

# SUPPORTING NATIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



## A GUIDE FOR FUNDERS





## Mission Statement

Workforce Matters is a national network of grantmakers that draws on expert and practitioner knowledge and works together to strengthen workforce development philanthropy such that it empowers workers, learners, and job seekers to realize their full potential; dismantles inequities based on race, gender, ability, and other individual characteristics; and advances equitable education and employment outcomes for youth and adults.

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## Disclaimer

We thank our funders for their support but acknowledge the findings and conclusions presented in this guide are those of Workforce Grantmaking in Native Nations and Communities and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the funders.

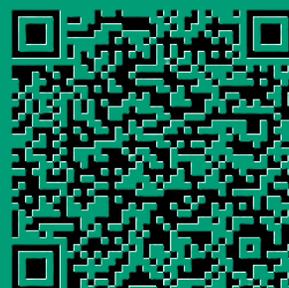
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<https://workforce-matters.org/get-involved/affinity-groups/workforce-grantmaking-in-native-nations-and-communities-initiative/guide/>



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## About Workforce Grantmaking in Native Nations and Communities (WGNNC)

Established in 2022, WGNNC is a funder collaborative focused on supporting workforce development in Native Nations and communities (Indian Country) based on their needs, priorities, and long-term goals. Both a learning and co-investment initiative, WGNNC’s goals are to strengthen workforce-focused efforts, organizations, and advocacy led by and for Native Nations and communities; and shift/influence the thinking, behaviors, and commitments of partners and potential partners (funders, federal and state policymakers and agencies, researchers, technical assistance providers, and other key stakeholders) so they more effectively support Indian Country.

WGNNC recognizes the meaning and ultimate goal of “workforce development” vary by culture. For most Native Nations and communities, workforce development is inherently more holistic and collective than it is across non-Native mainstream cultures. Across Indian Country, it is about building the human capacities needed to rebuild vibrant Native communities. It is about strengthening the inherent sovereign rights of Native Nations and preserving cultures, languages, and ways of life to foster prosperity for future generations. This requires a focus on all Native people, from “cradle through career” (young people to adults). WGNNC supports this sacred endeavor by: (1) strengthening Native workforce development organizations, leaders, and networks; (2) grantmaking to Native-led workforce development service providers and advocacy organizations; and (3) educating and engaging funders to sustainably support and enhance Native-led workforce development efforts and policies. This guide is a key first step in that process.

# THE GUIDE: PURPOSE, AUDIENCES, AND LEARNING OUTCOMES



**Veteran ironworker and Native entrepreneur Dave Bice (White Earth Ojibwe) successfully secured a bid for his company Bald Eagle Erectors, Inc. to help build the Minnesota Vikings National Football League stadium thanks in part to a \$200,000 working capital loan from the Minneapolis Foundation. (Photo: Bald Eagle Erectors, Inc.)**

Are you new to the world of Native<sup>1</sup> workforce development and seeking guidance on how best to understand and navigate it? Has your organization recently launched or expanded its commitment to supporting Native workforce development, but you are struggling with how best to engage and build partnerships with Native Nations, communities, and service providers in culturally appropriate ways? Are you an experienced grantmaker seeking to enhance your organization's alignment with *their* core values, distinct definitions of workforce development, and long-range goals for community prosperity?

WGNNC created this guide to provide those working in philanthropy and other key allies and supporters of Native Nations and communities with a basic understanding of:

- the history, evolution, and current landscape of Native workforce development;
- the wide range and distinct roles of Native, federal, state, and nonprofit workforce development service providers serving Native people living on – and outside of – Tribal lands;
- federal policies historically and currently impacting Native workforce development;

- the effective solutions Native workforce development service providers are developing and implementing across the country;
- the significant resource gaps (financial and otherwise) Native service providers face as they address Native people's distinct workforce development needs; and
- the unique and vital role philanthropy must play in closing that gap and strengthening federal and state policies and resources in support of Native-designed and led workforce development solutions.

