

DOI SELF-GOVERNANCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

c/o Self-Governance Communication and Education

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July 17, 2019

The Honorable Tara Mac Lean Sweeney
Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs
Office of the secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Enhance Coordination and Communication Between Self-Governance Tribal Nations and All Bureaus and Offices under Indian Affairs

Dear Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs Sweeney:

On behalf of the Department of the Interior (DOI) Self Governance Advisory Committee (SGAC), please accept this letter requesting your assistance to implement broad organizational reform within Indian Affairs that results in increased communication and collaboration between all bureaus and offices under Indian Affairs.

There are currently 285 Tribes and consortia that participate in Self-Governance at DOI. For years, Self-Governance Tribes have expressed concerns to Indian Affairs leadership and management regarding the lack of coordination and communication among the various bureaus and offices under Indian Affairs and provided examples of how the lack of communication harms our Tribal Nations. For example, in 2015, SGAC informed Indian Affairs of instances where Self-Governance Tribes and the DOI Office of Self-Governance (OSG) were not notified of grants made available in their Regions in a timely manner. As a result, Self-Governance Tribes were at an extreme disadvantage to apply for these opportunities. In addition, the distribution of year end funds is left entirely to the discretion of the Regional Awarding Official. Notification of the availability of these funds has not been consistent for all Regions and there is no accountability or transparency regarding the selection process or funding distribution mechanism that is being adhered to with respect to funding awards.

Tribes are not alone bringing to light the communication gaps within the Bureau. The need for improved collaboration and communication within Indian Affairs was also recently noted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the DOI's Office of Inspector General. Specifically:

- A lack of collaboration and communication is one of the factors that resulted in the GAO adding Federal management of programs that serve Tribes and their citizens to its High-Risk List in 2017. GAO's June 2018 testimony before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs reported that increased collaboration is an action an agency can take that may lead towards removal from the High-Risk List; and,

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- In September 2018, the DOI Inspector General reported that poor coordination between OSG and a BIA office adversely affected the efficiency of business operations and had measurable effects on the tribes the offices serve.

Consistent with the findings from the GAO, the Inspector General, and our prior correspondence with Indian Affairs, Tribal Nations continue to express concern that not including OSG participation in key meetings within Indian Affairs can negatively affect Self-Governance Tribes as they may be excluded from funding opportunities, program and service opportunities, and the exchange of general information on grants and trainings. Self-Governance Tribes work closely with OSG and often rely on OSG to relay critical information about the programs that serve their communities and opportunities for funding. ***As such, we request that efforts and actions to improve collaboration and communication include OSG.***

There is an urgent need for training and education across Indian Affairs about Self-Governance Tribes. There continues to be a grave misunderstanding within BIA that once a Tribe enters Self-Governance the responsibility to provide technical and other assistance to is the sole responsibility of the Office of Self-Governance. Contrary to this myth, Self-Governance Tribes have left considerable resources with the Central Office, Regional Offices and Agency Offices specifically for the provision of services. We, therefore recommend that the BIA in collaboration with OSG and SGCE design and implement at every level within Indian Affairs, a robust training series on Self-Governance history, principals and mechanisms and the continuing Federal trust responsibility.

Inclusion and transparency foster good faith and trustworthy working relations. We believe that improved coordination within Indian Affairs that includes all bureaus and offices, including OSG, will improve efficiencies and effectiveness within Indian Affairs and will also significantly benefit all Tribes—those that participate in Self-Governance, those that elect to administer services through a Self-Determination Contract, and those that elect to have BIA administer services.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this correspondence, please contact Jay Spaan, Executive Director, Self-Governance Communication and Education (SGCE) Tribal Consortium, at jays@tribalselfgov.org or (918) 370-4258. Thank you.

Sincerely,



W. Ron Allen
Chairman, DOI-SGAC
Tribal Chairman/CEO, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe

Cc: Darryl LaCounte, Director BIA, DOI
Sharee Freeman, Director, OSG, DOI
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Jay Spaan, Executive Director, Self-Governance Communication and Education (SGCE)