

State Human Resources Report



Native American Exit Interview Results
February 24, 2011

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Executive Summary

The State Human Resources Division interviewed Native American employees who recently left employment with the State of Montana. We conducted the interviews to gather information on Native Americans' experiences applying and working for state government and their reasons for leaving state employment. We also solicited feedback and suggestions for enhancing employment opportunities for Native Americans. Our results are summarized below. Individual interview questions and responses are not included in this report, but may be obtained by contacting Lisa Coligan at 406-444-3854 or lcoligan@mt.gov.

Interview Process

We administered a telephone exit interview to Native American employees who left employment with Montana state government between November 1, 2009 and November 1, 2010. Forty-two Native Americans left state government employment during this timeframe. The former employees worked for the state for an average of six years and their average age is 42 years old.

We attempted to contact all 42 employees via telephone and reached 23 former employees for an overall response rate of just under 55 percent. We included a chart of interview respondents by work location in Appendix A. Response rates and the total number of employees we attempted to contact in each agency are as follows:

Agency	Number of Respondents	Number of Employees Contacted	Percentage of Response Rate
Corrections	2	5	40%
Governor's Office	2	2	100%
Justice	2	3	67%
Labor & Industry	3	3	100%
Livestock	0	1	0%
Montana Historical Society	0	1	0%
Office of Public Instruction	0	1	0%
Public Health & Human Services	11	21	52%
Revenue	1	1	100%
Transportation	2	4	50%

We asked each respondent a list of open-ended questions about their experiences with state employment. Questions addressed what attracted respondents to state employment, what they found rewarding and challenging, and how they were treated while employed. We also asked

respondents their primary reason for leaving state government and asked them for suggestions to improve their work experiences and make state government more attractive to Native Americans. We analyzed the results and identified common themes, trends and recommendations, which are summarized in the next section.

Results and Recommendations Summary

Respondents were constructive and thoughtful when providing feedback and the following themes and recommendations emerged from their comments.

Hiring Process and Attractiveness of State Employment

Approximately 80 percent of respondents indicated state government was their first choice as an employer before they were hired. Respondents frequently cited the state's benefit package and to a lesser extent the stability and career opportunities state employment offers as their reasons for being attracted to state employment. Many respondents indicated the application process was easy, but a few commented on the length of the process and suggested we shorten it. Those using the online application system found it easy to use and implied it has improved the hiring process.

Respondents were also asked for suggestions on making state government employment more attractive to Native Americans. Although we received a variety of responses, comments indicated a desire for more state government positions located closer to reservations. A few respondents suggested long commutes to work and a structured eight to five work schedule made state employment difficult for them and their families. Respondents requested more cultural awareness training and suggested a need for more understanding about the role family plays in Native American culture.

Employment Experiences and Challenges

Over 65 percent of respondents stated working with people and helping others were the most rewarding aspects of their state positions. Respondents expressed less agreement about what was least rewarding. However, comments generally suggested lack of support from coworkers or management, too much pressure and poor treatment from management, lack of training and flexibility, and stress from high case loads as the least rewarding aspects of their work.

Five respondents felt they were treated differently because of their race. Most of these respondents were vague about why they felt this way and said others were condescending or treated them with a lack of respect. One respondent provided a detailed description of her experience with racial harassment. She left employment because her facility human resources officer suggested she ignore the incident when she attempted to file a complaint. Two respondents suggested Native American patients at their facilities were treated poorly in comparison to white patients.

Although only a few former Native American employees indicated being treated differently because of race, they frequently cited race or a lack of understanding of cultural differences when asked to name the most challenging aspect of working for state government. Some respondents indicated state employment opportunities are too far away from reservations and others believed

assumptions were made about them at work because of their race. Respondents were also asked to state what they would like state employees to know about working with Native Americans. Some respondents to this question again expressed a desire for more understanding of cultural differences and the importance of family life. Multiple respondents expressed a desire to be viewed and treated just like everyone else.

Reasons for Leaving State Employment

Respondents' reasons for leaving state employment generally fell into one of two categories. Approximately 30 percent of respondents cited personal reasons as their reason for leaving their jobs. They left to be closer to family or to take care of family members.

Almost 52 percent of respondents cited problems related to management as their reason for leaving. Although these respondents gave a variety of reasons ranging from lack of support and poor treatment to pressure from management to take on or resolve high case loads, respondents suggested management either caused or did not address the problem.

The remaining 18 percent either did not provide a clear reason or left for a variety of reasons. Some happily retired. One respondent left to take an advancement opportunity with the federal government and another stated she was fired from her state position.