The guide equips users with an informed understanding of how they and their organizations can:

- establish and grow impactful philanthropic partnerships with Native Nation governments, Native nonprofits, tribal colleges and universities, and other Native entities to expand and enhance the quality and accessibility of workforce development services designed by and for Native people; and
- support policies designed to expand and strengthen the ability and capacity of – and resources available to – Native workforce development service providers to develop and implement self-determined, effective workforce development solutions.

# INTRODUCTION TO NATIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## Defining Native Workforce Development

WGNNC offers the following broad and holistic definition of Native workforce development to frame this guide's focus and purpose for its primary audiences:

*The targeted education, training, and related efforts that Tribal governments, Native organizations, Tribal colleges and universities, federal and state agencies, and other service providers deploy to equip Native people with the knowledge, skills, experience, degrees, certifications, and connections necessary to access and build rewarding careers that enable them to achieve self-sufficiency for themselves and their families and contribute in the many ways their Native Nations and communities need to thrive socially, culturally, economically, and politically.*<sup>2</sup>

As noted below, this endeavor takes a diversity of forms across the United States, and it also takes on many different names other than “workforce development,” including names in the Native languages of the Native communities being served.<sup>3</sup>

## The Role of Workforce Development in Building Strong Native Nations and Communities

A movement is sweeping across Indian Country.<sup>4</sup> For the past several decades, more and more Native Nations have reclaimed their right to govern their own affairs and places and are slowly but surely charting brighter futures of their own making. Wrestling primary decision-making authority away from the federal government, they are “addressing severe social problems, building sustainable economies, and reinvigorating their cultures, languages, and ways of life.”<sup>5</sup> In so doing, they are affirming what Native peoples have always known – that self-determination and self-governance is the *only* policy capable of improving their lives and the overall quality of life in their communities.<sup>6</sup>

This movement, often referred to as “Native nation rebuilding,” has been described by one prominent Native scholar as “a revolution of the spirit.”<sup>7</sup> For most Native Nation leaders, employees, and citizens, this process requires decolonizing and redesigning the governance

“We are rebuilding Tribal Nations by building Native people.”

– Dr. Justin P. Guillory, President, Northwest Indian College<sup>8</sup>

systems and tools upon which their nations have long relied. This is perhaps nowhere more critical than with workforce development – how Native Nations and communities grow the capacity of their people to lead productive, satisfying lives and contribute meaningfully to their nations to sustain them for generations to come.

For Native Nations and communities, workforce development is not simply about helping a Native person get and keep a job. It's not just about reducing the unemployment rate on Tribal lands. Certainly, those things are important. However, across Indian Country, workforce development is about so much more. It's about creating opportunities and then preparing Native people to seize those opportunities through the forging of difference-making careers that strengthen them and their families. It's about revitalizing Tribal societies, communities, and cultures. It's about eradicating despair and dependency to foster self-sufficiency and hope in their place.

According to the National Congress of American Indians and others, achieving “success” in workforce development comes down, ultimately, to *what Native Nations and communities do*. It depends primarily on their willingness and ability to claim and exercise true ownership over the initiatives, programs, services, and activities dedicated to cultivating the minds, skills, and expertise of their people; how those things are structured; and for what overarching purposes. It hinges above all else on Native innovation from the ground up and the inside out – Native Nations and communities discarding uniform approaches designed by outsiders such as the federal government, and creating in their place distinctly Native approaches that make sense to them based on their particular cultures, values, challenges, circumstances, and priorities.

### KEY U.S. POLICY EVENTS TIMELINE

1819-1960s

**Boarding School Policy**  
Relocated Native children to boarding schools where they received “industrial training” as domestic servants, agricultural laborers, blacksmiths, and other tradespeople

1887

**Allotment Act**  
Converted communal Tribal lands into small parcels for individual Native ownership with a heavy agricultural focus; caused loss of 90+ million acres of Tribal land over next five decades

1934

**Indian Reorganization Act**  
Gave rise to modern Tribal governments and jobs for Native people in those governments and the new businesses those governments established

