

Understanding the Value of Centralized Services:

Blackfeet Manpower One-Stop Center

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This site brief describes the centralized services provided at Blackfeet Manpower One-Stop Center (Blackfeet Manpower) in Browning, Montana. The brief is one of three developed as part of the *Understanding the Value of Centralized Services (VOCS) Study*, awarded to MEF Associates and its subcontractor, Mathematica, by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families.

The VOCS study is a broad inquiry to explore the benefits and challenges of providing multiple social services at a single location for families with low income. It examines the range of models used to provide centralized services, the advantages, disadvantages, and costs of providing multiple services for families with low income at one location, and the use of virtual coordination as a complement to centralized services provided in person.

For the purposes of this study, we use the following definition of a “centralized community resource center” (CCRC): *Brick-and-mortar locations where individuals can apply for or receive multiple services and/or benefits that are funded by the federal government.*

The study includes three main components:

- Consultations with interested individuals and groups for active engagement and experts;
- A targeted literature review; and
- Site visits to three CCRCs that use varying approaches for centralizing services.

This brief draws on qualitative data collected from the site visit to Blackfeet Manpower in April 2022. The team conducted semi-structured interviews with program leadership, staff, and partners; focus groups with clients; and observations of partner meetings and physical space, including lobbies and general office layouts.

The findings of the study are presented in a final report, which can be accessed on the [VOCS project page](#) on ACF’s website.

GENERAL INFORMATION AND INTRODUCTION

In Northern Montana, just east of what is now Glacier National Park, is the headquarters of the Blackfeet Tribe (“the Tribe”) in Browning, Montana. This town, the headquarters of the sprawling Blackfeet Reservation, is the center of social services for residents of the reservation, nearly all of whom are members of the Blackfeet Tribe.

For more than 50 years, Browning residents have been coming to Blackfeet Manpower for a range of social services and programs. When it was established by a resolution passed by the Blackfeet Tribal Council in 1964 (and started operations in 1965), Blackfeet Manpower was housed in one building offering just a handful of services. It has since grown to become a state-certified One-Stop Center¹



Pictured: Blackfeet Manpower's main campus

GEOGRAPHIC SERVICE AREA

Blackfeet Indian Reservation

Main office: Browning, Montana
Satellite offices: Heart Butte and Seville



ABOUT THE SITE

Type of site: Tribal Organization



Key Partners:
Office of Child Support
Blackfeet Housing



Primary Funding Source: Federal funding through Public Law 102-477



Size:
70 employees
About 3,000 clients served per year

with more than 15 services and 70 full-time employees in 2022 (at the time of this writing), with plans to continue growing and expanding to meet existing and emerging needs among the Blackfeet Tribe. Although Blackfeet Manpower's service array has grown in recent years, the Tribe has long organized to deliver services in this way. Tribes and reservations often encompass large service areas but have limited resources to operate across that geography. As such, centralizing services in one location has been a necessity for Tribes and social services organizations serving Tribal members.

In the 57 years it has been operating, Blackfeet Manpower has grown in both size and scope because of expanded funding and growing demand and has increasingly centralized its service delivery because of a federal policy allowing operational changes to how Blackfeet Manpower allocates and tracks its annual budgets. The rest of this brief outlines the policy, structures, and services delivery of Blackfeet Manpower, focusing on how the

¹ Blackfeet Manpower is designated a One-Stop Center by the state of Montana, which allows the organization to participate in broader Community Management Team meetings with service providers across the state to discuss the best ways to provide services to their communities. Organizations must meet certain state requirements to be designated a One-Stop Center, including providing a range of employment, training, and career education services and connecting with certain partners to support these efforts. Blackfeet Manpower is the only Native American Tribal organization with this designation.

centralization of services affects how Blackfeet Manpower provides services to the Blackfeet Tribe and surrounding communities.

CLIENTS AND COMMUNITY SERVED

Browning, Montana, a small, rural town of around 1,000 residents,² is the most densely populated area on the Blackfeet Reservation. In addition to Blackfeet Manpower, other key social service programs in Browning include health care services, a State Department of Public Health and Human Services office (offering State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Medicaid), a homeless shelter, and additional Tribal services, including a housing authority and a child support office. Browning is also home to community institutions, including Blackfeet Community College, serving Browning and surrounding communities. Additionally, the Blackfeet Tribal Council, which is the governing body of the Blackfeet Tribe and oversees resources, programs, services, and tribal land management, operates in Browning.

