

**Change Leadership Toolkit**

**Case Studies:**

**College of the Muscogee Nation**



**An Addendum to the**

**Change Leadership Toolkit:**

**A Guide for Advancing Systemic Change  
in Higher Education**

By Elizabeth Holcombe and Ángel de Jesus Gonzalez

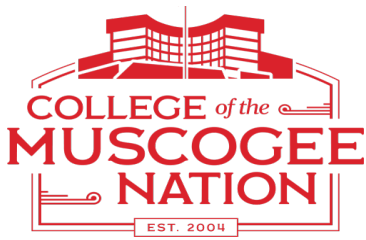
Collaborator: Dr. Monte Randall, College of the Muscogee Nation

# CHANGE LEADERSHIP TOOLKIT

## CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

These Case Studies accompany the Change Leadership Toolkit and demonstrate what it looks like in action to use Leader Moves to promote systemic institutional change. Each case highlights a few key Leader Moves and includes an overview of each institution, the leader at the forefront of the change process and a description of the Leadership Context and Levers used to achieve the change goal. Collectively, these Case Studies showcase the combinations of Leader Moves and Levers that leaders can use to drive change across different types of institutions. It is important to note that, given the lengthy time period for changes and keeping the document brief, these are just examples of Moves, Levers and Context elements and are not fully inclusive of the leaders' change processes.

In any systemic change project, there are a variety of conditions that may influence the Moves leaders choose to make, the Levers they may use and the ultimate change that is made. As a result, for these Case Studies, we chose to represent leaders in different roles, institutions with varying characteristics and various types of change projects in order to reflect this diversity and showcase how the Toolkit is useful in a variety of situations. Visit our Change Leadership Toolkit Case Studies web page to see other examples, <https://pullias.usc.edu/clt-case-studies/>.



# Promoting Growth and Student Success through a Native Cultural Lens at the College of the Muscogee Nation

## About the Institution

College of the Muscogee Nation (CMN) is a tribal college of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation located in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Founded in 2004, CMN was initially co-located with the Oklahoma State University-Institute of Technology before acquiring its own land and buildings and seeking accreditation as an independent tribal college emphasizing Muscogee language, culture and values. Initially accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in 2016, CMN became fully accredited in 2020. It offers six associates degrees and four certificates, along with an extension program and general education coursework that is eligible for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. While CMN's student population is quite small (under 300 students), the college plays a significant role in the local Muscogee (Creek) community and in preserving and advocating for the Muscogee language and culture. The Muscogee (Creek) tribe is one of the largest federally recognized tribes with 100,000 tribal members.

## CASE STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Leader Role(s) and Agency:** Dr. Monte Randall, president of College of the Muscogee Nation
- **Goals of Change:** Prioritize Muscogee language, culture and values while driving increased student success using the Native American Leadership Model
- **Level/Scope of Change:** Whole-institution
- **Institutional Type:** Community college, tribal college
- **Moves Highlighted:**
  - Sensemake and Learn
  - Create Vision, Expectations and Pacing
  - Develop Strategy and Resources
  - Lead People and Teams
  - Foster Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- **Context**
  - Institution type
  - Culture/mission
- **Levers:**
  - Campus (system, state) strategic plan(s), including mission, master plan, diversity plan and other plans
  - Affiliations or partnerships with national associations and organizations, including regional, community, state, national or international

## Setting the Stage: About the Project

Dr. Monte Randall assumed the presidency of College of the Muscogee Nation (CMN) in the wake of a campus tragedy — the untimely death of the college’s beloved president, Robert Bible, in 2021. Monte was a long-time leader at CMN, starting his journey as an intern and working his way up to dean of student affairs and then dean of academic affairs at the tribal college in Oklahoma. When he assumed the presidency, Monte had to help the campus community deal with a tragedy, while also creating and sustaining a new vision for CMN.

CMN was and still is an emerging institution in some ways. Founded in 2004, the college sought accreditation starting in 2008 and earned full accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in 2020. It has grown from a single office on another college campus and a handful of classes to a 40-acre campus with 10 associates degree and certificate programs. This period of rapid growth and change, both planned and unexpected, characterized the environment that Monte entered as he began his presidency.