1945-1968

**Termination/Relocation**  
Incentivized Native people living on Tribal lands to move to cities with the false promise of high-paying jobs, a main reason why majority of Native people today live outside of Tribal lands

1962

**Manpower Development and Training Act**  
First dedicated employment/training program for Native people; replaced by Comprehensive Employment and Training, Job Training Partnership, and Workforce Investment Act (WIA)

## A Brief History of Workforce Development in Indian Country

Over millennia, Native Nations thoughtfully developed, refined, and stewarded comprehensive systems for cultivating the capacity of their people in diverse ways to sustain their communities, cultures, economies, and ways of life. But colonization and ensuing federal policies uprooted and displaced those Native-designed systems, replacing them with workforce development programs imposed on Native Nations by distant federal agencies whose ultimate goal was not thriving Native communities, but Tribal subjugation and the assimilation of Native people into mainstream society as a compliant source of cheap labor. For example, from 1819 through the 1960s, the **U.S. government’s boarding school policy** forcibly removed Native children from their communities and transported them often hundreds or thousands of miles away to nearly 400 federal- or Christian church-run boarding schools where (among other things) they were required to engage in daily “industrial training” as domestic servants (female students) or agricultural laborers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, or other tradespeople (male students).<sup>9</sup>

The federal government brought a short-lived end to its assimilation program for Native Nations with Congress’s passage in 1934 of the **Indian Reorganization Act**, which returned a measure of self-government to Native Nations. This gave rise to modern Tribal governmental bureaucracies and the advent of Tribally owned businesses, which together provided modest increases in the number and types of locally available jobs. However, from the 1940s to 1960s, Congress reverted to its previous form, aggressively instituting its **Indian termination and relocation policy**, which worked to terminate the federal government’s recognition of and trust relationship with Native Nations, end federal funding of services to those Nations, lure hundreds of thousands of reservation-dwelling Native people to large cities with the promise of high-paying jobs (which rarely materialized), and free up Tribal trust lands for sale to non-Natives.<sup>10</sup>

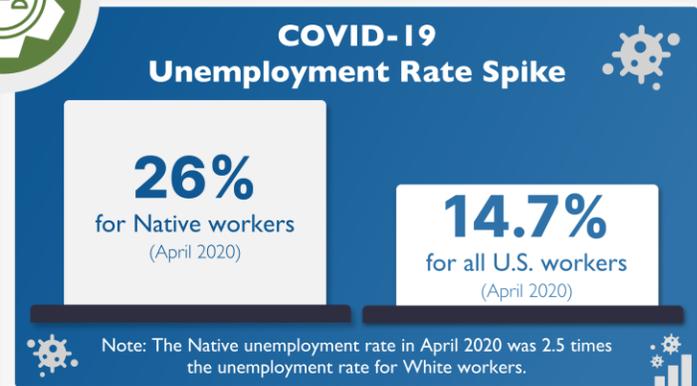
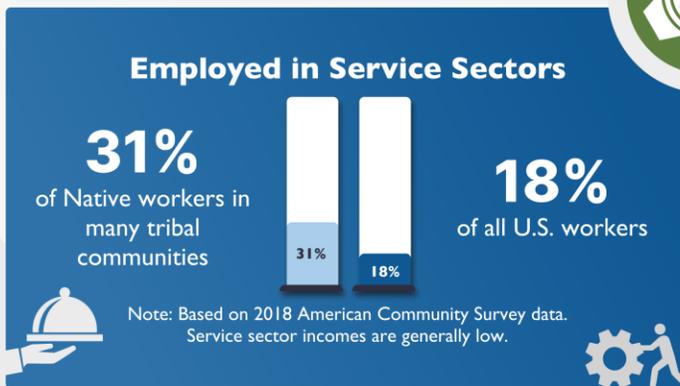
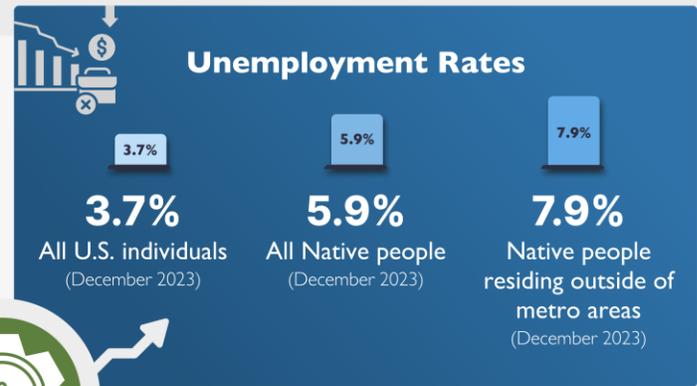
The 1960s ushered in a new era in federal policy governing Native workforce development. The failed termination and relocation policy gradually gave way to President Lyndon