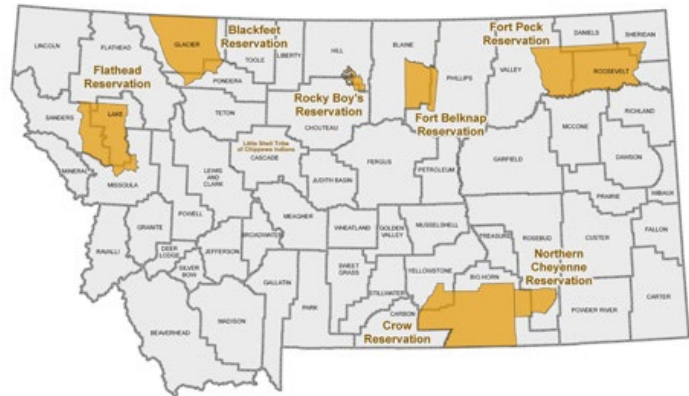
The town of Browning covers less than one-half square mile, but the Blackfeet Reservation covers 1.5 million acres (more than 2,000 square miles). With more than 17,000 enrolled members^{3, 4}, about one-half of whom live on the reservation⁵, the Blackfeet Tribe is the largest Native American Tribe in Montana (by enrolled members) and one of the 10 largest Tribes in the United States.⁶

Geography

Browning is in northwest Montana, fewer than 50 miles south of the Canadian border and about 15 miles east of Glacier National Park. About two hours' drive from the closest airport, Browning is geographically separated from larger cities in Montana.

The lands of the Blackfeet Tribe once ranged from southern Canada all the way through southern Montana.⁷ After various bad-faith treaties and negotiations with the U.S. federal government, described in Box 1, the Tribe's land was reduced to its current area, shown in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: Map of Montana's Tribal Reservations and Counties



Source: Montana Governor's Office of Indian Affairs

² "Browning town, Montana." United States Census Bureau. 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=1600000US3010375>

³ Blackfeet Nation. "Home." Blackfeet Nation. <https://blackfeetnation.com/>

⁴ To be an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Tribe, an individual must have at least one-quarter direct lineage to a Blackfeet member. Family members with less than one-quarter Blackfeet lineage are "descendants." They might have lineage from multiple Tribes or are a generation removed from direct lineage.

⁵ Governor's Office of Indian Affairs. "Blackfeet." Office of the Governor. <https://tribalnations.mt.gov/blackfeet>

⁶ Blackfeet Nation. "Home." Blackfeet Nation. <https://blackfeetnation.com/>

⁷ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2021, February 28). Blackfoot. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Blackfoot-people>

Given the rural setting of Browning and the reservation, along with the inclemency of the weather, job opportunities are often temporary and seasonal when Glacier National Park is open in the summer for tourists. The winters are long—sometimes Browning sees its first snow in September—and can last through May.

Box 1. A Brief History of Government Interference with the Blackfeet Tribe

The present-day Blackfeet Reservation is much smaller than the lands the Blackfeet historically had occupied and maintained. The U.S. federal government took the lands of the Blackfeet people and authorized hunting practices that decimated their food sources and land resources, resulting in the death and emaciation of a significant percentage of the Blackfeet population.

- 1855: The U.S. federal government and the Blackfeet Tribe signed the Lame Bull Treaty guaranteeing the Blackfeet a large part of Montana east of the Northern Rocky Mountains, establishing the reservation. The treaty also guaranteed the Tribe annual rations in exchange for allowing non-Tribal members and settlers to travel through the land.
- 1830–1870s: The federal government authorized efforts to hunt bison, a highly revered and respected animal in Blackfeet culture that also was a major food source.
- 1883–1884: Called “Starvation Winter,” between 600 and 700 Blackfeet died following the eradication of the bison and the delays and failures of the federal government to provide the rations.
- 1888: In the Sweet Grass Hills Treaty, the Blackfeet sold part of their lands to the federal government, leaving them their current reservation and the lands in current-day eastern Glacier National Park.
- 1896: Strapped for resources after the federal government–authorized hunting of bison on their own lands, the Blackfeet had to sell more of their lands (the “ceded strip”) to the federal government. They offered 800,000 acres of their lands (what is now current day eastern Glacier National Park and part of the Lewis and Clark National Forest) for \$3 million (1896 dollars), but the government would buy it for only \$1.5 million. This sale included the clause that the Blackfeet could continue to hunt, fish, and engage in traditional practices on the land they sold.
- 1910: Glacier National Park was established.
- 1932: A U.S. District Court said the Tribe’s land use privileges were null following the designation of the national park.
- 1973: A judge granted Blackfeet members free admission to Glacier National Park.

