



Ysleta del Sur Pueblo

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TESTIMONY OF CARLOS HISA, GOVERNOR
YSLETA DEL SUR PUEBLO
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON “THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF TRIBAL SELF-GOVERNANCE: SUCCESSES IN
SELF-GOVERNANCE AND AN OUTLOOK FOR THE NEXT 30 YEARS”

April 18, 2018

Good afternoon, Chairman Hoeven, Vice-Chairman Udall, and Members of the Committee. I am Carlos Hisa, Governor of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo located in El Paso County, Texas. For the past 18 years I have served as Governor and Lt. Governor of the Pueblo. My term of office is one year. I am accompanied by Linda Austin, Director of Operations, who coordinates both self-governance and data management initiatives for our Pueblo. I am here today to share how data management has been an important piece in our self-governance journey. More specifically, I want to share that our notoriety has been an evolutionary process since our federal recognition in 1987.

Brief History of YDSP

YDSP is one of three federally recognized Native American tribes in Texas, and the only Pueblo. During the period of early Spanish settlement (1598–1680), relations between the Pueblo Indians and the Spaniards were strained, which brought fierce oppression of all Pueblo people. In 1680, New Mexico Pueblo Indians rebelled against the Spaniards. This caused many tribal factions to relocate to modern day northern New Mexico and west Texas, which includes the Tigua region. The Tigua people of Ysleta del Sur were industrious farmers who raised wheat, corn, cattle, and horses. The Tigua were also instrumental in building the Ysleta Mission. Today, Ysleta, Texas has been home to the Tigua people for over 300 years. That said, YDSP is the oldest community in the State of Texas as well as the oldest running government in the state since its establishment in 1682. The Pueblo’s culture continues to

flourish as each generation proudly promulgates its heritage. At the end of 2017, the YDSP population was 4,226.

YDSP Data Management Philosophy

The Pueblo's data management philosophy is better understood when coupled with our self-governance framework. Self-Governance is fundamentally designed to provide tribal governments with control and decision-making authority over the federal financial resources provided for the benefit of Indian people. From its federal recognition in the late 1980s, YDSP did not experience the traditional BIA contract support—typically the BIA would administer direct services such as enrollment, social services, education, and others. However, we assumed the responsibilities exclusively to create and maintain these direct services. Thereby, the Pueblo unknowingly initiated self-governance principles to address needs with limited resources. Not only was the Pueblo strategic in its design of its government, but also provided the experience to create and maintain its own data management systems. In short, the 2013 transition to self-governance for our Pueblo was seamless. At the time, YDSP was the 252nd tribe (out of 567) to join self-governance and only one of five Pueblos in the Southwest Region.

One of the tenets of self-governance is that it empowers tribes to prioritize needs and plan growth at their own tempo, in accordance with their unique cultures and traditions. One approach to prioritizing needs is to conduct community assessments on a regular basis. By embracing this philosophy, YDSP has realized material and substantial gains in its efforts to advance the socioeconomic and health outcomes of its citizens.

YDSP Data Driven Outcomes

Some of YDSP's more recent outcomes and successes can be attributed to its data administration practices. These practices have driven the Pueblo's management decisions effectively in planning, securing future funding, and resource allocation. For example, the Pueblo engaged in enrollment reform to remove blood quantum requirements in the 2000s which doubled the population. To prepare for the financial implications, YDSP conducted a budget study to determine the financial impact on direct services resulting from the potential population surge. This study highlighted the financial shortages especially related to health services and became the impetus for a healthcare planning study that ultimately led the Pueblo to apply for the Indian Health Service (IHS) Joint Venture Program. The Joint Venture Program enables tribes to construct new healthcare facilities with tribal funds, while IHS funds the staffing costs for the life of the program.