Johnson’s Great Society agenda and War on Poverty programs, which included the establishment of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and specific OEO initiatives targeting Indian Country with workforce training and job opportunities. Other pro-tribal self-determination policies related to workforce development soon followed, including the **Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA)** of 1973 (which trained workers and then provided them public sector jobs), and the **Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (1975)**<sup>11</sup>, which enabled Native Nations to take over services previously administered by the federal government and fostered the emergence of hundreds of **Tribal Employment Rights Offices (TEROs)** that enforce Tribal laws requiring Native preference in hiring for available positions on Indian reservations. The 1970s also saw the rapid growth of Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) across Indian Country, which provide targeted and culturally appropriate workforce education and training to Native people based on their distinct needs.

The 1980s and 1990s featured additional federal legislation and programs – such as the **Job Training Partnership Act (1982)** and **Workforce Investment Act (1998)** – providing Native Nations and organizations greater funding for workforce education and training, greater latitude in designing initiatives tailored to their particular challenges and priorities (see current successful examples on page 7), and increased Tribal administrative employment opportunities for Native people. However, federal funding for Native workforce development has never been nearly enough – and rarely flexible enough – to meet the unique needs of the rapidly growing Native population. Meanwhile, the continued proliferation of disconnected federal workforce development programs has created a “silo effect”<sup>12</sup> in many parts of the country where Native and federal entities providing workforce development services to Native people are not aligned in their missions or coordinated in achieving them, resulting in fragmented, inefficient, and incomplete service delivery. As explained in the next section, however, an increasing number of Tribal governments, TCUs, Native nonprofit organizations, and other key Native community-serving entities are working – with growing success – to uproot this dynamic and create holistic, wrap-around workforce development approaches in their place.

1964	1975	1979	1992	2014	2017
<b>Economic Opportunity Act</b> Created the Office of Economic Opportunity, which instituted specific initiatives targeting Indian Country with workforce training and job opportunities	<b>Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act</b> Enabled Native Nations to take over federal services; sparked emergence of Tribal Employment Rights Offices enforcing tribal laws requiring Native preference in hiring	<b>Federal Funding Peak</b> Annual funding for Tribal workforce development through Department of Labor (DOL) peaks at \$225M before dramatic decline (2023 funding: \$73M)	<b>Public Law 102-477 “477”</b> provided Native Nations and organizations the option to merge funds received from four federal agencies into a single workforce development program	<b>Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act</b> Replaced WIA; Section 166 – administered by DOL – supports employment/training activities for Native people “in accordance with [their] goals and values”	<b>Public Law 115-93</b> Makes “477” permanent and expands law to cover 12 federal agencies, growing ability of Native Nations and organizations to create holistic workforce approaches

## Key Statistics for the Native Workforce



## Indian Country's Workforce Data Challenges

- Small sample sizes often lead to Natives being denoted with an asterisk and left invisible in many data sets (“Asterisk Nation”)
- Clarity of data quality constrained by differences between self-certification of Native affiliation versus tribal citizenship
- Siloing of Indian Country and tribal data within government agencies (tribal, state, and federal)
- Historical misuse of Indian Country data impacts trust among Native nations
- Some of the best data in Indian Country is found among Native nations (tribal data capacity varies)
- Tribal data sovereignty is critical principle in closing data gaps

Source: Center for Indian Country Development, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, December 2023