Many outside influences, from the HLC’s accreditation requirements to Achieving the Dream (ATD), to the Aspen Institute and the American Indian College Fund, contributed to a sense of things “being imposed on us” and a disconnection from some of the most important aspects of CMN’s mission. Monte’s main goal was to clarify the campus mission and embrace the college’s role as a steward of the Muscogee language and culture while simultaneously embracing more traditional community college goals around student success, completion and transfer. He wanted to help his campus find the unique intersection of these goals — increasing student success and increasing focus on Muscogee culture and language — and make that their own within their unique cultural lens.

As a result, Monte introduced a leadership and leadership development framework to help ground the campus in traditional indigenous values while pursuing their student success goals. Called the Native American Leadership Model (NALM), this model uses “a lens of tribal core values and indigenous learning methodologies...to reclaim and assert the indigenous perspective on Native American leadership that was dismantled over centuries through U.S. assimilation policies” (Randall, 2022). The NALM helped campus leaders view their many external partners as simply providing tools in service of their larger mission of serving the Muscogee (Creek) community and embracing Muscogee language and culture, rather than imposing external values and priorities.

Using the NALM as a framework, the CMN leadership team worked to make changes on campus that reflected their dual focus on student success and Muscogee culture. In terms of student success goals, they streamlined their onboarding process and created new student pathways, enhanced career services and built new partnerships with other local colleges and universities to ease student transfer. In terms of their cultural goals, they started a new Muscogee language program and strengthened their partnership with the Muscogee (Creek) tribal government. While this project is still in early stages, with the new strategic plan launching in 2024, the NALM has empowered leaders to lean into traditional indigenous approaches to leadership as they take action to transform their campus.

## Change Leader Moves



### Overview of Change Leader Moves

Monte used a variety of Leader Moves to support his goal of prioritizing the Muscogee language, culture and values while driving increased student success. First, he introduced the Native American Leadership Model (NALM) to his senior leadership team as a framework to help them make sense of their history, language and culture and the ways that this heritage can and should shape their actions as higher education leaders. He developed and ran a 13-week leadership development training program to support his senior team in reflecting on the ways in which their unique cultural background could influence their goals and strategies as a campus (*Sensemake and Learn*). The team used this sensemaking process to develop a new vision for the college, one that is grounded in Muscogee cultural values and that emphasizes a Muscogee-specific vision of student and community success

(*Create Vision, Expectations and Pacing*). Once this vision was established, the team embarked upon a new strategic planning process to concretize their vision (*Develop Strategy and Resources*). Throughout this process, Monte focused on developing his leadership team through the 13-week leadership development training and continuous engagement with the NALM (*Lead People and Teams*). He also threaded the Muscogee language, values and culture throughout all aspects of his change effort, demonstrating the ways in which Moves can be made in tandem (*Foster Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*).

### Sensemake and Learn

Monte's first step in his goal of re-centering Muscogee language, values and culture while increasing student success was to introduce the NALM to the leadership

team at CMN. Monte developed this model as a part of his graduate work, and it is designed to help encourage personal leadership development as well as knowledge of “tribally specific history, language and culture” (Randall, 2022). Monte introduced the NALM in a leadership development training for his leadership team in the summer of 2021. Over the course of this 13-week training, which Monte ran, leaders engaged in readings and exercises in both organizational and leadership development as well as the history, language and culture of the Muscogee (Creek) nation. This training was expanded to the broader community of faculty and staff in the fall of 2021, so that knowledge of the NALM expanded throughout the college.

At the same time that campus leaders were learning about the NALM and traditional indigenous ways of leading, they were also learning more about their own students through increased use of data on campus. With the support of organizations like ATD and the Aspen Institute that offer frameworks for reviewing data in support of student success, the leadership team at CMN was able to incorporate data into their planning process as they began to rethink what success would look like in their context.

