

NEW MEXICO CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT



2026 STATE-TRIBAL COLLABORATION ACT REPORT

Office of Tribal Affairs

Fiscal Year 2026

Table of Contents

- 1. Executive Summary
- 2. CYFD Overview
- 3. Mission, Vision, and Values
- 4. Office of Tribal Affairs Overview
- 5. Organizational Structure
- 6. Government-to-Government Relationships
- 7. Programs and Services
- 8. FY2026 Accomplishments
- 9. Strategic Priorities and Future Goals
- 10. CYFD Division Updates
- 11. Contact Information
- 12. Appendices

Executive Summary

The New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) remains committed to strengthening meaningful government-to-government relationships with the twenty-three federally recognized Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos located within the state of New Mexico. Through the Office of Tribal Affairs (OTA), the Department promotes Tribal sovereignty, improves outcomes for Native American children and families, and supports implementation of the State-Tribal Collaboration Act, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), and the New Mexico Indian Families Protection Act (IFPA).

Throughout Fiscal Year 2026, OTA continued to expand its role as the Department's primary point of contact for consultation, policy guidance, workforce development, quality assurance, and technical assistance related to Indian child welfare. OTA serves as a bridge between sovereign Tribes, Nations and Pueblo governments and CYFD, through fostering collaboration built on mutual respect, transparency, and accountability.

During FY2026, the OTA facilitated forty-eight (48) government-to-government meetings, coordinated seven (7) Title IV-E consultation meetings, delivered thirty (30) instructor-led ICWA/IFPA trainings for more than six hundred (600) CYFD employees, completed seven hundred eighty-seven (787) ICWA/IFPA case consultations, facilitated eight hundred four (804) Out-of-Preferred Placement (OOPP) staffings, and conducted two hundred nine (209) quality assurance reviews. These OTA effort's strengthened ICWA/IFPA compliance, improved child welfare practice, and reinforced collaborative partnerships with Tribal, Nation and Pueblo governments.

OTA at a Glance

FY2026 Highlights	Total
Federally Recognized Nations, Tribes & Pueblos Served	23
Government-to-Government Meetings	48
Title IV-E Consultation Meetings	7
Instructor-Led ICWA/IFPA Trainings	30
CYFD Staff Trained	613
ICWA/IFPA Case Consultations	787
Out-of-Preferred Placement Staffings	804
Quality Assurance Reviews Completed	209

CYFD Overview

The New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department is the state's child welfare agency responsible for promoting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families across the State. Through collaboration with Tribal, Nation and Pueblo governments, community partners, and families, CYFD works to provide culturally responsive, family-centered services to children and families. The Office of Tribal Affairs (OTA) serves as CYFD's primary contact and liaison for Tribes, Nations and Pueblo governments within the state and on a national level.

Mission

The mission of the CYFD's Office of Tribal Affairs is to serve children and families by promoting safety, permanency, and well-being through collaborative, culturally responsive, and family-centered services. The OTAs advances this mission through continuous tribal government-to-government collaboration and support to provide culturally appropriate child welfare practices for Native American children and their families.

Vision

CYFD's OTA envisions a child welfare system in which every Native American child remains connected to his or her family, Tribe, culture, language, and community whenever safely possible.

Values

- Respect for Tribal sovereignty
- Tribal, Nation and Pueblo government-to-government collaboration
- Cultural humility
- Transparency and accountability
- Family-centered decision making
- Continuous quality improvement
- ICWA and IFPA compliance