### A Multifaceted Native Movement for Holistic, Self-Determined Workforce Development

As Native Nations and communities have worked over the past several decades to reclaim control of their own affairs and revitalize their governance systems – which an extensive body of research confirms is the *only* pathway to sustained prosperity for Native people – the number and diversity of their workforce development solutions have grown dramatically. Across the country, Tribal governments, inter-tribal organizations, Native-led nonprofit organizations, TCUs, and other key Native entities (see page 6) – increasingly working in unison with one another and other partners – are crafting customized solutions to often daunting workforce development challenges that: (1) transform the lives of Native people in

search of employment and the education, skills, and experience necessary to build rewarding careers; and (2) strengthen Native Nations and communities culturally, socially, and economically in the process.<sup>13</sup>

In so doing, they are authoring effective “best practice” strategies (see “snapshot” examples on page 7) that provide not only fellow Native but also non-Native workforce developers with proven models they can customize to their distinct needs and priorities. As the following pages explain in detail, these Native-led initiatives require ample, flexible, and sustainable funding to overcome deeply entrenched workforce development challenges and develop Native workforces in accordance with Native cultural values and community and economic development goals.

# NATIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: PLAYERS, APPROACHES, AND INNOVATION

## The Key Players in Native Workforce Development

For a variety of historical and active policy reasons, the job of preparing Native people to enter and thrive in the workforce falls to a diverse array of Native, federal, state, and other service providers – the exact combination of which depends on: (1) where a Native person lives (on reservation, in an urban area, etc.); (2) whether they are an enrolled citizen of a Native Nation; (3) the person’s particular workforce development goals; and (4) the specific services and resources they need to achieve those goals. Below is a brief overview of some of the key workforce development players:

- **Tribal governments:** Typically the primary workforce development service providers on Native lands, Tribal governments generally operate a number of programs that serve the workforce development needs of enrolled Tribal citizens and in many instances other locally residing Native people. They often will have in place a government department exclusively dedicated to that purpose. Depending on available resources, some Tribal governments extend their services beyond Tribal lands to enrolled Tribal citizens and sometimes Native people living elsewhere. As mentioned, many Tribal governments also operate TERO offices that connect Native people seeking employment with locally available jobs and, often, the training needed to succeed in those jobs.
- **Tribal colleges and universities:** There are three dozen TCUs located on tribal lands or near Native communities serving 30,000 students nationwide. Together, they offer more than 350 different programs, including apprenticeships, certificates, diplomas, and associate, bachelor’s, and master’s degree programs.<sup>14</sup>
- **Native nonprofit organizations:** The main workforce development service providers for Native people living in urban areas, these entities include urban Native centers<sup>15</sup> and federally recognized Urban Indian Organizations<sup>16</sup> (which provide healthcare services but often workforce development services as well). In and around Tribal lands, these also commonly include Native-run, community-based nonprofit organizations like community development centers, small business incubators, and Boys & Girls Clubs.<sup>17</sup>



The Tribal Youth Ecological Forestry Training Program of the Lomakatsi Restoration Project provides Native young adults ages 18-26 from Native Nations in Oregon and northern California with valuable job skills and certifications and educates them about career paths in forestry, wildland fire management, habitat restoration, and natural resources. (Photo: Lomakatsi Restoration Project)

- **Inter-tribal organizations:** State-based or regional entities that serve multiple member Native Nations, these organizations often pool available Tribal resources to provide certain workforce development services their member Native Nations can’t provide as efficiently or effectively on their own due to capacity and/or resource challenges.<sup>18</sup>
- **Community development financial institutions (CDFIs):** Numbering about 90 across the country, Native CDFIs train Native entrepreneurs to start and grow small businesses, build the financial capability of their clients through targeted training and credit repair and building services, and help clients remove obstacles that hinder their ability to get or keep a job (such as a lack of transportation, which CDFIs address by providing clients with vehicle loans, for example).
- **Philanthropy:** As pages 10-13 detail, foundations and corporate philanthropies play an increasingly critical role in equipping the Native-serving entities described above with targeted resources enabling them to close programmatic resource gaps, hire and retain key staff, expand successful workforce development initiatives, design and implement new innovations, and assess and refine their approaches to serving Native people.