Further Reading

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Population served

The majority of Blackfeet Manpower’s clients are enrolled members of the Blackfeet Tribe, largely due to the organization’s mission to serve Blackfeet members and its location on the reservation. Additionally, funding for some services requires those funds to be spent on services for Tribal members. However, some services are available to non-enrolled members, who often are descendants of enrolled Tribal members.

On average, Blackfeet Manpower serves about 715 clients each month. Over the course of a year, the organization estimates an unduplicated service count of 3,350 clients. Staff say the majority of Blackfeet Manpower clients are women, who in Blackfeet culture are often the ones representing their families.

Shared Tribal cultural roots are a source of strength and pride in this community; clients and staff alike have strong ties to their Blackfeet culture, and staff said this emphasis on culture is a source of strength for their clients. Cultural ties play out in the types of services Blackfeet Manpower offers, too, including family strengthening activities and employment opportunities to help with community cultural events such as pow wows and heritage days.

Blackfeet culture reveres a multigenerational family structure. Grandparents often help care for (or entirely care for) grandchildren. Because many households are multigenerational, so tends to be benefits receipt and engagement with Blackfeet Manpower.

Although these family structures are partly rooted in culture, they are also sometimes the result of

“ I grew up knowing [Blackfeet Manpower] was here. Then I applied when I needed it. ”
- Client

challenging individual circumstances for a parent. In such cases, an aunt or grandparent (staff and participants said it almost always is the women in the family) may step in to help with child rearing. Common barriers that present such circumstances in the community include lack of child care, transportation,

and housing and challenges with alcohol use. Staff said drug use is increasingly becoming a challenge among clients, as well. These barriers can also interact in a way that clients said makes engaging in services or employment challenging. A client mentioned that parents do not want to leave their child with a partner or family member if there is known substance use. Another client mentioned that even if she can enroll her child in child care, a significant amount of her earnings goes toward paying for that child care. Clients noted these infrastructural and systemic challenges—lacking available transportation and child care in the community—as the main barriers to accessing services at Blackfeet Manpower.

Further, when extended family members care for children, they often do so without additional or adequate resources. For example, to receive TANF benefits, family caregivers must engage their family members with the Tribe’s child support system. Staff said family members are often unwilling to do so, which means they take on the financial responsibility of caring for the child themselves.

“ We can’t expect people to succeed if there are barriers and walls, so we take those barriers down. ”
- Staff member

Connections to the community

Blackfeet Manpower is a known organization in the community. Clients said they grew up hearing about Blackfeet Manpower, or they heard about the organization through word-of-mouth because of its reach in the community.

“

When they come to us, we are them. We come from the same people. It is easier for them to open up with us and move forward.

- Staff member

”

Further, Blackfeet Manpower emphasizes providing services rooted in Blackfeet culture. For instance, it offers parenting and teen pregnancy support and prevention using curricula specific to Blackfeet culture. In addition, staff and clients share both cultural identities and lived experiences engaging with Blackfeet Manpower services; many staff administering and

overseeing these services are members of the Blackfeet Tribe, and many were previously Blackfeet Manpower clients. One client mentioned how this shared experience and cultural identity means staff might better understand their circumstances than someone at another office.

SERVICES AND CENTRALIZATION

Blackfeet Manpower’s service delivery structure is informed by the organization’s funding streams.

Funding

Blackfeet Manpower receives four main types of funding, detailed below and outlined in Box 2.

Public Law 102-477 (“477”). Public Law 102-477 allows Tribes to consolidate employment and training-related funding they receive from various federal agencies into one plan. Those funds are then distributed and administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). So, although Blackfeet Manpower receives funding from multiple federal agencies—including the Department of Labor, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of the Interior, and BIA—the organization receives one consolidated grant from BIA with one reporting system.

Until 2017, Blackfeet Manpower had to track funding separately by source even though the funds were administered through a single 477 grant. However, in 2017, Public Law 115-93 amended the 477 law to allow Tribes to fully blend 477 funding into just one budget for planning and reporting purposes. This policy change means Blackfeet Manpower does not have to track the various funding streams separately; instead, the budget is one lump sum.⁸

The blended budget supported Blackfeet Manpower’s ability to fully centralize funding for this group of services.

This blended funding structure also gives Blackfeet Manpower flexibility in administering programs and reduces its reporting burden. Although each service is still distinct and has its own budget, if one 477 program has a shortfall, Blackfeet Manpower can easily reallocate funds and fill that gap with funds from another 477 program.⁹ Such programs account for about 75 percent of Blackfeet Manpower’s budget.