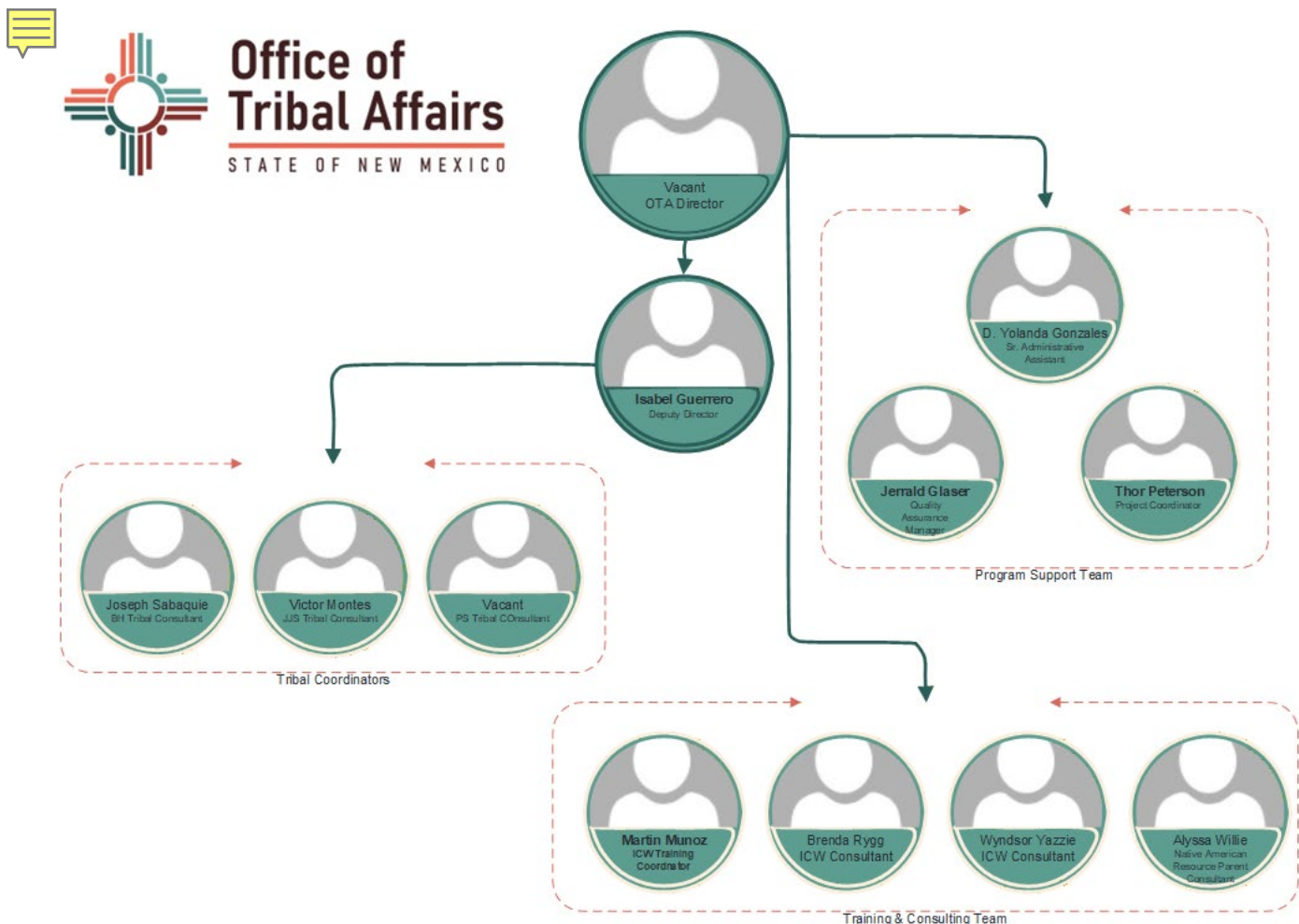
Office of Tribal Affairs Overview

Since its creation in 2020, The Office of Tribal Affairs continues to serve as the CYFD's central resource for strengthening relationships between CYFD and New Mexico's twenty-three (23) federally recognized Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes (NPTs) and with Nations and Tribes nationwide. The OTA provides CYFD with regular NPT collaboration and consultation, ICWA and IFPA implementation and guidance, workforce development, policy development and guidance, quality assurance review, and data-informed continuous improvement recommendations. The Office supports CYFD by assisting CYFD staff through case consultation, technical assistance, training, and collaborative problem solving while honoring Tribal sovereignty and promoting culturally responsive child welfare practices.