## Brief Snapshots of Indian Country Innovation

The transformative workforce development success stories fueled by Native-led innovation run the gamut. They include “cradle to career” approaches that support the workforce journeys of Native people beginning before kindergarten, wrap-around systems that methodically identify and address wide-ranging obstacles standing in the way of clients’ workforce success, “scholarship-for-service” initiatives that require Native people in whom Native Nations invest through higher education scholarships to return home to their Native communities to work, the re-emergence of Native cultures in the ways Native people’s workforce development needs are served, and reintegration programs enabling Native people leaving incarceration to avoid recidivism and become contributing members of society. Featured are five brief snapshot examples.<sup>19</sup>



### Gila River Indian Community (GRIC)

In 2012, GRIC became the first Native Nation in the country to obtain a U.S. Department of Labor Career Pathways (CP) grant to develop a comprehensive workforce development system aligned with its current and projected workforce needs across multiple industry sectors. GRIC worked with local employers (and colleges) to determine the skills and credentials GRIC members needed to gain and sustain employment in their businesses; the employers also led the design of training programs customized to their needs. In addition, Gila River created a human resources policy giving automatic hiring priority to its successful CP and Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act program training participants, increasing their work experience placements and providing a direct line to permanent employment.



### Muscogee (Creek) Nation (MCN)

Concerned the State of Oklahoma wasn't doing enough to prepare incarcerated MCN citizens for life after prison, in 2004 MCN established its Reintegration Program (RIP). Believing its participants are inherently capable of becoming law-abiding, productive citizens, RIP provides them a holistic array of culturally based support services geared towards eliminating their barriers to employment through GED acquisition, training, resume preparation, and connecting them with ex-offender-friendly employers. RIP also maintains several partnerships designed to help participants address their “life-sustaining needs” such as housing, clothing, and groceries so they have a stable foundation upon which to get and keep a job. RIP's recidivism rate is significantly lower than Oklahoma's rate.



### Round Valley Indian Tribes (RVIT)

Located in rural northern California, RVIT's Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program stabilizes participants' living conditions and removes employment barriers through hard skills training, health and wellness training and support, and job interview preparation so they can get hired. Several years ago, many TANF participants were struggling to comply with the program's work requirements because of the time they spent engaged in seasonal subsistence hunting and fishing to provide for their families. In response, the program's leadership negotiated with the federal government a revised definition of eligible work activities to “accept cultural participation” as countable work hours, enabling those participants to stay in program compliance while also fulfilling their cultural obligations. This has led to higher rates of program completion among participants. RVIT also raised TANF's poverty percentage threshold to enable its TANF program to help more of its people in need.

*To learn more about these and other workforce development success stories, go to: <https://workforce-matters.org/get-involved/affinity-groups/workforce-grantmaking-in-native-nations-and-communities-initiative/guide/>.*



### Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)

In the 1990s, CSKT was wrestling with an unemployment rate hovering around 50 percent. Its disjointed assortment of federal grant and other social service programs – run

by more than 20 separate agencies, each with its own priorities and particular workforce development functions – was failing to make a significant dent in that rate. In response, CSKT's Tribal Council consolidated these programs into a single entity: the Department of Human Resource Development (DHRD). Its goal: create a client-centered, “one-stop” shop providing CSKT members a holistic suite of services to prepare them to work and help them secure employment. Integral to this effort was DHRD's restructuring of state-administered programs that “weren't working and make them work” in accordance with the Tribes' cultural, social, and economic priorities. Over the past 25 years, DHRD has helped to cut CSKT's unemployment rate in half.