Blackfeet Manpower uses other federal, state, and Tribal funding sources, as well, listed in Box 2. Although 477 funding is blended by law, Blackfeet Manpower separately tracks the rest of its funding. All budgets and proposals are created in collaboration with the Tribal Council, and all funding flows through the Tribe’s finance department.

Box 2. Blackfeet Manpower Funding Sources

477 Funding

- Child Care Development Fund
- Community Services Block Grant
- General Assistance
- Native Employment Works
- Tribal TANF
- Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act

Other Federal Funding

- Vocational Rehabilitation grant from the U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families grants
- American Rescue Plan Act of 2021

State Funding

- Medicaid
- Tribal-State Work Activity Program

Tribal Funding

- Tribal funding for veterans’ services

⁸ Tribes submit 477 budgets as three-year plans. The 477 funds are distributed throughout the year, not as one lump sum.

⁹ The 477 plans received additional funding allocated by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to use at their discretion.

Services

Blackfeet Manpower’s overarching mission is to help clients become financially stable through employment and education rooted in culture and cultural activities. Blackfeet Manpower’s services seek to remove barriers (described in the Population Served subsection above) and to support family strengthening, which staff said is central to stability in Native culture.

Blackfeet Manpower is intentional about calling each of its offerings a “service” instead of a “program,” to indicate that all services are interconnected instead of being siloed by different funding sources or staff. Blackfeet Manpower’s services fall into two categories based on funding streams: 477 services, described above, and other services. Combined, these services cover cash assistance, employment and training, job placement, and supportive services, as listed in Box 3. The services designated with an asterisk in Box 3 and described below are specifically geared to Blackfeet Manpower’s Native clients and are rooted in Native culture.

Box 3. Blackfeet Manpower Services

477 Services

- Tribal TANF*
- General Assistance
- Child care
- Family strengthening classes*
- Adult education
- Job readiness training
- Job placement*
- Community work experience*
- Supportive services

Other Services

- Case management for State TANF clients
- Medicaid eligibility
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Teen pregnancy support and prevention classes*
- Veterans’ services

Tribal TANF. Clients must be enrolled members of the Blackfeet Tribe to be eligible for Blackfeet Tribal TANF. According to staff, Tribal TANF is the most common service clients receive at Blackfeet Manpower.

Fatherhood/Motherhood is Sacred¹⁰. This service is a Native-based, family-strengthening and healthy relationships curriculum, comprising 12 to 14 sessions about topics related to parenting rooted in Native culture, such as character and integrity, parents as leaders, and self-identity and pride in the clients’ Blackfeet roots. Clients engaging in job readiness trainings also attend Fatherhood/Motherhood is Sacred classes.

¹⁰ For more information on the curriculum, visit <https://www.nativeamericanfathers.org/fatherhood-and-motherhood-is-sacred>.

Employment and training. Blackfeet Manpower offers an array of services to help clients find jobs, including using funding from Native Employment Works (a federal program supporting work-related activities for Native American service populations) and WIOA to support education, training, and employment activities. Such activities could include general education development (GED) support, remedial, vocational, post-secondary, and alternative education; job skills and job readiness training; and job placement, community work experience, and community service programs. Staff place clients in jobs around the reservation and within Blackfeet Manpower, such as on the campgrounds that Blackfeet Manpower manages and at the Medicine Bear Shelter for the homeless.



Pictured: Native art displayed in Blackfeet Manpower's training space

Teen pregnancy support and prevention. Blackfeet Manpower received a five-year grant from ACF to develop and implement a teen pregnancy support and prevention curriculum in the schools in Browning and neighboring communities where Tribal youth live. The demonstration aims to identify or modify an existing curriculum to facilitate conversations rooted in Blackfeet culture around preventing unwanted teen pregnancy. The curriculum will include topics such as healthy relationships, sexual development, and healthy life skills. Each school district will develop its own implementation plan, the goal being to empower school districts to serve students in a “Blackfeet-specific” way.

Service delivery

Blackfeet Manpower provides services to clients directly, and the physical location and layout of the organization is key to the centralization of these services. Blackfeet Manpower has been intentional in developing a physical layout that makes accessing the services they need most easy for clients.



If we didn't have Manpower, we wouldn't have the services we have.

- Client



Physical Space

The Blackfeet Manpower “campus” consists of three adjacent buildings that cover about half a town block. Blackfeet Manpower provides additional off-site services and has satellite campuses in neighboring communities on the reservation.

The main campus includes the following buildings and services.

