



EXECUTIVE BRIEF

Tribal Financial Contingency Planning

NAFOA, in partnership with Native Advisory, LLC, hosted an educational webinar series on Tribal Financial Contingency Planning as a resource for Tribal Leaders and practitioners. This webinar series aimed to equip Tribal Communities with practical frameworks for protecting against potential federal funding disruptions. This briefing distills the workshop's core strategies into actionable guidance: how to conduct internal financial assessments, create data-driven impact reports that translate budget cuts into human consequences, and advocate effectively with Congressional offices, federal agencies, and state partners during significant uncertainty. Tribes that document their data will be positioned to respond immediately with compelling, verifiable narratives about the impact on their citizens.

Internal Financial Strategy: Five Priority Actions

First, conduct a detailed program evaluation, distinguishing "non-negotiables" from "nice-to-haves," identifying overlapping services that could be consolidated, and examining vacant positions. This exercise may require uncomfortable conversations but creates clarity for leadership decision-making.

Second, protect and prioritize revenue-generating positions. Healthcare providers who bill Medicaid and Medicare often generate multiples of their salary in collections. Grant writers, treasury professionals who actively manage investments, and compliance staff who prevent funding losses create more value than they cost. During constraints, these positions become lifelines.

Third, model hypothetical scenarios—5%, 10%, even 100% reductions on major grants—to understand your exposure. This isn't fearmongering; it's contingency planning. If agencies announce cuts, you'll have frameworks ready rather than starting data collection during a crisis.

Fourth, track every instance where federal service reductions push costs onto your tribe. If BIA no longer maintains roads or IHS facility closures force your clinic to absorb additional patients, document the additional expenses meticulously. This evidence becomes powerful advocacy ammunition and potential support.

Finally, resist the temptation to cut your way to prosperity. Strategic investments in revenue generation or cost reduction—better billing systems, energy efficiency, professional development—can improve your financial position even during uncertain times.

Creating Compelling Impact Reports

The funding impact report is your most powerful advocacy tool: a clean, scannable document that translates dollar cuts into human consequences. The format is deliberately minimal because decision-makers don't read lengthy narratives. For each of your federal awards show four datapoints: current funding, estimated reduction, revised funding level, and specific impacts measured in units—patients not seen, jobs eliminated, families denied housing assistance, miles of roads unmaintained.

For this effort, your tribal team must include leadership, your CFO, a data professional who can extract statistics from program reports, government relations staff who understand the political landscape, and communications professionals who craft compelling messages. This isn't a finance department project; it requires your most brilliant minds working collaboratively.

The goal is creating an "elevator speech"—talking points so tight that your tribal leader can deliver them in 60 seconds when encountering a Senator in a Capitol hallway: "We've lost \$5 million in IHS funding, which means 26,000 patients won't be seen and we'll have to let 42 people go." Specific numbers, human impact, no wasted words.

Data sources are closer than you think. Start with your Schedule of Expenditures of Federal Awards, already prepared for your single audit. Add grant award letters, program statistical reports you're already submitting to agencies, and economic impact studies if you have them. The hardest part isn't finding data—having the discipline to keep reports concise and the courage to ask program directors for honest numbers.

Critical credibility rules: never inflate impacts (damages trust), verify every number against financial reports (prepare to show your methodology), and focus on direct, quantifiable effects rather than speculative secondary impacts. Confidence and transparency matter more than perfection when asked how you calculated something.

Strategic Messaging and Advocacy

While maintaining sovereignty and bipartisan relationships, tribes can strategically frame impacts using administration priorities where genuine alignment exists. Tribal governments are "Made in America" job creators operating workforce development programs. Tribal healthcare systems reduce pressure on county hospitals while serving as rural infrastructure for entire regions. Self-governance compacts demonstrate that tribal administration produces better outcomes at lower cost than federal direct service. Energy development on tribal lands advances American energy independence.

This isn't a political endorsement—it's strategic communication. You're taking credit for work you're already doing, showing how tribal programs advance goals that matter to current decision-makers. Simultaneously maintain relationships with allies who champion tribal issues using different framing around equity, healthcare access, and climate. Tailor messages to audiences without changing underlying facts.

Distribution matters as much as content. Congressional appropriations committees need fiscal impacts and cost-benefit analysis. Your senators and representatives need one-page summaries and regular relationship-building beyond just funding requests. State officials need a regional economic context—tribal job losses affect surrounding communities, generate (or eliminate) tax revenue, and influence whether states must fill service gaps. Don't neglect county commissioners and local businesses who rely on tribal economic activity; they can become vocal advocates for your congressional delegation.

Opportunities Within Uncertainty

The disruption creates openings for tribes willing to act strategically. A smaller federal government may mean expanded opportunities for compacting and contracting services agencies no longer provide, but only with full contract support costs, non-negotiable. Every administration proposes new spending packages; be ready with

shovel-ready projects rather than leaving resources from federal funding programs on the table as Tribal set-asides sometimes go unaccessed. That pattern risks future allocations.

Public-private partnerships are proliferating, but exercise rigorous due diligence. "There's going to be a whole lot of people who are going to flood in," Horn warned. Vet partners thoroughly, protect tribal assets, maintain control of critical decisions, and structure deals with clear performance benchmarks and exit clauses. Co-sourcing with internal oversight beats full outsourcing; tribes that completely abdicated ARPA accounting to external firms experienced preventable errors.

Moving Forward

The evidence shows advocacy works when done strategically with solid documentation. Early secretarial and Congressional interventions on tribal behalf of tribes demonstrate that raising voices produces results. Tribes are not powerless. You possess compelling data, allies across the political spectrum, a unique sovereign status, and decades of survival and adaptation experience.

Your ability to stand up in this moment will be remembered for generations. Gather your teams, compile your data, draft those impact reports, and engage proactively. When funding discussions occur—and they will—tribes with clear, verifiable narratives about real-world impacts will be best positioned to protect essential services and the citizens who depend on them.

To view the webinar and for additional resources, visit: [Tribal Financial Contingency Plans - Proactive & Active Steps in Crises | NAFOA](#)

Based on NAFOA's February 2025 workshop with Lacey Horn, Native Advisory. Resources and templates available at nafoa.org.