SWEETWATER

YÁʼÁTÉÉH DǪǪ
WELCOME TO
TÓLIKAN

Indigenous Planning:
Tólikan (Sweetwater) Perspectives

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tólikan Chapter of the Navajo Nation is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Tólikan faces unique planning challenges due to its rural location and decades of land disenfranchisement. Issues fall within categories of bureaucracy, (futuristic) change, community, and (thriving) development.
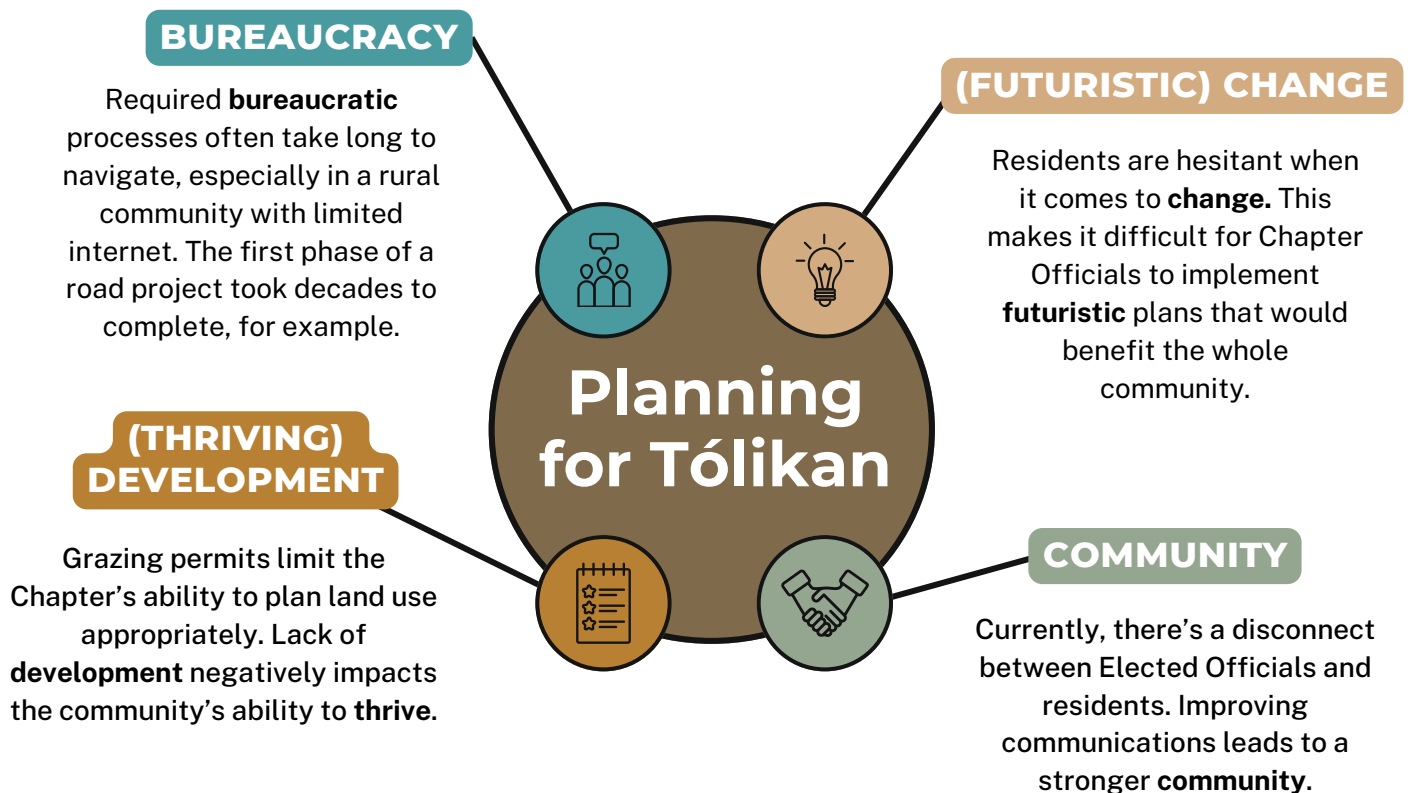
BUREAUCRACY

Required **bureaucratic** processes often take long to navigate, especially in a rural community with limited internet. The first phase of a road project took decades to complete, for example.

(FUTURISTIC) CHANGE

Residents are hesitant when it comes to **change.** This makes it difficult for Chapter Officials to implement **futuristic** plans that would benefit the whole community.

Planning for Tólikan

(THRIVING) DEVELOPMENT

Grazing permits limit the Chapter's ability to plan land use appropriately. Lack of **development** negatively impacts the community's ability to **thrive**.

COMMUNITY

Currently, there's a disconnect between Elected Officials and residents. Improving communications leads to a stronger **community**.

Figure 1. *Overall themes*

Recommendations

Based on these challenges, Tólikan leadership should incorporate strategies that aim to address the overarching themes, as proposed below:

Develop consistent training for elected officials and encourage more transparency.

Highlight the futuristic benefits of amenities and change to address any fears and anxieties that might arise.

Work with community, utilizing traditional and other knowledges. Better communication and collaboration builds stronger relationships.

Relationships strengthens public perception. This lends to thriving development by **proactively considering land impacts/grazing permits as a community**.

Chart 1. *Recommendations Flowchart*

BACKGROUND

There are over 500 reservations in the lower 48 states of the United States. Planning in the Navajo Nation presents some difficulties due to past and ongoing colonization. Indigenous peoples experienced many instances of land disenfranchisement over the last three decades (Hill and Tovey III, 2023).

The development of federal Indian law and policy that impacts Indigenous sovereignty, agency, and planning can be categorized under the following:

- International law
- Inherent tribal sovereignty
- Treaties
- Federal Statutes
- Executive Orders

- Federal court decisions
- Administrative regulations
- Tribal law
- U.S. Constitution

These policies are further explained across five general eras: colonial, treaty, land-dispossession, termination, and self-determination. This history led to individualized parcels, wherein the U.S. passed the General Allotment Act in 1887 that superseded any treaty provisions. Today, tens or hundreds of owners may have one single allotment due to this policy.

It's no surprise that these displacement efforts created a variety of hurdles to planning. These issues can be seen in the Tólikan Chapter Officials' and Land Use Planning committee's efforts to develop for the future. For example, individual grazing permits make it difficult to dedicate certain areas to a particular use.

In 2010, Tólikan became a Local Governance Act (LGA) Certified Chapter in the Navajo Nation. There's a total of 45 certifications within the Nation with the earliest dating back to 1999. The Navajo Nation passed the LGA in 1998 as a way to shift certain powers to more local chapters. Out of 110 chapters in the Nation as a whole, there are less than 50% of eligible chapters certified.

The purpose of the LGA is to provide local chapters an opportunity for more self-governance and sovereignty. This localized form of governance allows each community to utilize traditional practices. Before colonialism, Navajo leadership was "small, localized, and often clan-based autonomous communities" (Hale, 2018). LGA sought to return power to grassroots and local citizens.

However, many issues prevent both the eligible chapters from receiving certification and the certified-chapters from accomplishing local decision-making. According to Hale (2018), these include:

- Overburdened review board, which leads to delayed certification
- Insufficient accounting systems for central and local officials, which entails audits, budgets, and record sharing
- Costly fiscal and operations mismanagement
- Lack of accounting education; lack of budget and financial knowledge
- Improper use of funds
- Leadership turnover

This list isn't exhaustive by any means but highlights some issues that greatly impact a chapter's potential. In Tólikan's case, these hurdles can be seen in their local leadership. The Navajo Nation made important strides in welcoming traditional forms of government by using the LGA to decentralize power; unfortunately, the impacts of colonialism cannot be easily undone.