- The **client services building** houses most client-facing program staff, including receptionists, eligibility workers, case managers, and trainers. The building also has a computer lab for client use.
- **Veterans Alliance and client services extension** houses the Veterans Alliance (Blackfeet Manpower’s veterans services), Vocational Rehabilitation, the campgrounds staff, and adult education program services. The Veterans Alliance space includes a lounge with a big screen TV where veterans can spend downtime.

- The **administration and training building** is the administrative headquarters of Blackfeet Manpower. Organizational leadership offices are in this building, including for the director, the deputy director, and finance and human resources staff. This building also has a large conference or seminar room that staff use for client trainings.

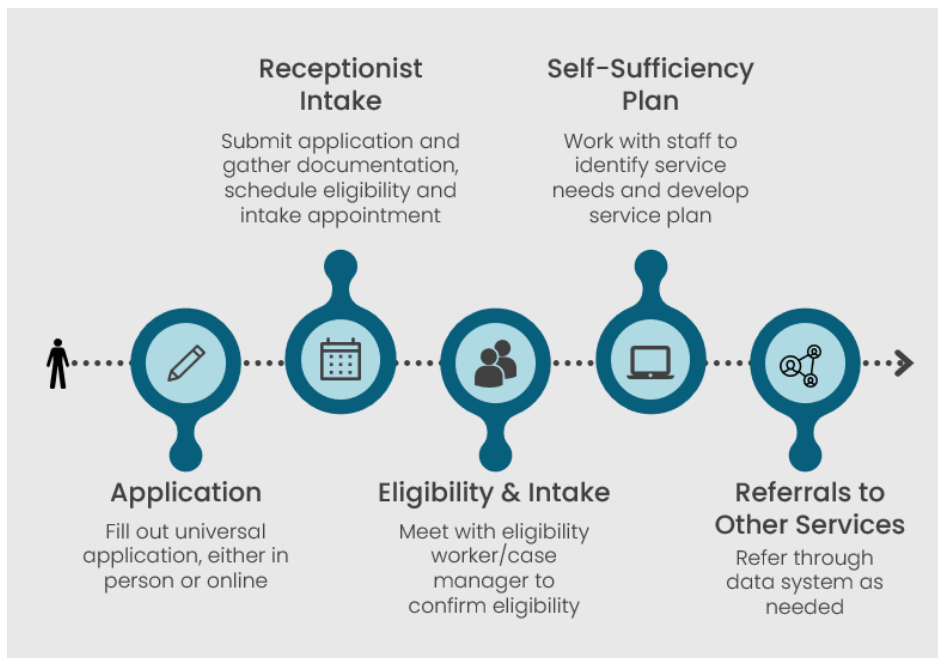
Off-campus services. A handful of Blackfeet Manpower services and partner organizations are located off-campus but still within a few blocks of the three main buildings. For example, Medicaid eligibility staff (who are employees of Blackfeet Manpower) are located in an office next to a health clinic.¹¹ Blackfeet Manpower’s partners Medicine Bear Shelter for the homeless and the Blackfeet Child Support Enforcement Program are also nearby but not co-located at Blackfeet Manpower.¹²

Satellite offices. Given the expansiveness of the Blackfeet Reservation, Blackfeet Manpower operates two satellite campuses serving neighboring communities in Heart Butte and Seville, with plans to open a third satellite campus in Starr School. These offices serve Tribal members who live outside the main town of Browning. The satellite offices offer the same services that the main campus offers.

Client Flow

Client engagement with Blackfeet Manpower can begin with a referral to a service (referral sources discussed below), or a potential client may come looking for a particular service. Exhibit 2 shows how clients access Blackfeet Manpower services.

Exhibit 2. Blackfeet Manpower Client Flow



¹¹ The Medicaid eligibility program is a newer program for Blackfeet Manpower, and office space for it was unavailable within the three main campus buildings.

¹² The Child Support Enforcement Program used to be part of Blackfeet Manpower, but the two have since separated and are now working together under a memorandum of understanding.

Referral sources. Clients can initially connect with Blackfeet Manpower through any of its service offerings. Many clients hear about Blackfeet Manpower by word-of-mouth and by living on or near the Blackfeet Reservation. Though a client may come to inquire about one particular service, staff may identify other needs during intake and connect that client to other services. Additionally, some clients are referred to Blackfeet Manpower from other service providers. For example, the Child Support Enforcement Program operates with a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Blackfeet Manpower that requires child support staff to refer clients to Blackfeet Manpower if they are not already engaging in services.

