Executive summary | February 14, 2024

Wipfli Tribal Government CFO Exchange

Host: Lisa Desotelle | Wipfli

SME: Alan Post | Wipfli

SME: Bryce Sutherland | Salesforce

Facilitator: Austin Evans | Profitable Ideas Exchange

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Introduction

Chief financial officers (CFOs) from tribal governments all over the U.S. met virtually to share leading practices and discuss topics of mutual interest based on an agenda created through a series of preinterviews. Lisa Desotelle, partner at Wipfli, hosted the exchange and Austin Evans of Profitable Ideas Exchange facilitated.

Alan Post, tribal government director at Wipfli, and Bryce Sutherland, tribal strategic account executive at Salesforce, joined to provide subject matter expertise. The focus of the discussion covered the following topics over the course of the hour:

- Energy tax credit updates
- ARPA requirements and guidelines
- An overview of Salesforce benefits for tribal governments

Energy tax credit updates

Lisa Desotelle of Wipfli opened the discussion with an update on energy tax credits.

- The Department of the Treasury launched a website for the Inflation Reduction Act that acts as the central information hub; CFOs are encouraged to subscribe to their weekly email updates.

- There is also a prefiling registration tool available with companion instructional videos. It is recommended to file the preregistration no later than 120 days prior to filing the tax form.

Energy tax credit updates

Members applying for the energy tax credits were reminded to fill out IRS Form 990T.

- It's recommended to have the form prepared by a CPA firm or other professional services firm that specializes in the energy tax credits in conjunction with the preregistration filing.
- The 990T is the tax form that nonprofits use for filing their unrelated business income taxes. Since tribes don't have tax returns, this is the form the government is asking tribes to complete when applying for the tax credits. (It is only related to the energy credits and not any other financial information of the tribes.)

There are many opportunities for tribes in the areas of building projects, including solar, wind, geothermal, combined heat and power, EV charging stations and other clean energy areas.

- For additional information, members can review the December 12, 2023, clean energy webinar from the IRS and/or work with Wipfli consultants to identify areas of opportunity.

ARPA guidelines and requirements

Wipfli's Alan Post guided the group through a discussion on ARPA guidelines and requirements.

- With the goal of not sending money back to the Treasury, Post noted that their objective was to help members navigate requirements so that all allocated funds can be spent appropriately.

Timelines are important to ARPA, as all funds must be obligated by December 31, 2024, and fully spent by December 31, 2026.

- There is also an April 30, 2024, reporting deadline within that obligation. In this case, an obligation is defined as an order, contract or subrecipient agreement that the tribe has signed that obligates them to pay funds out.

ARPA guidelines and requirements

When it comes to obligating items that may not be able to be ordered, such as payroll and other related items, there is a secondary definition for an obligation that was recently released for reporting.

- Members can allocate State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to cover many costs related to reporting and compliance, subrecipient monitoring, civil rights and nondiscrimination requirements.

- All recipients of these funds must estimate total expenses from now until December 31, 2026. These estimates, along with a reasonable justification for the estimate, must be reported by April 30, 2024. The final amount expended for these costs will also need to be reported. Overestimates will result in funds being returned to the Treasury.

A question was raised about the criteria for an obligation.

- Ways to meet the standard for obligations include a signed contract, an order placed for materials or an indirect cost being charged, among other options.

- Things that do not meet the standard for obligations include a purchase order that does not have an actual order of materials or services attached, budget appropriation of funds for a project that has not begun and a budget or allocation of the SLFRF funds. Generally, any purchase order needs to include something tangible.

Salesforce for tribal governments

The meeting concluded with a presentation from Bryce Sutherland about the benefits of Salesforce for tribal member management.

- Salesforce is a cloud-based technology that can be accessed anytime, anywhere and on any device. It offers managed packages as well as personalized solutions.
- Salesforce is "all clicks, no codes" and provides a user-friendly experience for creating dashboards and reports.
- Salesforce is a subscription-based model that renews yearly, and ARPA funds can be obligated to cover the purchase.

Salesforce for tribal governments

Sutherland shared about the Salesforce "one-stop shop" vision and putting tribal members at the center.

- For example, if a tribal member goes into the secure platform and fills out a LIHEAP application, they can automatically see what other grants they prequalify for.

For the tribe's employees, Salesforce provides a wealth of information and capabilities.

- All needs, including but not limited to grant management, loan management, LPI, emergency program management, benefits management, assistance programs, WIC applications, diabetes applications and the gaming business can be supported through this one system.

- For example, the Cherokee Nation has seen a huge increase in applications processed and has saved up to $4 million per type of application by moving from pen and paper to Salesforce.

Several members expressed interest in using a tribal member management system, such as Salesforce.

- A sense of disorganization can come from cobbling together multiple systems from multiple departments. Using one comprehensive solution, such as Salesforce, may be the solution to this headache.

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