The land disenfranchisement and resource extractions created the need for individualism that overshadows the community as a whole. Diné scholar, Larry W. Emerson, also describes colonialism as "how settler people invent their ideas and theories and apply them to Indigenous people" (Emerson, 2014). While certified chapters can rely on self-governance, they often lack the resources to successfully become independent. These layered policies – both past and present – require intentional collaboration between local chapters, Navajo Nation, and U.S. Federal Government.

This report focuses on the Tólikan Chapter of the Navajo Nation, which is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Tólikan faces unique planning challenges due to its rural location and this overarching political history.
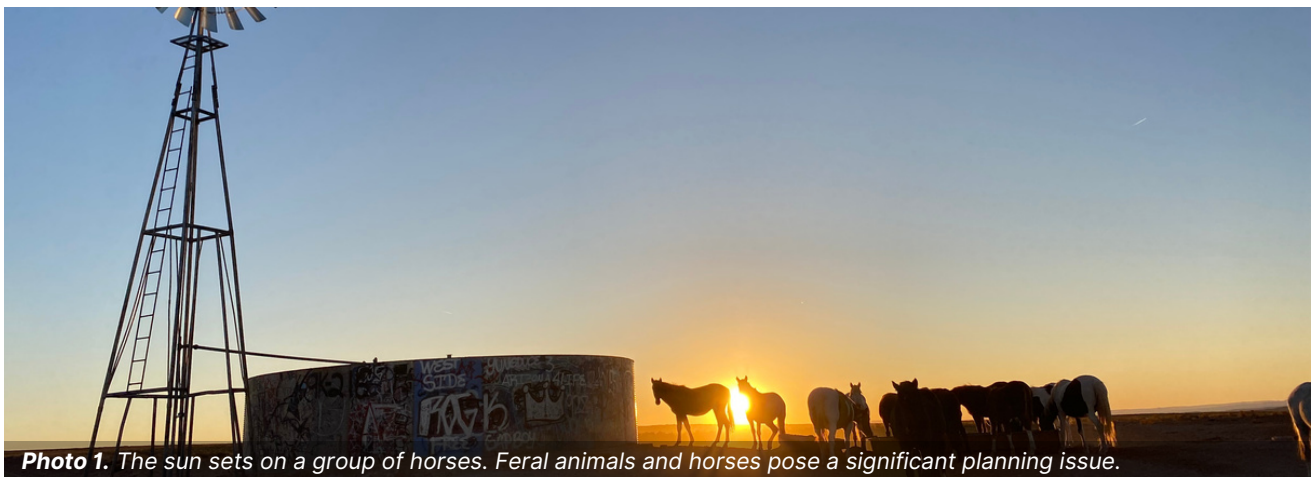

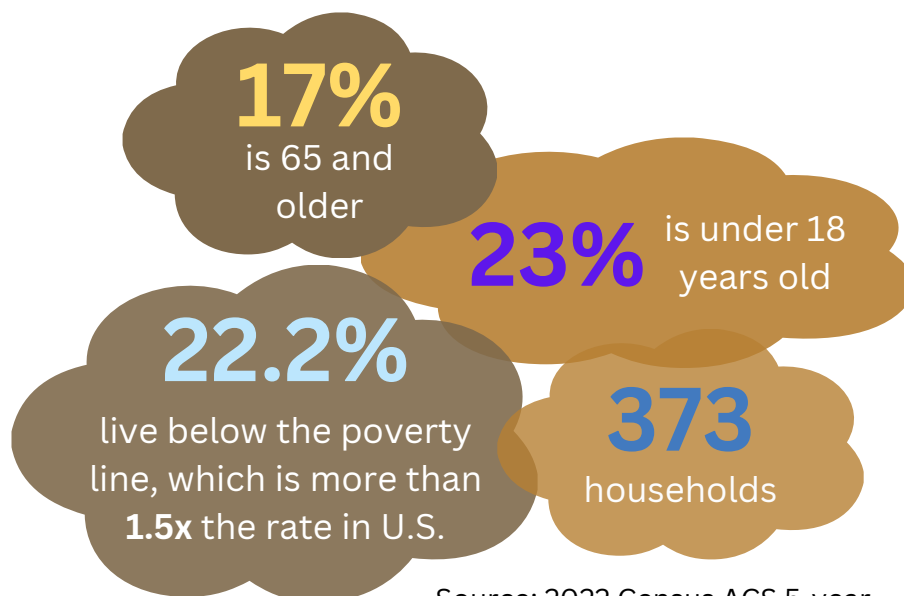**Photo 1.** *The sun sets on a group of horses. Feral animals and horses pose a significant planning issue.*

Introduction to Tólikan

Located in northeast Arizona, Tólikan is nestled between the Carrizo Mountains and the canyons to the south. Its name, To Likaan, means "Sweet Water" and refers to a little sandstone spring (Yurth, 2014). This community is part of the original treaty reservation established in 1868. The chapter encompasses 315 square miles, which is larger than New York City!
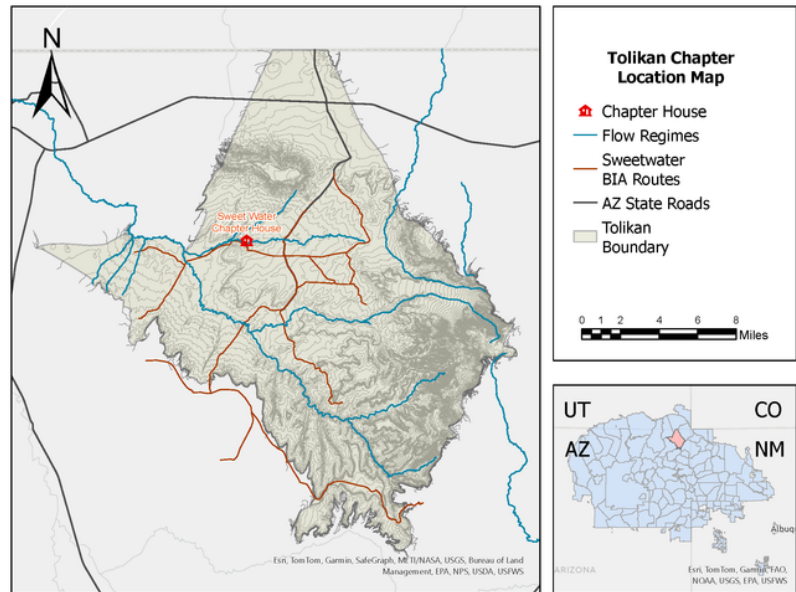
Figure 2. *Map of Tólikan Chapter, Joaquín Lopez Huertas*

Based on the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) Census data, the chapter's population is 1,369 – a decrease from 1,535 in the 2010 Census data. These projections provide crucial information about the local demographics. Planning appropriately for the community requires figuring out how to maintain or grow current population through infrastructure, development, and economic opportunities. However, the U.S. Census Bureau experiences difficulties in its data collection on Indian reservations. These demographics provide a helpful framework but may be severely undercounted like in previous estimates.

17% is 65 and older

23% is under 18 years old

22.2% live below the poverty line, which is more than **1.5x** the rate in U.S.