Blackfeet Manpower also conducts community outreach, highlighting its available services in the newspaper and on the radio and social media (e.g., Facebook).

Application and receptionist intake. On arriving at Blackfeet Manpower for the first time, a client fills out a universal application and hands it to a receptionist. The universal application collects identification and demographic information, and clients can identify services that interest them.

Receptionists help clients identify needed documentation for eligibility determination for various services, such as identification, Tribal enrollment verification, and Social Security card. Once the client has all the necessary documentation, the receptionist makes an appointment with a case manager from the desired service within two days. Another receptionist is responsible for scanning all the application and eligibility documents into a document management software (for the eligibility determination, described below) and entering client information into a separate case management data system.

The universal application, which Blackfeet Manpower launched in March 2022, is also online, so clients can electronically complete and send the form to the receptionist.

Eligibility, intake, and self-sufficiency plan. Because each service has its own eligibility requirements, each service also has its own eligibility workers and case managers who evaluate a client's eligibility for that service. Eligibility workers and case managers review the application and eligibility documentation with a client to identify needs and start developing a self-sufficiency plan. Clients receiving multiple services provide documentation only once, at their initial intake appointment. Staff from multiple services use that same documentation to determine their particular service eligibility.

Referrals to other services. The case manager serves as the lead point-of-contact for a client, and, based on needs identified in the self-sufficiency plan, the case manager uses the data system to make internal referrals to other services at Blackfeet Manpower.¹³ Clients sign release forms as part of their service intake, which allows other service staff to contact them directly and set up an appointment. Although these referrals historically have been done in-person, as the organization grows, staff are using electronic referrals to find efficiencies in this process.

Transition to universal case management. At the time of our visit (April 2022), Blackfeet Manpower was in the middle of transitioning to a universal case management service approach where all case managers and eligibility workers would be cross-trained in all 477 services. This universal approach means that any client could work with any case manager, instead of being connected to a specific case manager based on service need.

¹³ Vocational Rehabilitation staff do not yet have access to the data system. Additionally, Child Support Enforcement Program staff have "read-only" permissions, so they are unable to update information themselves.

In addition to having a broader array of staff to serve clients, the universal case management approach will also distribute caseloads more evenly across case workers. Before universal case management, case workers in different services had drastically different caseloads. Now, clients can be assigned on a rotating basis among all the caseworkers, evening out caseloads.

Frequency and length of services. Most clients receive ongoing case management while receiving services from Blackfeet Manpower. Some programs, such as Tribal or State TANF or General Assistance, require at least monthly contact with case managers because clients are required to submit timesheets for work activities at the beginning of each month. Clients also meet with case managers every few months, depending on the program, to review progress toward goals and revisit their service plan.

The length of time a typical client receives services from Blackfeet Manpower varies and is often cyclical, given that work opportunities in and around Browning tend to be seasonal and temporary, or what Blackfeet Manpower calls “spot jobs.”¹⁴ Moving into spring and summer, clients have opportunities to engage in work on the campgrounds or the various summer festivals hosted by the Tribe. However, those opportunities depend on the season and the weather, and service engagement and benefits receipt tend to increase again during the winter months.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Blackfeet Manpower adjusted service delivery from the in-person processes described previously to the remote environment described in Box 4. Clients began submitting applications via a drop box, and staff conducted appointments over the phone. However, at the time of data collection for this study, most processes were returning to in-person as they had been before the pandemic.

Box 4. Service Adaptations during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Like many other service providers, Blackfeet Manpower had to quickly adapt and adjust to working and providing services in a remote environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tribal offices closed, including the Blackfeet Manpower office, so clients could not engage with staff in-person.

At the start of the pandemic, clients could still drop off application forms at the office. Blackfeet Manpower set up a drop box outside the front door of the client services building into which clients could drop their forms. Receptionists waited 24 hours before collecting the forms, as an extra safety precaution, and then proceeded with processing and filing as normal. Eligibility workers engaged with clients on the phone.

Case managers received laptops from the organization to work with clients remotely. Since benefits programs suspended their job search requirements, case managers were in contact with clients less often than they had been previously. However, they still communicated with clients via phone or virtual platforms to check in and provide supportive services whenever possible.

Additionally, some services, including Fatherhood/Motherhood is Sacred and driver’s license training, provided virtual trainings. Other trainings, such as CPR, or inspections for child care providers were paused because they required in-person instruction and interaction.

¹⁴ In fact, clients typically continue to receive General Assistance (cash assistance to meet basic needs) even while they are working these spot jobs because they are temporary. General Assistance is another of the most common services Blackfeet Manpower clients use.