### Coeur d'Alene Tribe (CDA)

Developed in 2007 and continually refined ever since, CDA's holistic “Education Pipeline” approach fuses education with workforce development to prepare its members to enter and thrive in the workforce. A visual inventory

that provides CDA with a comprehensive, real-time picture of the strengths of (and gaps within) its systems of support for CDA members, the Pipeline features 15 chronologically sequenced, educational groupings: Early Child, Primary (K-2), and so on, up through high school and GED programs, various post-secondary tracks, graduate degrees, and professional degrees. Individuals enter the Pipeline when they are infants, remain in the Pipeline with the Tribe's tracking and support as they move from one educational stage to the next, and emerge at the end of Pipeline as prepared, productive members of CDA and its local community.

# THE FEDERAL ROLE: WHAT FUNDERS AND ALLIES NEED TO KNOW

## An Overview of Key Federal Laws and Programs

As the infographic on page 9 illustrates, a host of agencies across the U.S. government currently administer programs designed to support particular aspects of Native workforce development in accordance with federal laws and regulations exclusively focused on or otherwise inclusive of Native Nations and people. Below are brief overviews of the two primary federal laws and programs supporting workforce development across Indian Country.

**Public Law 102-477:** In 1992, Congress passed [Public Law 102-477](#), considered by many in Indian Country as the most important federal advancement for Native workforce development to date.<sup>20</sup> Known simply in Tribal circles as “477,” this unique legislation provided federally recognized Native Nations and consortia the choice to combine various employment, training, and related grant programs administered by four federal agencies into a comprehensive, customized workforce development plan with a single budget and reporting system.

477 proved an immediate and rousing success. In addition to the many benefits 477 brought Native Nations and consortia – from expanded, more effective, and more streamlined services to administrative cost savings to reduced federal reporting burdens – it also dramatically improved the lives of Native people who participated in Tribal and inter-tribal 477 Programs through increased job placements, much higher hourly wages, and nearly universal positive employment and education outcomes.<sup>21</sup>

These proven benefits prompted Congress to [amend](#) the law in 2000 to provide 477 Programs greater flexibility by enabling them to use a portion of their 477 dollars for Tribal economic development efforts, which many Native Nations and inter-tribal consortia have used to, for example, cultivate Native entrepreneurs who own and operate their own small businesses. Still, Native leaders and workforce development practitioners continued pushing for more. Their relentless advocacy culminated in Congress’s passage of [Public Law 115-93](#) in 2017, which significantly expanded 477 to further enhance the ability of Native Nations and consortia to meet their employment, training, education, economic development, welfare reform, and related needs as they see fit. The expanded law: (1) broadened 477 to cover eight additional agencies; (2) made what had been a 25-year demonstration program permanent; (3) streamlined and clarified the federal government’s 477 Plan review and approval process; and (4) designated four types of funding (including competitive

and discretionary funding) that Native Nations and consortia can include in 477 Plans. Critically, the law also endowed the Secretary of the Interior with the *exclusive* authority to approve Tribal 477 Plans and put the Department of the Interior in charge of directing the approval process. In 2022, after the initial inter-agency MOA was deemed to have violated the law (by allowing individual agencies to unlawfully veto the inclusion of certain programs in 477 Plans), the 12 agencies ratified an [updated MOA](#) governing their implementation of 477.<sup>22</sup> Currently, 298 Native Nations participate in 477 through 78 distinct 477 Programs across the country.<sup>23</sup>

**Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) – Section 166:** Passed in 2014, WIOA replaced the Workforce Investment Act (1998) as the primary legislation governing the public workforce system. [WIOA Section 166](#) is dedicated to supporting employment and training activities for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian individuals to “develop more fully the academic, occupational, and literacy skills of such individuals; make [them] more competitive in the workforce and to equip them with the entrepreneurial skills necessary for successful self-employment; and promote the economic and social development of Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities in accordance with the goals and values of such communities.”<sup>24</sup>

Section 166 Native grantees receive Comprehensive Services Program (Adult) and/or Supplemental Youth Services Program (Youth) funding allotments each year based on four-year grant awards administered by the Department of Labor. Despite chronic underfunding of WIOA Section 166 by Congress over the past four decades (see page 10), grantees have proven highly successful in preparing Native people to secure and retain employment (see page 9). As of June 2023, a total of 166 grantees administered Section 166 Programs, with 68 of those integrating them within 477 Programs.