373 households

Source: 2022 Census ACS 5-year

Photo 2. *Wayfinding sign in Tólikan*

The chapter is quite remote despite being 15 miles from major highways due to the sandy road. Residents make a 65-mile commute one way to get groceries and other necessities (Yurth, 2014), emphasizing the need for improved infrastructure in Tólikan. However, community members speak highly of the resources they do have – beautiful landscape, the regional health center, the Immanuel Mission – and above all, the people.

Photo 3. *Valley overlook*

Along with its natural beauty, Tólikan's lands are healthy. A 2012 study on vegetation across three chapters in the Shiprock Agency's District 9 reveal that Tólikan has the best pastures (Ecosphere, 2012). The ecology lends well to carrying capacity and stocking rates (number of animals per acre) but is quite low compared to historic potentials. This means that ranges now carry much less livestock than currently permitted. Additionally, feral horses and other wild animals further undermine soil health.

The change in ecological health reflects general climate change trends that Tólikan faces, including droughts. As local officials and committee members work on updating the chapter's Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP), planning in accordance with the 2018 Climate Adaptation Plan for the Navajo Nation is necessary to lessen harmful environmental impacts and sustainably develop infrastructure.

PLAN REVIEW

Land use plans are necessary for communities to grow and envision its future. Though often written for people in leadership roles, community members can also benefit from learning about these proposed policies and goals. Incorporating community involvement will improve the successes of implementation efforts.

Readability

Setting the example for its chapters, the Navajo Nation must maintain nationwide visioning for its 110 chapters. The 2018 Climate Adaptation Plan for the Navajo Nation does just that by calling attention to a global issue that threatens local livelihoods. As a result, the climate plan is geared more toward local leadership teams to implement into their own plans. This may limit the readability of the plan for officials who aren't used to reading text heavy reports with little-to-no visuals. The Century Gothic typeface also doesn't read as well in body text where the font size is smaller. This plan provides insightful guidance on the Nation's priorities but doesn't lend well to the general public nor does it include local language or emphasize cultural values.

The Tólikan 2015 CLUP references its community when it opened up with the vision of planning for the people. The chapter does a great job of making its CLUP available to the public – uploading the document onto their webpage and allowing for public download. There are visuals included throughout with good use of colors, though Century Gothic typeface can be difficult to read at smaller font sizes. Similar to the Nation's climate plan, this document is more technical despite being widely public-facing.

Likewise, the 2015 Mexican Chapter Land Use Plan uses color and visuals to promote readability. The maps, overlayed with terrain view, provide more visual context to readers. This makes it easier to understand the area and how proposed development fits within it, whereas Tólikan's CLUP may require readers to recall what that one area looks like. For locations that are difficult to access, more photos and terrain views help increase reader accessibility. Additionally, Mexican Water's choice of typeface is less straining on the eyes.

Both chapters and the Nation as a whole, however, can find successful elements from the Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Whakaue ki Maketu (Rūnanga) plan to incorporate into theirs. The Rūnanga plan is the most user-friendly land use plan through its integration of culture and community. There are visuals throughout that maintain the reader's attention while keeping text appropriately broken up. Alongside less text walls, much of the language used is quite personable. There are plenty of "we" and "our" statements; translations to and from the

Rūnanga's native language; and traditional chants and sayings. All of these elements take it a step further from the other plans by better integrating the Plan into the community – whereas, the Navajo Nation may still be finding a balance between technicality and readability.

Sustainability and Culture

One recurring theme in all of these plans is the need for sustainability priorities. In its climate adaptation plan, the Navajo Nation hosted a number of workshops for community leaders to identify their priorities alongside the Division of Natural Resource. These issues included: water; feral horses; communication; enforcement and compliance; pollution, air quality, and illegal dumping; and grazing management. The assessed priorities closely align with that of the Tólikan and Mexican Water Chapters. These are already pain points for local officials but climate change exacerbates the negative effects on communities working to solve the issue as is.

The Rūnanga centers its entire local plan around sustainability to address the global implications of climate change. Their approach utilizes a more community-driven mindset. While the Navajo Nation and its chapters highlight the importance of community involvement in their plans, the Rūnanga narrated cultural importance of each element such as air and water.

Regardless of the differences in how the Navajo Nation, two of its chapters, and the Rūnanga present its sustainability goals, many of their struggles are similar. These Indigenous communities confront climate change with limited resources. For example, environmental hazards remain in their own communities despite not being the ones who extracted these resources. Colonialism and extraction threatens Indigenous well-being while limiting their resources to address climate change.

Settler colonialism, as described by Diné scholar Larry W. Emerson, is the imposition of settler ideas and theories onto Indigenous peoples. Emerson refutes utilizing westernized and colonial methods to solve these problems caused by colonization; rather, he calls for engaging a politics of hózhó̜: being relational and interconnected with self, land, plants, family and kin, and community within the Diné Four Sacred Mountains.

Additionally, Indigenous cultures have been threatened by forced assimilation, which includes but is not limited to: boarding schools and land ownership. All of these plans touch on the importance of maintaining culture, traditions, and identity. Both sustainability and culture go hand-in-hand when developing these plans as one cannot exist without the other.

Implementation

Since these communities experience similar struggles against climate change, their goals and proposed policies are quite alike. The Navajo Nation and its chapters take a more technical approach. The plans highlight policies in a matter-of-factly manner, which helps minimize potential for confusion. On the other hand, the Rūnanga takes a people-driven focus by highlighting how the issue and its policy relate back to their people. There are differing reasons why one plan may employ certain strategies, but publicly-accessible plans utilize more of the personable approach.

Using community-centered language foster a stronger sense of collective action. For example, the Rūnanga focused on water quality by framing it as:

> *"We are downstream, at the lower end of large catchment systems, so we see, feel and bear the brunt of upstream land use and associated discharges to land and to water.*
>
> *We want a healthy environment so that we can swim safely and gather kai. We want to be able to provide sufficient food for ourselves and our manuhiri.*
> *. . .*
> *Poor water quality affects instream life, mahinga kai resources, and our ability to swim in, or gather food and drink from, our waters."*

This specific inclusion of the community — we, ourselves, our manuhiri — instill a greater call-to-action for not only the leadership but for the people. While the Navajo Nation and its chapters provide important technical information in their plans, what is the likelihood of its people feeling truly represented? And what is the likelihood of leadership re-visiting the plan to guide its implementation?

Additionally, the Rūnanga assign "lead" organizations to each proposed policy. This places the responsibility on that entity to follow through on its goals. Developing forms of accountability increases implementation success, whereas the Nation and its chapters may be operating under the assumption that someone will step up and see it through.

The Nation's climate adaptation plan — for instance — does highlight the level of priority and severity of risks, but nearly all the goals are categorized as "high" with no clear designation of ownership. "High priorities" can be daunting for local leaders to prioritize accordingly, especially if the onus falls on one entity to implement all of the goals. An example for Tólikan is feral horses. Whose responsibility is wildlife management and how can it be improved upon? Without accountability, there's no viable path forward.

