

Personal Approach Leads to Multiple Funding Sources

By Jean Oxendine

Closing the Gap, Looking for Money • April 1998

Maria Dagdar has come to realize that who you know can be just as important as what you know. The key to getting multiple funding sources is building trust and personal contacts, says Dagdar, the coordinator for Washington Internships for Native Students (WINS).

The program raises funds so that American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) college students can participate in eight-week internships in Washington, D.C. The amount of \$6,300 funds one student internship. The fee covers round-trip airfare, housing, health care, food, an unlimited subway card, a stipend, and a six-credit course titled "Washington Leadership Seminar in Tribal Issues and Native Studies."

WINS began in 1993 when American University (AU) agreed to provide an office for the program coordinator and seed money to help the program get off the ground. At the time, the program mostly approached federal agencies for funding. That approach worked, Dagdar says, because "federal agencies saw WINS as an avenue to reach American Indian/Alaska Native students, and also as a way to provide a supportive environment for students."

But in order to sustain the program and improve its capabilities, it became necessary to expand the list of potential funders. This sometimes involved taking a hard look at whether the mission of the program and a potential funder were in sync. For example, after careful consideration, the WINS Native Advisory Council ruled that the program would accept funds from gaming—the practice of gambling. The council decided that since gaming money is used to provide significant benefits to tribal communities, it made sense to use the money for WINS and help educate future leaders.

Involving the tribes was an important step in diversifying the program's funding, Dagdar says. She started by calling on friends from various tribes with whom she had built trusting relationships. "This was not an easy task," she says.

"There is a lack of trust in American Indian communities when someone calls and says they're calling from Wash-

ington, D.C. I had to justify the \$6,300, and show people how good the program could be if they were supportive."

She is also more aggressively seeking corporate support—making an effort to speak at conferences and taking every opportunity to meet people so they could put a face to her name. "If you have no connection to the people you're calling, it's pretty tough," she said. AU's Program Development Office is also helping WINS with increasing corporate sponsors.

Corporate funding is critical because it can help support internships for AI/AN students at mainstream institutions. "Money from federal agencies can only support students at tribal colleges," Dagdar explained. "But we don't want to cut out American Indian students from other colleges because they need help as well." She cited an example of two sisters. Only the one who attended the tribal college Crownpoint Institute of Technology could participate in WINS. The other sibling who attended mainstream Allegheny College in Pennsylvania could not take advantage of federal support.

Social work, psychology, and health careers are popular majors for students in the WINS program, according to Dagdar. On January 15, 1998, she gave a presentation to the HHS Tribal College and Universities Work Group at the Office of Minority Health in Rockville, Maryland. "My reception was very warm," she says, "and agencies have already started calling with great interest."

The National Institutes of Health (NIH), has already been a big sponsor of WINS. Students have worked at NIH's Volunteer Clinical Research Center, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, and the National Institute of Dental Research. Many students wind up changing their major to a health professions field after experiencing such an internship, Dagdar said. "Through WINS, we are fostering the development of motivated and directed leaders."

For more information about the WINS program, call 202-885-2033. Or visit the program's web site: <http://www.american.edu/other.depts/wins>. ❖

