smith.** “When we invest in Native workforce development, we invest in New Mexico’s future.”*

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Founded in 1961, the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC)—now operating as the [Native Professional Advancement Center \(NPAC\)](#)—is one of the nation’s oldest Native-led organizations advancing Indigenous self-determination, civil rights, and opportunity. For 65 years, NIYC/NPAC has served Native communities across New Mexico through culturally grounded workforce development, education, leadership training, and advocacy. Rooted in the Red Power movement and a legacy of community-led action, NPAC continues to empower Native people to build strong families, resilient economies, and thriving futures.