OTA serves as CYFD's subject matter expert on Indian child welfare matters and actively supports CYFD's efforts in establishing and maintaining relationships that respect and honor tribal sovereignty through on-going communication, positive collaboration, and meaningful consultation through policy/procedural initiatives and the execution of state-tribal agreements.

Organizational Structure

OTA is supported by a multidisciplinary staff with expertise in child welfare consultation, behavioral health, juvenile justice, workforce development, quality assurance, project coordination, and Tribal engagement. This integrated structure allows the Office to provide comprehensive statewide support across CYFD divisions.



Government-to-Government Relationships

Tribal, Nation and Pueblo government-to-government relationships remain the foundation of OTA's work. Throughout FY2026, the OTA facilitated forty-eight (48) Government to Government, consultation meetings, with New Mexico Tribal, Nation and Pueblo leadership and maintained regular communication with TNP's child and family social service programs to strengthen collaboration, improve policy development, and address issues affecting Native American children and families.

Programs and Services

The OTA provides a comprehensive range of services designed to support Tribal, Nations and Pueblo governments, Native American children and their families, and CYFD staff statewide. The core program areas include government-to-government consultation, implementation support for the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and the New Mexico Indian Families Protection Act (IFPA), workforce development, case consultation, quality assurance, policy development, Title IV-E collaboration, Out-of-Preferred Placement (OOPP) staffing facilitation, strategic planning and guidance, technical assistance, and data reporting. These integrated services strengthen partnerships with the New Mexico TNP governments while promoting culturally responsive child welfare practices and improved outcomes for Native American children and families.



Traditional Healing and Cultural Activity Funding

In addition to its consultation and technical assistance responsibilities, the OTA is responsible for administering funding to support Traditional Healing and Cultural Activities for Native American children in the legal custody of CYFD. By ensuring children have access to traditional healing and cultural activities, the OTA helps support the importance of maintaining a child's connection to their Tribe, culture, language, traditions, and spiritual practices as an essential component of healing, identity development, and overall well-being.

The availability of funding for traditional healing supports non-western tribal practices that address the child's behavioral, physical, medical, or spiritual health needs through traditional healers or ceremonies recognized by the child's Nation, Pueblo, or Tribe. The funding also supports cultural activities that strengthen and maintain a child's connection to their cultural identity, as identified and approved by the child's Nation, Pueblo, or Tribe. The requests for funding originate from the child, family, Tribal representatives, or CYFD staff and are coordinated collaboratively between the OTA and the child's Nation, Pueblo, or Tribe. The OTA utilizes tribal documentation to verify each request while respecting Tribal sovereignty and cultural confidentiality, to ensure that no unnecessary questioning is done out of respect to religious practices and unnecessary disclosure of ceremonial or traditional practices.

During Fiscal Year 2026, the OTA received six (6) requests for Traditional Healing and Cultural Activity funding. Four requests were approved and funds totaling \$8,205 were disbursed to support Native American children in accessing culturally significant activities and traditional healing services. The remaining two (2) requests for traditional healing and cultural activity funds were pending processing at the close of the fiscal year.

Expanding access to traditional healing and cultural activities remains a priority for the OTA. During Fiscal Year 2027, OTA will focus on increasing awareness of the funding opportunity with CYFD staff and Tribal partners while streamlining the referral process to ensure more Native American children and youth have the opportunity to participate in traditional healing and cultural activities that strengthen their identity, support healing, and reinforce connections to their families, communities, and Tribes, Nations and Pueblos.

FY2026 Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2026 represented another year of meaningful progress for the OTA. The Office continued expanding consultation, training, quality assurance, and collaborative engagement with Tribal, Nation and Pueblo governments while supporting department-wide implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), the New Mexico Indian Families Protection Act (IFPA), and the State Tribal Collaboration Act (STCA).