Indigenous communities can learn a lot from one another. While their cultures and geographies are distinctly unique, similarities can be found in the issues they experience. Incorporating new approaches into and continually improving upon — rather than relying on outdated templates — community plans is crucial to accomplishing the goals set forth.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Introduction

Under the guidance of University of Utah's City & Metropolitan Planning Ph.D. Candidate Joaquín Lopez Huertas, we created an interview guide to understand the experiences of Chapter Officials and residents. This guide focused on questions related to the person's role in the community and their experiences, such as:
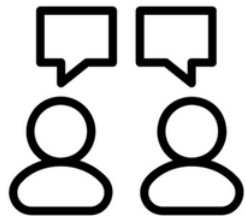
- Can you tell me about your involvement as a Navajo Official in your community? / Can you tell me a little bit more about yourself? What are some of your involvements with the community?

- What are some concerns you hear from community members? / What are some concerns you've experienced?

- What does community engagement look like to you?

These perspectives are then used to inform our work with the Tólikan Chapter as they update their previous 2015 Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

Methodology

Over the course of a month, I contacted and followed up with five Chapter Officials and two community members to interview. I interviewed two officials and one resident over the phone. Our calls each lasted around 45 minutes to an hour, with an additional follow-up call for one official.

I received consent from each individual to record the conversations for post-interview transcription. These transcripts provided the foundation for thematic analysis. My initial takeaways guided each interview analysis before I combined the four analyses to finalize the major themes that appeared multiple times — emphasizing the importance of that particular topic.

However, further research will contribute greatly to the following results. This is limited by an outsider's perspective. As someone who doesn't belong to the Nation or have personal relationships with these interviewees, our conversations may not have gone as in-depth as they could have. Although, this may have encouraged interviewees to be more open and honest knowing that their perspectives were anonymized by me.

For the post-interview transcription, I initially uploaded the audio file into Microsoft Word's dictation feature to develop draft transcription. I then listened through each recording to correct errors and expand on sections that the dictation software missed.

These transcripts served as the basis for thematic analysis, wherein I read through each one multiple times to highlight elements that stuck out in that individual interview. This helped me develop some initial themes that I then used to more thoroughly check against one or both of the other interviewees' transcripts. Afterwards, I listed out general categories from codes that connected different interviews. I developed the final four themes by analyzing the codes and patterns that kept recurring, which emphasized the importance of that topic.

- Bureaucracy emerged to capture interviewees' concerns around multi-agency processes, time-intensiveness, and funding requests/approvals.

- Change materialized from recounts of residents' oppositions, future hopes, and lack of improvements. Futuristic was added to bring forth Navajo philosophy that reframes "change" while preserving the interviewees' perspectives.

- Community captured intergenerational differences, desire for stronger relationships, and people's unique skills & knowledge.

- Development encompassed grazing permits, zoning and land use, and sustainability. Thriving was added to bring forth Navajo philosophy while preserving what interviewees said about "development."

The word mapping (page 16) examined important connections. These connections show the relevance of a specific interview code (aka "topic") to its associated theme, as well as to other codes or themes. Many of these topics are interrelated; it's difficult to pinpoint where one ends and the other begins, showcasing the complexities of these issues.

As a result, challenges and recommendations that emerged from this analysis can be applicable to more than one theme. The opportunity for this interconnectedness is that one solution can address many other issues; however, being unaware of existing influences can hinder the effectiveness of a specific initiative.

Photo 4. *Natural arch overlooking a building*

Results

Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy encompasses interview codes that relates to official processes. Many interviewees noted specific instances, as seen below in table 1, but interview coding also included implicit examples related to bureaucratic procedures.

Bureaucracy
- same people on the same committees, all giving the same input   - there's issues and problems [with processes]   - if you know somebody higher-up, then they can push that for you. . .speed things up   - overall budget, allocation, funding request to Nation   - some roles are overburdened, need to delegate/provide more help   - we've been waiting on this for 20 years   - delays, projects not prioritized within Nation   - accountability and responsibility   - nothing ever gets done   - nepotism, you scratch my back i scratch yours   - takes a lot of training, orientation   - local Chapter, get away from Nation and be on our own   - self-controlled, self-governing, implement our own plans   - need progressive leaders, critical thinkers, decision makers, plans for the future and not just tomorrow   - need to complete stats and assessments, meet criteria   - how can we negotiate or work with the [federal] government   - do it for the community, the people   - a lot of time spent chasing. . .everybody just kind of loses interest

Table 1. *Code examples from interview excerpts analyzed under "Bureaucracy"*

The primary reason for delayed or long-drawn-out projects is specific processes to follow. From funding requests to coordinating with the Nation, any minor setbacks can have a drastic impact on the already time-consuming procedures. Other effects revealed through a bureaucratic analysis include elements of power, networking/connections, and accountability.

(Futuristic) Change

A variety of interview codes that fall under change highlight both the need for these improvements and people's hesitation to do things differently. As seen in table 2, interviewees note some of these tensions.

(Futuristic) Change
- the mindset of we've always done it that way   - unaware of how other cities and towns operate   - nothing's ever going to change, do your business and we won't come to the meetings   - where the Chapter will be moving in the future   - are they willing to make those changes or adapt to changes?   - some people don't like it. . . a lot that we need to make changes   - there used to be youth programs when i was a kid   - cell tower was a land issue… need to explain that people will have their own cell phone   - making changes is hard, but we need the change to move on   - modernizing world   - community is still just like when i left in 1980   - hope that young people still honor and respect the traditional view, at the same time still developing   - new insights and perspectives   - plan for future

Table 2. *Code examples from interview excerpts analyzed under "Change"*

The lack of overall improvements can be attributed to people's resistance to change – both from chapter officials when it comes to bureaucratic processes and from community residents when it comes to proposed developments. These anxieties and fears around change are further exacerbated when cultural traditions are taken into account. Modernization can be seen as a threat to traditional practices. Instead of adhering to western notions of "change", the Tólikan community can focus more on futuristic benefits. For example, how might modernization be used to preserve culture?

Community

Relationships were the focal point of community. Many interviewees talked about trust and collaboration between chapter officials and community members, as well as within the group of each respective affiliation. Table 3 reveals some of the conflicts that emerge related to community.

Community
• to establish and maintain relationships, it takes years • so we can advocate • present to the elders in their language, meet with elders • no relationships with the younger generation then younger generation leaves and they get upset cause nobody's representing the young generation • work with other chapters and learn from them • people talk down to officials • members need resources • people talk against each other, vote each other down • community is the boss, they're the voters • ensure young generation feels a part of the community • high-level of conflict/distrust/disconnect • have to educate them on land use • culture plays main role in development • reciprocal relationships • orientation for the people and community, how to serve the community • medicine man, church people, elderly, young people...work with youth and elders • need transparency and accountability

Table 3. *Code examples from interview excerpts analyzed under "Community"*

The lack of community engagement is a result of a disconnected community, wherein interviewees noted intergenerational differences and virtually nonexistent communications. This theme also highlights the strengths that the chapter as a whole could utilize from community knowledge and skills. The interviewees acknowledge that building trust and relationships take a lot of time and commitment. Ultimately, the benefits are well worth the effort.