In addition, YDSP began publishing formal socioeconomic profiles of its citizenship in 2008. The most recent profile is the 2016 assessment and, like the others, serves as a periodic snapshot of the Pueblo containing an array of indicators such as education levels, employment, household size, and income. These data, and subsequent findings, are employed as a foundation for policy and/or resource management decisions. YDSP leads these efforts given that secondary data sources, such as the U.S. Census Bureau and other governmental agencies, often do not accurately reflect the Pueblo's characteristics and traits. Rainie et al. (2017) states that the "Indigenous nations in the United States face a 'data landscape' marred by sparse, inconsistent, and irrelevant information complicated by limited access and utility" (1). The YDSP Socioeconomic Profile aims to bridge these data gaps. Further, in the spirit of self-governance, it is imperative that tribal nations lead their own data studies to capture the nuances and culturally sensitive issues inherent to only them.¹

YDSP's 2012 Socioeconomic Profile was successful in engaging Pueblo members and outlining its socioeconomic status. It played an important role, helping to assess needs and develop goals and objectives that drove grant writing efforts to support new programs and services while informing Pueblo leadership of current needs. The 2012 study employed a survey instrument, entitled *Tribal Member Questionnaire*, that has evolved since its inception in 1997. Building on these experiences, the Pueblo was able to revise and modernize the 2016 socio economic study. The questionnaire was updated to revise survey items and modernized to streamline the data collection process. The Pueblo leading its own studies has had several key advantages such as utilizing stakeholder feedback to ensure methodologies and processes are culturally relevant and sensitive.

The 2016 Socioeconomic study's findings indicated that the Pueblo has made strides in improving its socioeconomic status. For example, the percent of YDSP members with bachelor's degrees or higher has dramatically improved. In 2016, those reporting the same educational attainment notably increased – 15% of YDSP members 25 years and older earned bachelor's degrees or higher compared to approximately 7% in 2008. While the improvement is encouraging, this remains half of state and national counterparts. Further, the 2016 study revealed that approximately 30% of YDSP members have attended college, however, they had not completed their degrees. A later analysis suggested that many of these members had dropped out. This in turn has prompted the Pueblo to reexamine how it supports members who are interested in going to college beyond financial assistance alone. In other words, the Pueblo is investing resources into developing a case management approach where YDSP staff will coach, mentor, and monitor higher education

students.

The findings have identified and substantiated education needs, thus making higher education attainment a priority. It is understood that lower educational attainment most likely influences other factors such as income, financial security, and overall quality of life. Prioritizing education remains at the forefront of the Pueblo's agenda as evidenced by investing in both continuing educational programming and creating high quality early learning programs. These programs aim to mitigate barriers to financial security while creating safe and stable households. Equally important, the Pueblo's economic development efforts—such as our Speaking Rock Entertainment Center—can create different avenues to achieve similar outcomes. Speaking Rock has been a true success story in our self-governance journey despite the State of Texas Attorney General's unwavering grievances. It is unfortunate that the State does not fully recognize us as a sovereign. These challenges obstruct our pathway to self-sufficiency. Thus, it is imperative that each sovereign collaborate in harmony to harvest the community's fullest potential.

Conclusion

Ysleta del Sur Pueblo embodies the principles of self-governance. From its data management to resource allocation to service delivery, the Pueblo implements self-governance strategies to design future programs to address today's needs. The Pueblo's vision for the next 30 years holds no barriers to the success it stands to achieve. Tribes perform better when they set their own trajectories, allocate their own resources, and establish priorities based on tribal data and needs. It is also a tool to broaden self-determined efforts to spark innovation, courage, and resiliency. Self-governance is not a program with a beginning and end, it is paradigm shift that changes the thinking of status quo to that of endless potential. In essence, self-governance works when making data driven decisions.

References

Rainie, SC, Schultz, JL, Briggs, E, Riggs, P, and Palmanteer-Holder, NL. 2017. "Data as a Strategic Resource: Self-determination, Governance, and the Data Challenge for Indigenous Nations in the United States." *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, Volume 8, Issue 2.