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***Monte used the summer leadership development program to help empower his team to recenter their unique Muscogee cultural values and priorities and create their own unique vision for supporting Muscogee and other Native American students.***

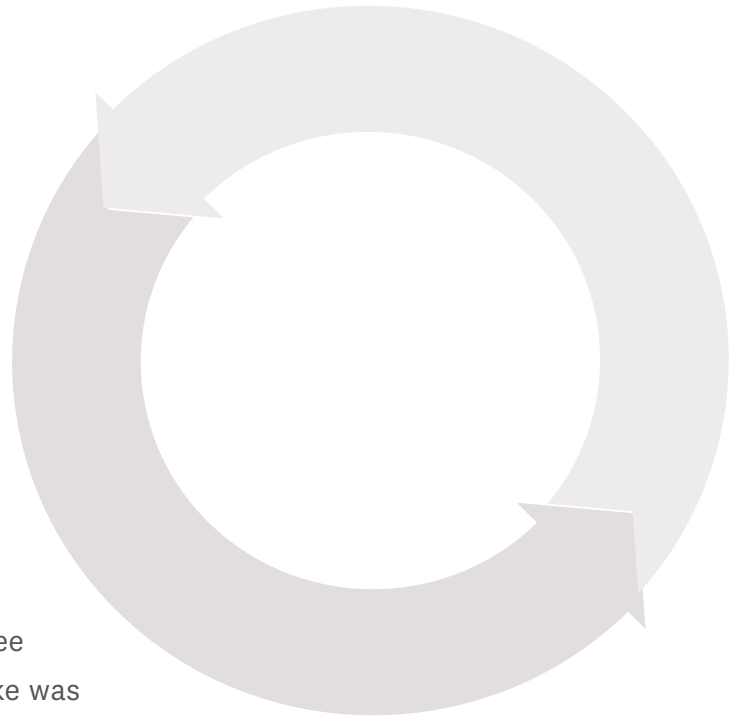
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## **Create Vision, Expectations and Pacing**

As the leadership team learned about and engaged in the NALM at the summer leadership development training, Monte worked with them to focus on a vision for the college’s future. This vision centered around growth and development — specifically growing the student population and helping develop the local tribal community — student success, and revitalizing the Muscogee language and centering indigenous values and culture. Sensemake and Learn Moves also supported the creation of this vision, as Monte helped the leadership team learn more about their history as Muscogee (Creek) people and the historical trauma involved in the education of Native Americans that led to loss of language and culture through forced assimilation. Part of this process also involved coming to terms with the involvement of all the outside organizations that had been engaged with CMN in its short institutional history. As noted above, the college had regular dealings with the HLC, Aspen, ATD, and the American Indian College Fund, among others, and there was a sense among campus stakeholders that lots of external values and priorities were “being imposed on us.” Monte used the summer leadership development program to help empower his team to recenter their unique Muscogee cultural values and priorities and create their own unique vision for supporting Muscogee and other Native American students.

## Develop Strategy and Resources

As Monte and his team clarified their vision and worked to foreground their Muscogee language and values in the work that they did, they began a new strategic planning process for the college in late 2021 with a goal of implementing the new strategic plan in 2024. This new strategic planning process provided a way to concretize their vision in a set of actionable strategies on dual yet intersecting tracks — Muscogee culture and student success. In terms of Muscogee culture, a primary focus was the revitalization of the Muscogee language. One example of what this focus looked like was translation of a basic managerial planning tool, the SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) into the Muscogee language. A seemingly simple step like this one helped the team feel pride in their culture and ownership of the planning process in a way that was true to their heritage and values. Other priorities for developing Muscogee culture and language included creating a new Muscogee language master apprentice program, in which local Muscogee speakers served as teachers for student “apprentices” who would learn the language. In terms of student success strategies, the team prioritized changes to student onboarding, creating student pathway programs, strengthening career services and easing transfer.



## Lead People and Teams

As we noted above in the section on Sensemake and Learn Moves, Monte implemented a 13-week professional development series for his executive leadership team in the summer of 2021 to engage the team in learning and development around re-centering Muscogee language, values and culture while increasing student success. Monte termed this series CMN Leadership, Engagement and Development (CMN LEAD), and it “served as a team-building exercise” as well as a Sensemaking and Learning process (Randall, 2022). The first two sessions focused on the history of CMN and the NALM, with an emphasis on processing both historical trauma and the more recent trauma of losing the long-time CMN president whose position Monte assumed. The remaining sessions prioritized team members learning from one another. Each team member had to make a presentation on a topic that they researched and framed through the NALM. Examples of topics the team presented included data management and analysis, Native American resilience, emergency management and conflict resolution. This exercise helped team members build relationships and trust and empowered them to take more ownership of both their immediate job responsibilities as well as broader campus goals. The entire CMN LEAD series also helped the team re-conceptualize their roles through an indigenous leadership framework.