(Thriving) Development

All of the previously mentioned themes touch on development in some way; they must be addressed when considering infrastructure needs. Table 4 provides insights into some of the hurdles in the development phases and processes.

| **(Thriving) Development** |
| --- |
| mapping, clear boundaries. . . ordinances, zoning each permit holder needs to understand the scope of their land and their responsibilities farm, develop businesses, hospital, residential, trading post, school, roads, transportation, supermarket, restaurants, fire station, police station, school bus routes cell tower / cellular one how do you improve if the state or the tribe doesn't want to or doesn't have money to make every road a highway only a grazing permit, not land.. it's federal land benefit the community $14 million [*Chapter House*], $7 million [*initial quote for next phase of road construction*], $15 million [*increased quote of road construction*], $52 thousand [*power line*], $60-64 million [*construction, administrative, maintenance, etc. fees*] *NOTE: ALL OF THESE ARE QUOTED OR ACTUAL COST NUMBERS RELATED TO INFRASTRUCTURE PROJETS* need to go 5-10 miles an hour over some roads environmentally friendly... solar, our own farming and garden, water system water rights, lake powell, Navajo dam. . . they trick you, they'll take what you have away from you without you knowing it uranium issue, damage underground water and wells, drinking water contaminated . . . livestock's stricken and then we eat our livestock planning isn't immediate plan for the young people |

Table 4. *Code examples from interview excerpts analyzed under "Development"*

This theme looked at infrastructure as a whole, capturing implemented and desired projects that the interviewees referenced. It also includes one of the primary hurdles to planning – grazing permits – that cause a lot of land issues and improvement setbacks. A thriving community includes amenities and services that enhance the well-being of people and land.

Mapping These Connections

While the aforementioned interview codes were assigned to one particular theme, many could be interpreted under other categories. Mapping these connections between codes-themes and even codes-codes was integral in understanding the extent of each issue that interviewees talked about.

The mapping isn't exhaustive by any means. Rather, it serves as a big picture overview of the key issues identified that support one of four themes. There needs to be intentional consideration when implementing solutions. How could they be expanded upon to address a connected issue? And what needs to be done to ensure that one area won't unknowingly limit the effectiveness of an initiative?
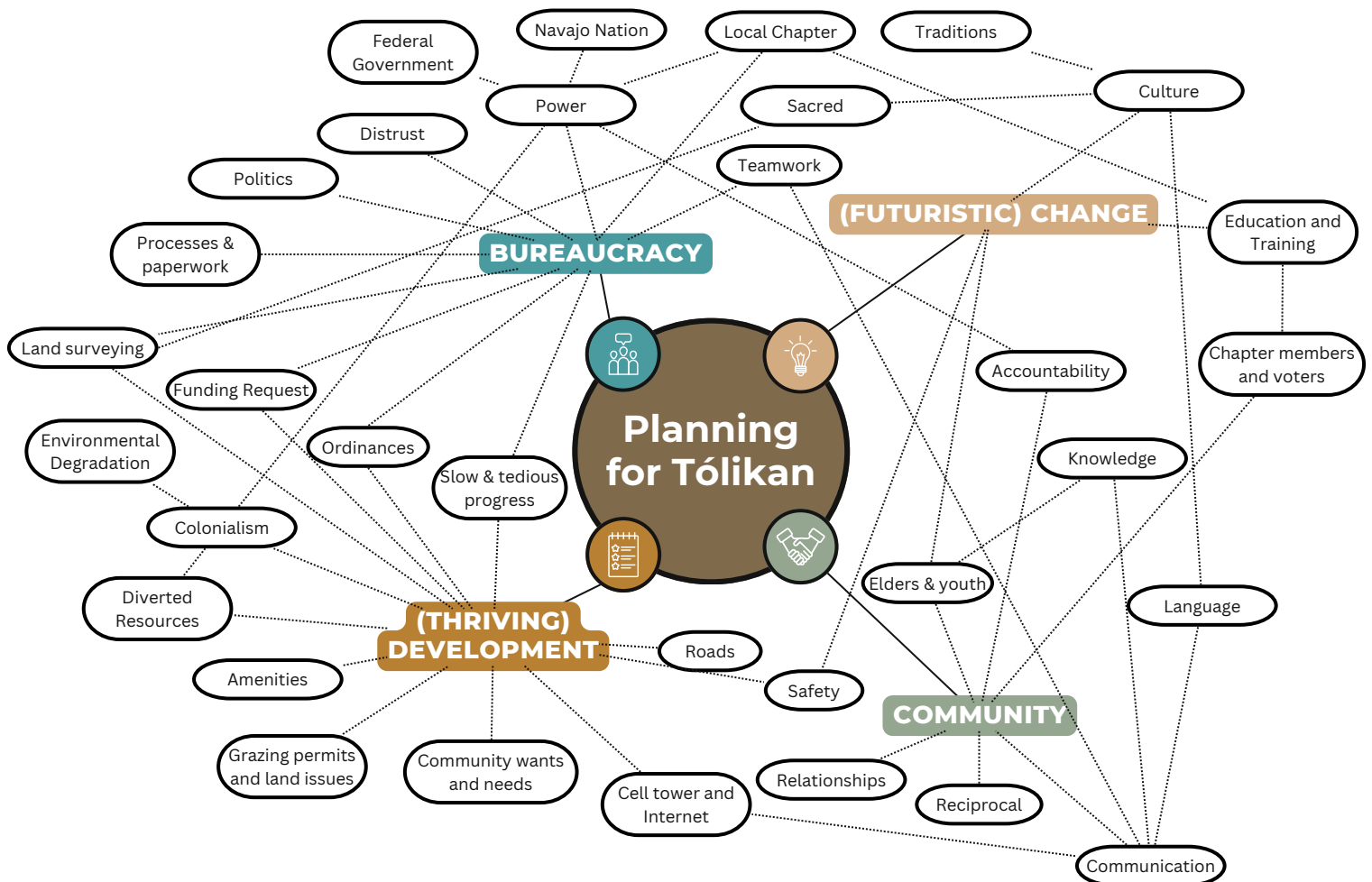
Figure 3. *Mapped connections of codes-themes and codes-codes to better understand the influences one element may have on another*

Discussion

With these four themes that arose out of the interviews, we can see how each category affects the other and how land disenfranchisement imposed a greater sense of individualism over collectivism The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, signed in November 2021, includes funding to remedy some of the issues that interviewees brought forth. Utilizing these policies and resources can help the Chapter in its planning.

Bureaucracy

Given its LGA-certification, the Tólikan Chapter has the authority to enact certain policies. This provided the Chapter more oversight of its local operations while remaining subject to the Navajo Nation's laws.

The Chapter Official Interviewees (COI) both viewed this as an opportunity to become more independent from the Nation. However, the Community Resident Interviewee (CRI) viewed the decreasing involvement from the Nation's Council Delegates as a downside. This conflicting perspective between officials and resident highlight how the Chapter's work isn't fully understood.

This lack of transparency frustrated all of the interviewees: the COIs felt that their work is unappreciated while the CRI felt like chapter residents are ignored. The Chapter's ability to facilitate improvements through ordinances and planning is then overshadowed by this frustration. This could lead to Chapter Officials withdrawing from community engagement and to community members disregarding the officials' efforts.

Photo 5. *Welcome sign to the Chapter*

Photo 6. *Navajo Nation Seal*

Ultimately, these perceptions exacerbate the sentiments that all interviewees expressed:

- Dissatisfaction with lack of working relationships
- Lack of communication
- Slow and delayed timelines
- Little change/improvements for the community

Of the completed infrastructure, the COIs talked about the difficulties they faced in getting the projects finished. For example, the cell tower and main road provided significant improvements to the community. However, the COIs mentioned that these took 20-50 years to complete! Interviewees attributed this long process to land issues and grazing permits.

To improve planning, each interviewee stressed the importance of educating the community. The CRI noted how people have conflicting information over the boundaries of their permits. As a result, permit holders may not realize the extent of their allotted land.