Staffing

At the time of the visit, Blackfeet Manpower was in the process of transitioning its staffing structure. In the previous structure, administrators of each service oversaw the implementation and delivery of their specific service. Frontline staff—including eligibility workers and case managers—also worked under specific programs. Under the new structure, frontline staff can work with clients across services. Staff roles include the following:

- **Tribal Council.** The Tribal Council is the governing body of the Blackfeet Tribe. Members are elected to serve a four-year term. The Council has the final say in all decisions about funding and service delivery at Blackfeet Manpower. Not only does the Council approve all of Blackfeet Manpower’s proposals and budgets, it also identifies community needs and sometimes requests Blackfeet Manpower take on additional projects and services. For example, the Tribal Council asked Blackfeet Manpower to manage the campgrounds as a new service area.
- **Director.** The director oversees all of Blackfeet Manpower’s services, supports staff and professional development efforts, and seeks opportunities for the organization to grow and expand.
- **Deputy director.** In addition to supporting the director, the deputy director works with human resources to oversee and manage staffing.
- **Finance staff.** A team of three finance staff manages federal and state grants, oversees revenue and expenses for specific services, and processes payments.
- **Administrators.** Each service at Blackfeet Manpower has an administrator who oversees that service’s implementation and delivery, including supervising case managers and eligibility workers. Administrators meet weekly for Administrative Committee meetings to provide updates on their services and to make broader decisions for Blackfeet Manpower as an organization.
- **Frontline staff.** Receptionists, eligibility workers, and case managers work directly with clients, determining eligibility and providing direct services.

Changes to the Staffing Model

At the time of the site visit, service staff were service specific. For example, a Tribal TANF case manager would handle eligibility and case management only for Tribal TANF services for a client.

However, Blackfeet Manpower was in the middle of transitioning its staffing and service model to universal case management, whereby any eligibility worker can assess eligibility for any 477 service and State TANF (for individuals not enrolled in the Blackfeet Tribe), and any case manager can provide case management services across programs. When staff are trained in multiple services, leadership expect that they will serve clients more efficiently without the client’s having to go to multiple staff members to access all the services they want or need. Clients also mentioned that even though staff communicated and worked together across services, they still sometimes had to provide the same documentation multiple times.

Every summer, Blackfeet Manpower holds all-staff cross-trainings where each service team presents to all staff their services, eligibility process, client flow, and the way they partner with other departments. These mandatory trainings provide insight into all service offerings at Blackfeet Manpower, so case managers know where they might refer their clients. Tribal Council members also attend these trainings. Now that Blackfeet Manpower is restructuring to provide universal case

management, the organization has held more specific cross-trainings, so all frontline staff become well versed to work with a client across services.

Partnerships

Blackfeet Manpower provides the majority of its services directly. However, the organization does partner with other agencies operated by the Blackfeet Tribe to provide comprehensive services to clients. Additionally, other community organizations refer clients to Blackfeet Manpower.

Other Tribal agencies. As a main services provider for the Blackfeet Tribe, Blackfeet Manpower works closely with other agencies that fall under Tribal organization, such as Blackfeet Housing and the Child Support Enforcement Program. These partnerships are generally formalized with an MOU outlining which organizations are responsible for which parts of the service delivery. For example, Blackfeet Manpower and Blackfeet Housing—the designated housing entity for the Blackfeet Tribe¹⁵—partnered on a special project using COVID-19 relief funding. The two agencies signed an MOU whereby Blackfeet Manpower can pay its clients seeking employment opportunities who are also renting through Blackfeet Housing to do construction and landscaping work on their rental units. Blackfeet Manpower pays them, the clients gain experience and earn money, and Blackfeet Housing gives clients credits for their hours worked to go toward any arrears.

Community Management Team. Every month, a group of leaders and staff from service providers in neighboring communities gather and share updates about their own services. These Community Management Team meetings serve as a way to learn about employment and training opportunities for clients, sharing strategies for working with employers on behalf of clients, and other general approaches and conversations around service delivery.

Other partnerships. Specific services within Blackfeet Manpower also have their own partnerships with other organizations. For instance, the Veterans Alliance partners with other organizations in the community also serving veterans. One such partnership is with the neighboring Great Plains Veterans Services Center¹⁶ to provide transportation for veterans to various appointments.

Data Sharing

Blackfeet Manpower uses one shared data system for all its services, though each service has its own module within the system. Staff can view modules from other services as needed, but they keep separate service records for clients.

Shared data system. The primary data system supports eligibility determination, referrals, case management, training records, and payment processing. Staff use this system to document each step of client engagement with Blackfeet Manpower.

