

Alaska Native groups seek changes for ICWA grants

Representatives from Alaska Native organizations from throughout Alaska met recently and discussed their frustration with the current Indian Child Welfare Act grant process.

Ranging from seasoned grant writers to newly appointed village representatives, about 30 participants at the conference expressed their concerns and frustrations with the current process of obtaining funding for their ICWA programs.

Tim DeAsis, director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs division of Native Services in Juneau, said the gathering represented "a unique opportunity to look at the entire grant application process and have the opportunity as a group to revise the entire procedure if necessary."

Why some grants are approved and funded, others are approved and not funded and still others are completely denied was of great concern to the participants.

"We are looking at redesigning the program nationwide. We are aware that certain areas require regulatory changes and are looking for completion by the 1992 funding cycle," said James Clemmons, BIA chief of the Social Services Branch in Juneau.

Since its inception 10 years ago, the ICWA grant process has remained essentially unchanged, and this meeting marked the first review to be held in Alaska.

Esther Combs, executive director of Cook Inlet Tribal Council, said 10 years is too long to go between meetings.

"We need to review the process every two to three years," she said. "As far as the current grant process

ICWA

goes, we find it distasteful to go into competition with other contractors for funds. All contractors would like multi-year grants, but the reality is this would cut out the new potential grantees."

Combs also spoke on the cost involved in producing a grant and the effect it has on small contractors.

In the interest of evaluating and improving the present system, the representatives at the meeting were asked to develop a document with their recommendations by the end of the conference. The document will then be submitted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C.

The consensus of those gathered was that there is insufficient funding at the national level.

Other recommendations to the BIA included:

- Abolish the competitive application process.

- Distribute 100 percent of all ICWA funds, using a per capita formula, directly to Alaska Native villages and regional organizations.

- Grantees need to form an "Indian Child Welfare Association" and develop cooperative programs.

The group also suggested that priorities in the application kit are inappropriate. For example, recreation is a higher priority than employment of professional staff to assist tribal courts.