OTA strengthened internal and external partnerships by providing timely technical assistance, supporting policy implementation, coordinating government-to-government meetings, and assisting staff in resolving complex child welfare matters involving Native American children and families. These accomplishments demonstrate CYFD's commitment to strengthening Tribal partnerships while improving practice and compliance.

One of the Office of Tribal Affairs' most successful initiatives during FY2026 was the development of the "Life of a Case" Series, a collaborative educational forum designed to increase transparency, strengthen relationships, and enhance understanding between CYFD and Tribal partners. Recognizing that many Tribal representatives regularly interact with CYFD staff at different stages of a child welfare case without fully understanding the role and responsibility of each CYFD worker, OTA developed a series of presentations highlighting each phase of a child welfare case from intake through permanency.

Throughout the series, CYFD division leaders and subject matter experts presented on their respective program areas, providing Tribal partners with an overview of departmental responsibilities, decision-making processes, legal requirements, and practice expectations. Tribal participants had opportunities to ask questions, engage in open dialogue, and discuss areas where increased collaboration could improve outcomes for Native American children and families.

The series was exceptionally well received by Tribal partners. In addition to increasing understanding of CYFD operations, the sessions created valuable opportunities for Tribal representatives to establish direct relationships with CYFD leadership; fostering trust, improving communication, and strengthening government-to-government partnerships. The initiative reinforced OTA's commitment to transparency, collaboration, and shared learning while creating a foundation for continued partnership between CYFD and New Mexico's Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes.

Workforce Development

OTA invested heavily in workforce development by delivering instructor-led trainings, coaching sessions for supervisors and staff, supporting onboarding, and developing educational resources designed to increase knowledge of ICWA and IFPA requirements. In partnership with the department's Workforce Development Bureau, OTA worked to ensure compliance with the mandated "State Tribal Collaboration Act Cultural Competency Training", increasing attendance from sixteen (16) in FY25 to one hundred forty-four (144) employees in FY26, an increase of 800%. Additionally, OTA's thirty (30) instructor-led trainings reached six hundred thirteen (613) employees and reinforced the importance of culturally responsive practice, and ICWA

IFPA mandates to include: Active Efforts, notice requirements, jurisdiction, placement preferences, and collaboration with Tribal governments. Beyond formal instruction, OTA staff routinely provided one-on-one coaching and technical assistance to reinforce learning and improve practice consistency.

Training efforts emphasized practical application in addition to statutory knowledge. The courses incorporated case scenarios, discussion, policy review, and collaboration with Tribal partners whenever possible. The OTA continued with the development of specialized curricula for supervisors, investigators, permanency staff, attorneys, and other professionals while supporting continuous learning through technical assistance and follow-up consultation.



Case Consultation

OTA completed seven hundred eighty-seven (787) case consultations during FY2026. The consultations addressed jurisdictional questions, Active Efforts, notice requirements, placement preferences, Qualified Expert Witness issues, transfer of jurisdiction, family engagement, permanency planning, and culturally responsive decision making. These consultations promoted consistent statewide practice while assisting staff in resolving complex cases involving Native American children and their families.

Out-of-Preferred Placement (OOPP)

OTA coordinated approximately sixty-seven (67) Out-of-Preferred Placement (OOPP) staffing reviews each month for a total of eight hundred four (804) OOPP staffings during FY2026. These multidisciplinary reviews evaluated placement decisions, explored culturally appropriate alternatives, encouraged family search efforts, and promoted compliance with placement preferences pursuant to the ICWA and the IFPA.

Title IV-E Collaboration

The OTAs continued to participate in Title IV-E consultation with Tribal governments throughout the fiscal year. Seven consultation meetings supported collaboration and education regarding Title IV-E pass through agreements, funding opportunities, program development, implementation activities, and continued partnership between CYFD and Tribal child welfare programs.