Staff can edit data only within their own modules; for example, a State TANF case manager can edit client information only as it relates to the TANF engagement. However, that case manager could see how that client is engaging with child care, for example. Additionally, receptionists and partners from the Child Support Enforcement Program have only read-only access to data. If staff responsibilities change over time, the data system administrator can adjust their access to different modules.

¹⁵ Blackfeet Tribe. "About Us." Blackfeet Housing. <https://blackfeethousing.org/aboutus.html>

¹⁶ Great Plains Veterans Services Center was previously Rocky Boy Veterans Center. "Rocky Boy's" is the name of the reservation for the neighboring Chippewa Cree Tribe.

The data system is maintained by a third-party organization which facilitates system updates, creates new reports, and trains staff on using the system. Data managers at Blackfeet Manpower can make changes to staff access as needed.

Other data systems. Blackfeet Manpower uses the state data system for Medicaid eligibility, as required by the state.¹⁷

Reflections on Centralization of Services

The centralization of Blackfeet Manpower's services is partly a function of specific community circumstances and service needs and the policies related to funding.

Benefits of centralizing services

Staff said Tribes have long centralized services for clients out of necessity—reservations are geographically expansive, and clients may face barriers to accessing services, including challenges with transportation or connectivity for virtual services. Blackfeet Manpower has grown in size and scope over time, a testament to staff and community belief in the benefits of providing services in this model.

Staff and clients at Blackfeet Manpower feel that centralization of services better serves clients in the following ways.

- **Ease of accessing services.** Offering multiple services in one place, especially for clientele who often are interested in receiving multiple benefits, helps expedite the process of accessing those services. Most clients seeking services from Blackfeet Manpower walk there. Centralization is critical for minimizing the effects of these individuals' limited transportation options.
- **Raising awareness of available services.** Having different services in one location can alert clients to other services they did not previously know were available. Although clients often know which service interests them when they first come to Blackfeet Manpower, they do not know, until they arrive, about the full array of services offered by the organization. Clients also mentioned how staff work together and communicate to help clients quickly and easily access various services.
- **Staff support.** Staff mentioned the support they receive from, and provide to, one another because they all work in the same building. Case managers across services can ask questions or can provide more information on their service offerings to better understand various ways to serve clients. Staff can break out of individual services and get to know other programs.
- **Flexible funding.** The blended 477 funds, which account for most of Blackfeet Manpower's funding, and Blackfeet Manpower's discretion over how to use those funds allows the organization to spend more time on planning and delivering services instead of maintaining individual service budgets. The ability to easily reallocate 477 funds from one service to another allows the organization to be nimble and responsive to client needs.

¹⁷ Blackfeet Manpower helps determine Medicaid eligibility for clients and submits applications, but the state still provides Medicaid.

Challenges of Centralizing Services

Conversely, staff identified the lack of available space as the main challenge of providing centralized services.

- **Space limitations.** As Blackfeet Manpower grows in scope and size, the current campus does not have enough space to accommodate additional staff or service offerings. Limited real estate in the area means limited options for expansion into new buildings. The organization wants to expand and provide additional services but first has to secure funding and a physical space to grow.

Lessons learned and plans for the future regarding centralized services

Blackfeet Manpower has provided centralized services since its inception, and its leaders regularly reflect on the growth of the organization and how to adapt moving forward.

Clients and staff alike offered key takeaways related to Blackfeet Manpower's service delivery.

Client-staff relationships. Clients highlighted the importance of developing a trusting relationship with their case manager and all other staff at Blackfeet Manpower. A strong relationship allows them to feel comfortable asking questions and receiving services. Additionally, clients mentioned that their shared lived experiences with staff—many of whom previously were Blackfeet Manpower clients themselves—provides a strong foundation for developing such a relationship.

Staff communication. One pillar of centralization is communicating among one another at all levels about services and delivery updates. Staff members must know about the other available services provided at the organization so they can make all the appropriate referrals to best serve clients. Ongoing cross-training is a valuable way to ensure this breadth of knowledge.

Ultimately, Blackfeet Manpower wants to expand and add additional services for clients, though it faces constraints in terms of physical space. Leadership meet with potential partners in the community and seeks additional funding opportunities to expand Blackfeet Manpower's portfolio of services, and the Tribal Council is identifying additional service areas for the organization to incorporate into its offerings. For example, Blackfeet Manpower recently created a tourism department, which will provide additional employment opportunities for clients and advance its mission to serve the community and celebrate Blackfeet culture.

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