## Foster Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Monte's work foregrounded Moves in the Foster Diversity, Equity and Inclusion category, as it prioritized Muscogee values, culture, and language and focused on weaving them throughout the work of the College. Monte's case provides a helpful example of how Moves can be made in tandem. Specifically, DEI Moves were paired with or threaded throughout almost all of the other Moves he made. For example, his Sensemake and Learn Moves were primarily focused on helping team members learn about and celebrate Muscogee history, culture, and language. His Vision Moves were all about centering Muscogee values within the vision and priorities of CMN moving forward. His Strategy Moves focused heavily on revitalizing the Muscogee language, and his Lead People and Teams Moves were grounded in indigenous leadership approaches. All of the Moves that Monte made were informed by his desire for the College and its leaders to embrace and center their Muscogee (Creek) heritage in planning and decision-making.





## Focus On: Leadership Context

Leadership Context involves the set of internal and external influences that shape a leader’s change landscape, influence the Moves made and provide opportunities or challenges to consider when developing a change strategy. At CMN, important elements of Leadership Context included *institutional type* and *culture*. In terms of *institutional type*, Monte tied his goals of centering Muscogee culture and prioritizing student success to CMN’s dual missions as both a tribal college and a community college. CMN’s mission as a tribal college — the only tribal college in the state of Oklahoma — was instrumental in helping Monte make the case for revitalizing the Muscogee language and rethinking key College processes through a Muscogee cultural lens. At the same time, CMN’s community college status lent itself to prioritizing goals around student success and transfer. Monte intentionally tied his vision and strategy to these dual missions (Vision and Strategy Moves). Monte also noted that his campus’s *culture* was a key aspect of Context that he considered as he worked on his systemic change. Specifically, the campus was suffering from “initiative fatigue” as a result of all its partnerships with external organizations. These partnerships had resulted in feelings of disempowerment and disengagement among campus stakeholders. Monte used both Sensemake and Learn Moves and Lead People and Team Moves to realign all the various initiatives around the dual goals of promoting Muscogee language and culture and promoting student success. These Moves also helped him rebuild morale, buy-in and a sense of empowerment among campus leaders.

### Leadership Context



INSTITUTIONAL TYPE



LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE



CULTURE



POLITICS



HUMAN CAPITAL AND CAPACITY



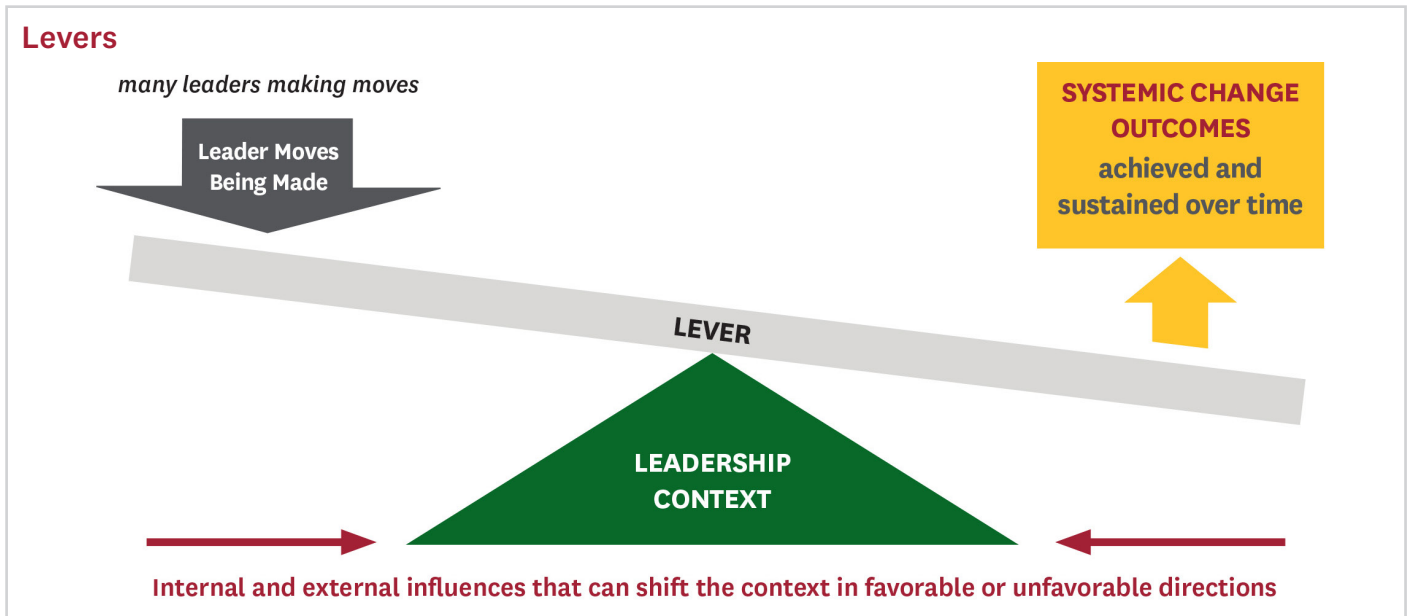
PHYSICAL, FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES



EXTERNALITIES

## Focus On: Levers

When leaders engage in systemic change efforts, they are faced with many opportunities to amplify change. In the Toolkit, these opportunities are referred to as Levers. A Change Lever is an opportunity that can be leveraged or that can be “pulled upon” or manipulated to advance or accelerate the desired change. In this section, we describe the most prominent examples of Change Levers from Monte’s project.



1. **Campus (system, state) strategic plan(s), including mission, master plan, diversity plan and other plans:** Monte leveraged CMN's strategic planning process to embed his key goals around centering Muscogee culture and values and promoting student success into the new strategic plan. He used this process as a continued learning opportunity for faculty and staff across campus, as well as an opportunity to emphasize the importance of prioritizing student success through a Muscogee-specific approach. Embedding these goals in the strategic plan demonstrated their importance to campus stakeholders and ensured their prioritization in the years to come.
2. **Affiliations or partnerships with national associations & organizations, including regional, community, state, national or international:** Monte leveraged resources from external organizations such as Achieving the Dream and the Aspen Institute to promote his goals around student success. As we mentioned earlier in this Case Study, it was important for Monte to frame these resources as simply tools to help CMN leaders accomplish their goals, rather than requirements or impositions. These tools, especially ones related to building capacity around data use, were valuable resources as the team engaged in changes such as realigning their enrollment and advising practices. Monte also leveraged connections with the Muscogee (Creek) tribal government to promote language revitalization programming and prioritize Muscogee cultural values.

## Key Takeaways

In this case, Monte worked with his team at CMN to prioritize Muscogee language, culture and values while driving increased student success in the wake of a campus tragedy and a period of rapid growth and change. He leveraged the strategic planning process to embed these goals across campus and ensure their widespread use and prioritization. He also leveraged external partnerships with ATD and Aspen to support his student success goals and with the Muscogee (Creek) nation to support his goals around Muscogee language and culture. He used a 13-week professional development program (CMN LEAD) to help his leadership team learn more about how their Muscogee language and culture could support their student success goals. The CMN LEAD program also helped build trust and stronger relationships on the leadership team, as well as promote team empowerment and buy-in. While the new strategic plan only launched in 2024, Monte's leadership and collaboration with his team have already resulted in many changes related to both Muscogee culture and language and student success.

## Reflections to Help You Ignite Change

This Case Study provides an example of how Monte used the Moves outlined in the Change Leadership Toolkit to enact systemic change at their institution. We offer the following questions to get you thinking more deeply about Leadership Context, Leader Moves and Levers:

- How did Leadership Context shape Leader Moves in this case?
- How did this Case Study help you to better understand Levers and how they can help motivate or amplify change?
- What stands out for you in terms of significant Leader Moves that were made?
- What influence did the leader role and/or agency have on the project?
- What did you learn that you can apply to your campus change initiative? How might you use the Toolkit to advance change leadership on your campus?