Quality Assurance

The OTA remains committed to strengthening quality assurance as a critical component of continuous quality improvement and accountability. During Fiscal Year 2026, OTA completed two hundred nine (209) quality assurance reviews to evaluate CYFD's compliance with the provisions of ICWA and the NM IFPA, policy, and the requirements of the Kevin S. Settlement Agreement. These reviews identified strengths, opportunities for improvement, and recurring practice trends that informed technical assistance, workforce development, policy implementation, and system-wide quality improvement efforts.

The OTA's quality assurance work was delayed during the first half of FY2026, due to the departure of the OTA's Quality Assurance Manager at the beginning of the fiscal year. The position remained vacant until February 2026, when a new Quality Assurance Manager joined the Office of Tribal Affairs. During this transition, OTA continued to support quality assurance activities while laying the foundation for the redevelopment of a more comprehensive and data-driven quality assurance initiative.

The OTA's new Quality Assurance Manager has prioritized rebuilding the program by strengthening quality review methodologies, standardizing data collection practices, improving reporting processes, and developing performance measures that provide more reliable and actionable information for leadership and frontline staff. These efforts were developed with the intent to improve consistency, accuracy, and transparency of quality assurance activities while creating stronger connections between review findings, workforce development, technical assistance, and policy improvement.

As part of this redevelopment, OTA has conducted a comprehensive evaluation of existing quality assurance processes and identified several opportunities to improve review protocols, documentation standards, and data management practices. The enhancement of these processes will improve the reliability of performance reporting, putting the OTA in a better position to identify statewide trends, measure compliance with ICWA and IFPA requirements, and support evidence-based decision-making.

Looking ahead, OTA will continue expanding its quality assurance framework through the implementation of standardized review tools, enhanced reporting dashboards, improved data validation practices, and stronger integration with continuous quality improvement initiatives. These enhancements will support a more robust performance management system capable of informing strategic planning, strengthening accountability, and improving outcomes for Native American children and families throughout New Mexico.

Data & Continuous Quality Improvement

OTA continued strengthening its data-informed approach by supporting dashboards, reporting, performance monitoring, and Kevin S. Settlement reporting requirements. Data collected through consultations, quality assurance reviews, training participation, and staffing activities provided leadership with the necessary information to evaluate progress and prioritize future improvement initiatives.