It's not only important to provide definite information regarding each permit holder's boundaries but to also stress the benefits of development. One COI said "if permit holders give up their land, we'll take care of them." The CRI's family has donated acres of land to support the community, citing the importance of expanding amenities. All interviewees suggested more education — of why development is necessary — and more awareness — of actual permit boundaries — to minimize land use concerns.

Additionally, the COIs both talked about how education is necessary for their own leadership. Orientation and training provide important tools for everyone to work effectively; though, one felt that the leadership wasn't aligned on tasks and procedures. This disrupts the processes and contributes to delays. The inefficiencies within the Chapter itself prevents local leaders from effectively engaging with the Nation.

The COI's embraced more local autonomy and leadership; however, chapter officials do need to engage the Nation more. Funding requests and federal processes – such as environmental assessments and surveying – are a primary reason in long delays to accomplishing the Chapter's goals. The lessened involvement of Council Delegates may have helped Chapter Officials in developing their own local policies while negatively affecting the needed collaboration to secure funding. One COI noted that they consistently reached out about being on the Nation's priority list of projects.

Re-establishing these integral communications with the Nation can also allow the Tólikan Chapter to partner with other chapters. One COI and the CRI talked about other communities they believed to be great examples of what Tólikan should become. Learning from similar Chapters can provide Tólikan officials with new ideas and strategies.

Overall, the interviewees' sentiments – both implicit and explicit – highlighted the ongoing effects of colonialism. Local residents have little access to clean water and live nearby environmental hazards, such as uranium, from past mining/resource extractions. These conditions call for a greater need in utilizing federal grants. Detailed processes, like required environmental assessments and clean-ups, take up a lot of time and money. Unfortunately, COI's expressed disappointment in the lack of outcomes despite going through the proper channels. The larger scale, and continued sidelining of local chapters, at which these projects require Federal involvement greatly limits the officials' abilities to operate at the local level.

> **You have to like what you're doing for the community, for the people . . . Don't be a leader where you're going to say things, and then you're lazy to do it. You know, you have to get out there and do it. Mean what you mean to be a leader.**
>
> *-Chapter Official Interviewee*

(Futuristic) Change

The desire for change, however, often meets opposition from local residents. Change can spark fear and anxieties in residents, especially given previous tumultuous land disenfranchisement efforts. Both the COI's noted that new policies and development were objected to by the greater community – which can be attributed to lack of communication but also fear of unknown. The inclusion of "futuristic" is used to capture the interviewees sentiments while reframing "change" to align with the Navajo way of being, K'é.

While the negative sentiments surrounding change are inevitable, these can be soothed through stronger relationships and focus on the future of K'é. The futuristic change provides more benefits than residents may realize. For example, one of the COI's talked about the Chapter's experience in setting up a cell tower. Many community members didn't see a need but were elated once it was constructed. The COI mentioned that residents were calling each other and celebrating the enhanced network.

> # Everybody pull their cell [phone out] at the top . . . everybody was happy calling each other. And that was a land issue, that was a problem.

> ## -Chapter Official Interviewee

However, the CRI noted that things are still relatively the same with little to no improvements since their childhood. Many of the large projects that the CLUP puts forth experience delays due to land issues from grazing permits. There seems to be strong resistance to change throughout the process but satisfaction once improvements have been made that increase the community's well-being.

Interviewees also stressed that traditions need to be preserved despite change. They all want the community to modernize so that the Chapter can grow and keep its residents; however, cultural and traditional practices should still be maintained in the process. Two interviewees mentioned that this looks like presenting meeting items and having discussions in their native language. Doing so allows knowledge to be passed down from the elders.

Additionally, more needs to be offered to bridge the gaps in technology and knowledge. Many of the residents are unfamiliar with technology, and the CRI stressed that technology workshops should be hosted in the community. They provided an example where people may drive hours to a larger town just to scan an image or document to mail out and proposed an alternative solution of taking a photo and emailing it to the recipient.

These ongoing changes that ultimately benefit the community shouldn't be inaccessible due to lack of technological skills. This disparity also highlights interviewees' concerns regarding intergenerational differences. Interviewees noted that younger generations are unaware of what living without cell phones and technology was like for the elders – and the knowledge they hold of traditional practices, like in navigating the changing seasons. On the flip side, interviewees noted that older generations don't understand the youth. For example, their community may be found online as opposed to in-person. The lack of youth programming nowadays leads to a new method of connection for the younger generations.

Change is needed – especially when envisioning the future of many generations to come. A futuristic outlook maintains collectivism and K'é. Despite differing opinions on how to achieve this goal, everyone can agree on the wanting the best for their community. Finding the balance between futuristic change and traditions helps community members embrace the unknown — knowing that "the inclusive nature of tradition, change, sustainability, and continuity" (Emerson, 2014) paves the way to the future.

Photo 7. Element markers of identity and Tólikan

Community

Since change is dependent on strong relationships, the lack of transparency between Chapter Officials and residents greatly impacts community relations. All of the interviewees stressed the importance of community engagement, which Tólikan seemed to be struggling with.

Both the COI's and CRI shared similar perspectives that the chapter doesn't clearly communicate with its residents. Examples include utilizing inaccessible methods of communications (through social media and on the Internet), passing resolutions and measures without much community consideration, and lack of personal relationships.

The CRI also noted observations in meetings where elders were dismissed while one of the COI's highlighted that presenting information in their native language allows elders to engage. Additionally, these two individuals expressed disappointment in the lack of youth involvement. The need for community engagement is especially necessary for bridging any intergenerational gaps.

The CRI shared childhood memories of participating in the Chapter's youth programming and how that connection back then led to many community members attending chapter meetings – young and old alike. Unfortunately, it seems to be much different today with growing gaps of knowledge and communications between generations. This leads to further communal disconnect that hinders K'é.

Ultimately, this individualized mindset perpetuates colonialism's impacts through personal property. Many permit holders remain concerned with their acreage size – wanting to preserve their lands for future generations. In return, this hinders the ability of the Chapter to plan for the community as a whole. All of the interviewees expressed a desire for more collective collaboration – and the idea of promoting welfare for their Chapter as a whole. The individualism of grazing permits is a hurdle, wherein the Chapter needs to convince one individual that giving up an X amount of acreage will eventually benefit that individual and their family in the long run.

Refuting these individualistic desires rely heavily on community efforts. The well-being of the whole chapter only enhances the well-being of the individual – and right now, there seems to be a massive disconnect between Chapter Officials and residents that only perpetuates the individual scarcity mindset. Building and strengthening personal relationships between all of the residents, residents and chapter officials, and officials is necessary to exemplify collectivism.

> " It takes years, but you know what? In five years – those kids that are 13 years old – if we work with them today, when they turn 18 and register, they're going to say, "Hey, I remember doing this. I remember this time and I'm part of the community." So, when we say planning, it's not immediate.... I say years.

-Chapter Resident Interviewee

Photo 8. Tólikan Chapter House gathering space for formal meetings

(Thriving) Development

All of the previously discussed themes tie back into development. The interviewees view these other elements as additional factors to allow for better planning. All of them note the importance of zoning and land use, which can be met with opposition from community members. Additionally, the cost of infrastructure projects is expensive and require more funding requests to the Nation. The emphasis on "thriving" shifts development away from western impositions and orients it toward K'é. A thriving community requires sustainable planning for the people and land.

