

Tribes Go Commercial, Embrace Sports Betting, Debate Next Gen Gaming, Evolve Analytics at NIGA 2019

The Innovation Group team left San Diego with sustained confidence in the Native American gaming market. Tribes continue to explore new ways to diversify their portfolios and offerings to better compete in the progressively saturated U.S. gaming market. Here's our take on the topics TIG saw rising to the top of conversations on-site last week:

Commercial Gaming Opportunities

As more tribes enter the commercial gaming space, including in Arkansas and potentially Virginia, tribal leaders express optimism that the right opportunities can strengthen their economies. However, tribes considering a commercial move should be aware of the challenges and pitfalls involved. [Contact Tom Zitt](#), who spoke on this topic, to learn more about how to evaluate these opportunities.

Sports Betting Advances

Whereas last year's approach to sports betting was more of a wait-and-see, this year tribes seem to be developing their own action plans. Panels discussed the pros and cons of managed services, tips for running an RFP process, and mistakes made in commercial rollouts. Tribes are still exercising caution when it comes to opening the compacts, but where last year sports betting felt uncertain, this year sports betting in tribal country feels inevitable. [Learn more about market access and partnership opportunities](#) by watching our recent webinar for Emerging Leaders of Gaming, and hear Brian Wyman discuss the opportunity for tribes later this month at Betting on Sports America - [details here](#).

Skill-based Laboratories

A small number of skill-based games are placed in casinos now, including some tribal operations, and while a few passionate disbelievers in the concept created excitement in the panel discussions, suppliers shared good reasons to be optimistic. Limited data has shown a much younger customer profile than slots overall, as well as positive game engagement and feedback. Additionally, they noted two advantages of tribal casinos: a strong desire to innovate and a lack of the bureaucracy found in large commercial organizations. We're cautiously optimistic that these games can engage new players, but as with ETGs, it may take some time before we can make a definitive call.

Bringing Analytics to Life

Data and analytics were hot topics at the NIGA conference this year. The focus was on making analytics actionable and implementable, an evolution from past discussions making the case for the practice altogether. Topics ranged from applications of AI and machine learning to how small and medium-size casinos can begin to adopt "analytics on a budget." We see exciting new approaches to optimizing slot floors and marketing, as well as applications of analytics in hotel, labor, food and beverage, and elsewhere across the operation. However, obtaining broader organizational buy-in and understanding how to keep project implementation from stalling remain concerns for tribal leaders. Review Chloe Fletcher's slides from her conference presentation, ["Data Driven Decision-Making on a Budget"](#), and [read her recent piece](#) in *Global Gaming Business* magazine for additional context.