Almost 83 percent of respondents said they would recommend state employment to friends and family, but 37 percent of those recommending state employment did so with reservations or strongly suggested they would not recommend their previous position with the state.

Respondents' Recommendations

Respondents made several recommendations along with their answers to the interview questions. Although some of these were touched upon above, we've summarized the most commonly cited concerns and recommendations below.

Respondents expressed a strong desire for more employment opportunities closer to reservations. They want to work closer to their families and some indicated moving away from the reservation is challenging. Many respondents worked far away from their families and friends while working for the state and some suggested the lack of a nearby support group made work more lonely or difficult for them. One respondent suggested the state organize a support or networking group for Native American employees to give Native American state employees a place to network with each other and turn to when they need support.

Several respondents recommended more training. Some recommended both general management training and cultural awareness training and others only requested more cultural awareness training. Several suggestions for cultural awareness training came from respondents working on or near reservations. These respondents implied other employees in their office lacked the cultural awareness necessary to successfully help their Native American clients and customers. Some respondents suggested the cultural awareness training they received from the state was inadequate. They said the training usually comes from Helena and is too general or uninformative

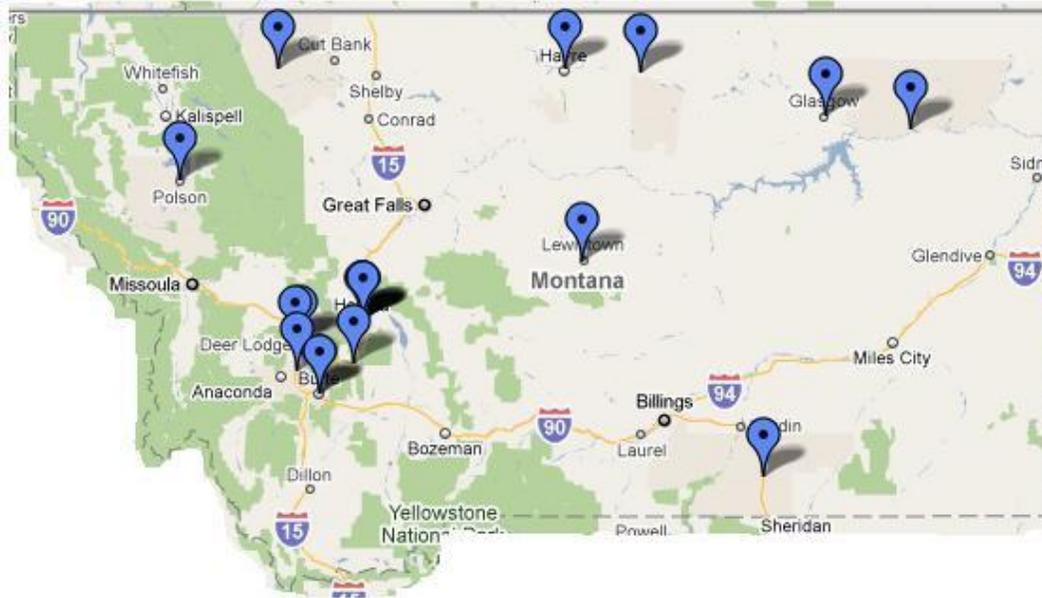
to be effective. They suggested this problem could be resolved by hiring Native Americans to develop and present the training.

A few respondents suggested the state provide more flexibility and be more accommodating of the need to spend time with family. Some respondents also requested the state simplify and shorten the hiring process. Respondents did not provide clear responses on how the state should achieve these recommendations other than one respondent who suggested more vacation time.



Appendix A

Interview Respondents by Work Location



Browning	Helena
Glacier County Public Assistance (DPHHS)*	Child and Family Services (DPHHS)
Boulder	Admin Support (GOV)
Montana Developmental Center (DPHHS)	Central Services (DOJ)
Butte	Fiscal Services (DLI)
Montana Chemical Dependency Center (DPHHS)	Indian Affairs Office (GOV)
Motor Carriers Services (MDT)	Property Assessment Regional Office (DOR)
Deer Lodge	Lewistown
Title and Registration (DOJ)	Montana Mental Health Nursing Care Center (DPHHS)
Montana State Prison (COR)*	Lodge Grass
Glasgow	Maintenance (MDT)
Job Service Center (DLI)	Polson
Harlem	Job Service Center (DLI)
Philips County Public Assistance (DPHHS)	Warm Springs
Havre	Montana State Hospital (DPHHS)*
Hill County Public Assistance (DPHHS)	Wolf Point
	Child and Family Services (DPHHS)
*Two former employees responded from these locations	