Interviewees note the desire for more sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions. One COI in particular noted the lack of natural resources within the community, citing water diversion – Lake Powell and the Navajo Dam – and uranium contamination that negatively harm physical health. Colonization still has prominent effects on Native Indigenous communities today due to resource extractions and ongoing neglect.

Although designated as Indian reservations and tribal property, these are still considered federal lands. The many layers of regulation and policies often complicate land development through bureaucratic processes, especially through required involvement of Federal agencies. All of the interviewees talked about planning for the future and for the youth; they also recognized how time and resource intensive these projects are, highlighting factors that may be out of the Chapter's immediate control.

Again, the excitement for more local authority provides elected and appointed officials greater opportunity to address community needs. Unfortunately, these larger-scale development efforts require collaboration at the Nation and Federal levels.

The COI's noted certain instances of nepotism, such as getting projects fast-tracked due to knowing someone or extra benefits through powerful connections. These bureaucratic complexities raise an important question, "How can the Chapter ensure steady development?" — especially since all of the interviewees expressed an interest in:

- The completed main road & more paved networks to improve access
- More expansive health facility
- Senior housing (in the works)
- More housing
- Community recreation centers
- Police station

- Fire station
- Trash disposal / station
- Local businesses
- Expansive grocery store
- Restaurants
- Farms / community gardens
- Solar panels

***Photo 9**. Tólikan welcome sign and space*

The interviewees, after talking about what they'd like to see built in their community, recognized that planning itself isn't immediate. It's a process that requires time, often facing bureaucratic hurdles, which can lead to people losing interest. Maintaining the motivation for these projects requires a commitment to the community and accountability to each individual's promises. There's also a tension in balancing more immediate and long-term goals, such as ensuring basic needs and prioritizing language recovery.

Unfortunately, the biggest hurdle on the local level is negotiating land with the grazing permittee. All of the interviewees cited this particular land issue as a barrier to planning. Given the instilled individualism in land "ownership," taking the approach of requesting permittees to give up some of their acreage won't yield the most favorable responses.

Shifting to a collective mindset requires collaboration. Residents don't want to be asked to donate X amount of land. They want to be involved from the very beginning to ensure that their needs and concerns are considered as well. Active participation is one way that permittees feel valued. This starts to build that K'é needed for planning.

Development is achieved through collaboration. This can't always be done in a meeting room but rather in the community where the people are. The interviewees stress the importance of going directly to them; they all mention that current processes require that residents attend the meetings and provide formal comments. However, this can be limiting to many who live farther away from the Chapter House. Including more grassroots strategies ultimately encourages development by centering the community every step of the way.
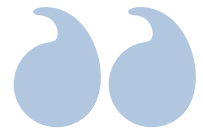
When you present it to the people... I don't know. Are they willing to make those changes or adapt to changes or what? We don't know, yet... So that's something that's going to be a challenge.
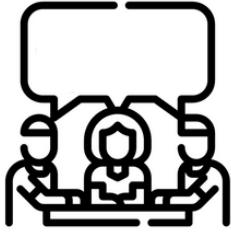
It does get better and easier. But then the thing... The question is, how are we going to pay for those? How are we going to implement all these programs. How?

-Chapter Official Interviewee

Photo 10. *Building in Tólikan Chapter*

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop comprehensive and consistent training materials for Elected Officials. If possible, utilize existing connections to shadow other Chapters' leadership to share insights.
- Improve processes for working with Navajo Nation and Council Delegates.
- Establish map of official permit boundaries.

The time-intensive process in training and onboarding for elected officials, especially new individuals, highlights the need for materials to be consistently updated. It can also be easy to fall into repetitive habits for officials in multiple terms. Some of the interviewees' criticisms highlight resistance to change not only from community members but also from elected officials. Continually trying new methods or strategies can help improve processes. Interviews also show the need for officials to be on the same page. That doesn't necessarily mean in opinions but in aligning on the same mission and goals, as well as following through on processes and being accountable to one another.

Emerson (2014) proposes the practice of indigenization for social change. This concept helps "fulfill the promises we have made to our communities, promises that liberate us from colonization frameworks that keep our voices suppressed" (Emerson, 2014). Incorporating indigenization into current bureaucratic processes allows chapter officials to prioritize Hózhǫ́ (hózhonáházdłį́į́') and K'énahazdlii' knowledges.

> *"Remember that Indigenous knowledge is not linear and is nonhierarchical. Indigenous knowledge stresses cooperation, not just competition; collective action, not just individuality; relationality, not just compartmentalization; interdependence, not just independence; and the natural rather than the unnatural."*
>
> — Larry W. Emerson

Training documents and processes are necessary for building the foundation to effectively work as an individual and together as a team. Indigenization is one concept that can be incorporated into the overarching mission as a way to guide actions.

Develop consistent training for elected officials and encourage more transparency.
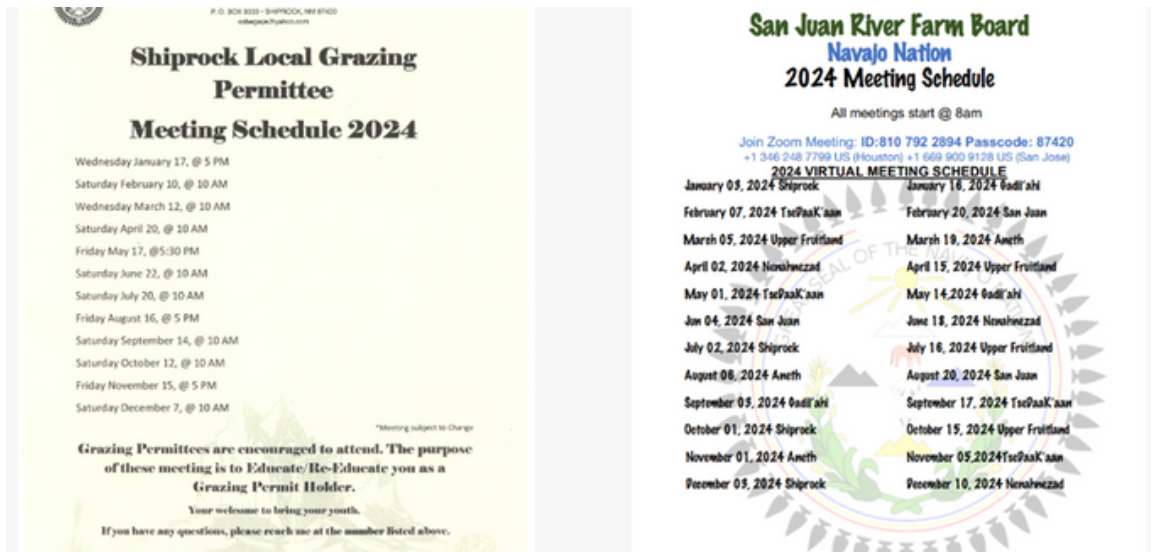
Figure 4. *A screenshot of the 2024 meeting schedules on Shiprock's website*

The interviewees all mentioned getting to know other chapters and leadership. They expressed the desire for more collaboration – at least in learning different approaches and methods. Three other mentioned chapters are Chinle, Shiprock, and Aneth. While travel and coordination can be tricky to plan, collaboration in any form can contribute to Tólikan's successes. For example, viewing the Shiprock Chapter website alone highlights meeting strategies that Tólikan can implement both online and on hard copies to post around town.