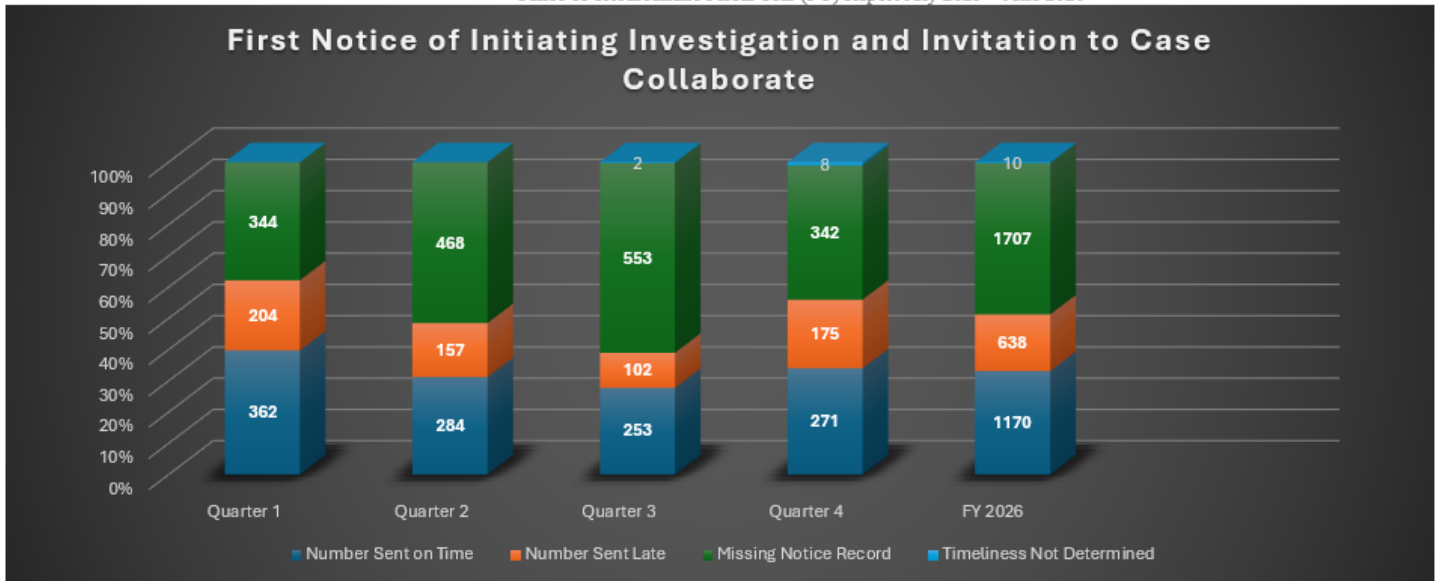


Figure 2

Figure 2 summarizes CYFD’s implementation of the policy and procedure for sending the First Notice of Initiating Investigation and Invitation to Collaborate to Nations, Pueblos, and Tribes during FY26. Of the 3,525 required notice records, 1,170 notices (33.2%) were sent within the required timeframe, 638 (18.1%) were sent late, 1,707 (48.4%) had no matching notice record, and 10 (0.3%) had a notice record but the timeliness could not be determined. Among the 1,808 notices that could be classified as either on time or late, 64.7% were sent within the required timeframe. On-time performance was highest in Quarter 1 and lowest in Quarter 3, while missing notice records increased through Quarter 3 before decreasing in Quarter 4. Counts reflect unique required notices by child and qualifying investigation; multiple notices sent to different N/P/Ts for the same child were not counted more than once in the required-notice denominator.

Strategic Priorities

Looking forward, OTA will continue strengthening Tribal, National and Pueblo government-to-government relationships, expanding workforce development, improving ICWA and IFPA implementation, enhancing quality assurance processes, increasing use of performance data, refining policy guidance, and supporting collaborative initiatives that improve outcomes for Native American children and families.

Future Goals

Key priorities for the coming year include expanding technical assistance resources, strengthening consultation processes, integrating continuous quality improvement into daily practice, enhancing staff competency through advanced training opportunities, improving data reporting capabilities, and supporting the implementation of the Kevin S. Settlement Agreement and the IFPA.

Remaining CYFD Divisions

Consistent with previous State Tribal Collaboration Act reports, additional CYFD divisions will report accomplishments, goals, and collaborative efforts within their respective program areas. OTA remains committed to partnering across all divisions to ensure that important Tribal perspectives are integrated into departmental planning, policy, and service delivery.

CONTACT INFORMATION



Office of Tribal Affairs

New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department

Isabel Guerrero
Deputy Director/Acting Director
Isabel.Guerrero@cyfd.nm.gov

Jerrald Glaser
Quality Assurance Manager
Jerrald.Glaser@cyfd.nm.gov

D. Yolanda Gonzales
Administrative Assistant
Diane.gonzales@cyfd.nm.gov

Thor Peterson
OTA Project Coordinator
Thor.Peterson@cyfd.nm.gov

Victor Montes
Indian Child Welfare Coordinator
Victor.Montes@cyfd.nm.gov

Joseph Sabaquie
Indian Child Welfare Coordinator
Joseph.Sabaquie@cyfd.nm.gov

Cynthia Aragon
Associate General Counsel
Cynthia.Aragon@cyfd.nm.gov

Martín Muñoz
Indian Child Welfare Training Coordinator
Martin.Munoz@cyfd.nm.gov

Alyssa Willie
Indian Child Welfare Resource Parent Consultant
Alyssa.Willie@cyfd.nm.gov

Brenda Rygg
Indian Child Welfare Consultant
Brenda.Rygg@cyfd.nm.gov

WyndSOR Yazzie
Indian Child Welfare Consultant
WyndSOR.Yazzie@cyfd.nm.gov