

# Native organizations urge changes in ICWA grants

by the Cook Inlet Tribal Council  
for the Tundra Times

JUNEAU — Representatives from Alaska Native organizations statewide met last summer to finalize recommended revisions to the Indian Child Welfare Act grant process.

The final recommendations were submitted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs central office in Washington, D.C.

This conference marks only the second time in 11 years the ICWA grant process has been reviewed and followed closely an earlier meeting held during June in Anchorage where changes to the grant process were initiated.

Recommended revisions to the grant process include abolishing the competitive process. Currently, and since its inception 11 years ago, about 200 villages in Alaska have been forced to compete among themselves and against larger corporations for limited funding to run their ICWA programs.

The allocation for Alaska is about \$700,000.

Attending the conference was Leroy Bingham, senior planner at Cook Inlet Tribal Council, who said, "Everyone deserves funding. The current process has made for unreal planning, especially any long-term planning as a lot of the villages are unable to compete with the bigger non-profits.

"More often than not, the experienced grant writers have an edge over the smaller contractors. A factor that comes into play is how much money do you have to spend to try and get money? This causes the smaller applicants to grow more discouraged and frustrated so eventually they quit applying," Bingham said.

"The number of applications being submitted for ICWA funding has dropped dramatically over time, and this sends the wrong message to Washington."

With the abolishment of the competitive process, every organization applying for ICWA monies would receive an equal portion based on the number of children age 18 and under

in their service area.

Under the proposed reforms, a letter of intent would need to be submitted by a deadline. As long as the letter-of-intent deadline was met, every organization requesting funding would be guaranteed an equal share.

The proposed changes are designed to simplify the current ICWA grant process. Instead of an agency writing a proposal asking for money, they would simply write a plan explaining the use of the funds.

As part of the proposed changes, recommendations included the formation of an Alaskan ICWA Coalition so information and ideas can be exchanged statewide in place of the existing process that tends to create ill-will and distrust between applicants.

"Our children are our greatest resource, but when you see the birth-rate in some villages exceeding that of third-world countries, compounded by the number of adoptions and foster home placements, you can clearly see how woefully underfunded this program is," Bingham said.

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