Whereas, navigating the Tólikan Chapter website can be confusing for some and not as counterintuitive. The links and forms page provide important content, but it's difficult to determine its accuracy. For example, two documents listed under "forms" are meeting schedules for 2018. On the Organizations page, meetings are dated 2023.

Updating the Chapter webpage – alongside postings on any bulletin boards and community gathering spaces – can improve communications with the whole community and ensure that consistent, updated information is easily accessible. Providing updated information for the community makes it easier for elected officials to be on the same page. Ongoing communications with each others improve coordination with the Nation as a whole. Effective planning requires collaboration at the Nation level — especially for projects like capital improvement and environmental assessments.

Develop consistent training for elected officials and encourage more transparency.

- Highlight the benefits of increased amenities and services
- Develop more youth and community programming to build intergenerational relationships
- Maintain cultural traditions and utilize modern technology to help, as appropriate.

As we can see from the implementation of Cellular One – Tólikan's cell tower – community members welcome the advantages of a broader network despite initial oppositions. It can be difficult to step back and look at the bigger picture, but something that officials can emphasize is collective benefit gained from infrastructure. All of the interviewees noted that land issues can be solved through constant education on how their quality of life will be improved.

Additionally, there is a current disconnect in intergenerational relationships that could be contributing to an individualized sense of well-being. It can be difficult to plan for future generations when people are focused on themselves and their own immediate relatives. Strengthening relationships in the community is necessary to achieve K'é.

The interviewees mentioned the need for more youth engagement as a way to bridge these gaps. More youth programming and services can help younger generations feel more connected to their own community – encouraging them to learn more about their own traditions and connect with elders. Likewise, technological workshops can connect elders with the greater community.

Cultural practices can be maintained and passed on alongside change through these strengthened intergenerational connections. The younger generation now can continue to teach these traditions to future generations. Additionally, more technological infrastructure can help with capturing knowledge.

An integral part of change is looking to the future – not necessarily a complete shift in cultural elements but in utilizing new resources as needed. Technology access can increase overall well-being and facilitate sharing cultural resources (Mcllduff et. al 2022)

Develop consistent training for elected officials and encourage more transparency.

Highlight the futuristic benefits of amenities and change to address any fears and anxieties that might arise.

- Increase community engagement and outreach
- Host more informal, community gatherings
- Improve communications by expanding methods (door-to-door, postings, radio, etc.)

Focusing on overall community outreach is integral in building a tight-knit community. This can look like promoting chapter meetings and inviting people of all ages to attend. By providing a variety of strategies to engage people – whether that's in an interactive or standard setting – it can create a stronger sense of feeling valued. Community engagement isn't a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Elected officials may need to experiment with different strategies to see what the Tólikan community best responds to. While there might be specific bureaucratic processes that the Chapter is required to follow in accordance with its certification, more informal outreach can provide important insights. The interpretation of these ideas into formal language may require more work for the officials but improves accessibility.

Additionally, hosting more informal gatherings in general can build stronger relationships. Many of the interviewees noted that they felt like the community isn't as connected as it used to be. They expressed a desire for elected officials to foster informal connections as a way to develop reciprocity. While officials have limited time and an enormous amount of work, hosting community-wide events can be one method to include – rather than starting with one-on-ones. Events like BBQs, potlucks, and movie nights can also encourage more community relationships with one another instead of just officials and residents. Other suggestions include workshops to learn sand painting, weaving, and other skills.

Lastly, there's a great need for more communication. If news is only being published online, then that limits accessibility due to weak Internet coverage in certain areas and the lack of technological knowledge. Expanding methods to include KNDN AM announcements, bulletin boards in communal spaces, and/or encouraging establishments (school, church, health clinic) to share news will start to establish clearer communications.

Develop consistent training for elected officials and encourage more transparency.

Highlight the futuristic benefits of amenities and change to address any fears and anxieties that might arise.

Work with community, utilizing traditional and other knowledges. Better communication and collaboration builds stronger relationships.

- Share drafts for public input, host special sessions targeted at elders, youth, and so forth.
- Work with individual permit holders to discuss proposals, using the established map.
- Apply for BIL funds and grants to improve infrastructure.

Involving the community at all phases is integral to effective planning. This can be taken a step further by having multiple opportunities for public input, instead of just one meeting, and more targeted gatherings that allow people to feel more comfortable with their peers. Special sessions that cater to specific demographics can include a variety of strategies. For example, meeting with elders can be driven by communicating in their language and meeting with youth can incorporate technology. Engaging people with what they're familiar with provides more interactions and in-depth feedback.

Additionally, hosting regular meetings or workshops with individual permit holders is necessary to address land issues as they arise. This proactive coordination can prevent severe interruptions or conflicts further in the future. Doing so also allows the permit holders to feel heard – and improves collaboration not only between an individual permit holder and the chapter leadership but between all permitees.

Limited resources can be traced back to colonization and extraction. Ongoing efforts, such as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, aim to address some of these impacts. This data tracker shows BIL remaining funds. To plan for the larger and more expensive projects – such as road and housing – coordinating with the Nation to apply for BIL-specific grants can allow existing resources to be utilized for more immediate needs, such as youth programming or community building.

Photo 11. *Feral horses roaming around*

Develop consistent training for elected officials and encourage more transparency.

Highlight the futuristic benefits of amenities and change to address any fears and anxieties that might arise.

Work with community, utilizing traditional and other knowledges. Better communication and collaboration builds stronger relationships.

Relationships strengthens public perception. This lends to thriving development by **proactively considering land impacts/grazing permits as a community.**

The COIs expressed frustration with delays and their projects being identified as low-priority on the Nation's list. Improving relations with the Council Delegates takes time but more regular communications – to ask questions or for assistance – can help the Chapter get the resources it needs. Additionally, utilizing existing resources such as the Shiprock Agency's service programs (Natural Resources) can help identify each allotment's boundary.

According to BIA data, the Northern (Shiprock) Agency's district nine – made up of five chapters, including Sweetwater – has a total of 593 grazing permits with 741 permittees. Tólikan's land use planning can be improved upon by consulting with individual permit holders. Proactively engaging residents throughout the process helps with future development projects since the Chapter Officials and CLUPC are working directly with the individuals, minimizing the potential for land conflicts.

Shiprock Agency	Grazing Permits	Permittees	Sheep Units Permitted
District 9	593	741	23,345
District 12	1,200	1,422	52,166
District 13	210	261	10,995
Agency Total	**2,003**	**2,424**	**86,506**

Figure 5. *Data from BIA Shiprock Agency website that shows the number of grazing permits, permittees, and permitted sheep units.*

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CONCLUSION

Indigenous communities have experienced many different forms of land disenfranchisement under colonialism. Despite changes in policies and the designation of tribal lands, negative impacts still perpetuate land issues. In addition to planning and addressing colonialism's impacts, Indigenous communities are navigating climate change that drastically alters their environments and threatens their livelihoods.

These are hurdles that the Tólikan Chapter of the Navajo Nation is dealing with as it plans for the future. Elected officials and CLUPC members grapple with bureaucracy, (futuristic) change, community, and (thriving) development issues. As the chapter works toward updating its CLUP, addressing these key themes is necessary to accomplish the immediate and long-term goals it set out. Planning for the future and for the youth maintains the unique community, Hózhó, and K'énahazdlii' found in Tólikan.

Photo 12. *Buildings in Tólikan Chapter with signage of local agencies/offices*

Photos 13 and 14. *Visioning and working group*

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MEDIA SOURCES

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