With Congress due to reauthorize WIOA in 2024, Native leaders, workforce development practitioners, and advocates are working to ensuring their priorities for protecting, strengthening, and expanding Section 166 are featured in the new legislation, including: streamlining reporting requirements to decrease the administrative burdens on grantees, substantially increasing Section 166 funding, recognizing Section 166 grantee-generated data in evaluating performance, and elevating the role and voice of DOL’s [Native American Employment and Training Council](#) in departmental decision-making.<sup>25</sup>

# Public Law 102-477



**78**

Number of Public Law 102-477 ("477") Programs as of January 2024<sup>1</sup>

**298**

Number of Native Nations participating in 477 Programs as of January 2024<sup>1</sup>

**\$9.45**

Total average gain in hourly earnings of 477 Program participants who obtained unsubsidized employment during FY 2021<sup>2</sup>



**93.6%**

Percent of participants who completed the training and employment goals identified in their 477-based Individual Self-sufficiency Plans during FY 2021<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Division of Workforce Development, Bureau of Indian Affairs - Office of Indian Services U.S. Department of the Interior, January 2024.  
<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior FY 2021 Annual Performance Report, November 16, 2022. (<https://www.doi.gov/media/document/doi-fy-2021-annual-performance-report-508>)

# WIOA Section 166

Presented below are key data points regarding federally funded and Native-run Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act Section 166 programs, which:



**1**

support employment and training activities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians;



**2**

make them more competitive in the workforce; and



**3**

promote their development "in accordance with [their] goals and values."

**166**

Number of Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Section 166 program grantees<sup>1</sup>

**68**

Number of WIOA Section 166 program grantees who have integrated Section 166 funding into 477 Programs<sup>1</sup>

**68.4%**

Employment rate of all Native adults served by WIOA Section 166 grantees (2nd Quarter After Exit from program)<sup>2</sup>

**69.5%**

Employment rate of all Native adults served by WIOA Section 166 grantees (4th Quarter After Exit from program)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Division of Indian and Native American Programs, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor (January 2024)  
<sup>2</sup> Division of Indian and Native American Programs, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, *Annual Performance Results for Report Period Ending June 30, 2023* (see: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/performance/results/wsr>)

# Key Federal Agencies Supporting Native Workforce Development

## Primary Agencies



### Department of the Interior

- Public Law 102-477
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Adult Basic Education\*
- BIA Higher Education and Scholarships\*
  - Johnson O'Malley\*
- Job Placement and Training\*
- Tribal Work Experience\*
- Bureau of Indian Education\*



### Department of Labor

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Section 166 (Adult & Youth)\*
- Registered Apprenticeship
- Wagner-Peyser



### Department of Education

- Native American Career and Technical Education\*
- American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services\*
- Alaska Native Education\*
- Tribally Controlled Postsecondary Career and Technical Institutions (Carl Perkins)



### Health & Human Services

- Child Care Development Fund (Mandatory and Discretionary)\*
- Native Employment Works\*
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families\*
- Community Services Block Grant\*
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance\*

## NATIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

## Secondary Agencies



### Department of Agriculture

- Federally Recognized Tribes Extension
- New Beginning for Tribal Students
- 1994 Tribal College Scholars
- Tribal College Initiative Grants



### Department of Commerce

- Building Equitable Native Economies Project\*
- Minority Business Development Agency\*
- Economic Development Administration programs serving Native entrepreneurs and organizations supporting them



### Small Business Administration

- Support Native entrepreneurs through SBA's entrepreneurial development, lending and procurement programs

**NOTE:** This graphic depicts the key Indian Country programs administered by the main agencies supporting efforts to develop the workforce readiness, skills, and experience of Native people across the U.S.

\* Program is currently integrated in one or multiple 477 Plans.

# HOW NATIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IS FUNDED

## Three Key Funders: Federal Government, Tribal Governments, and State Governments

While the specific funds each Native-led workforce development entity relies on vary, they typically come from one of the following three primary sources.

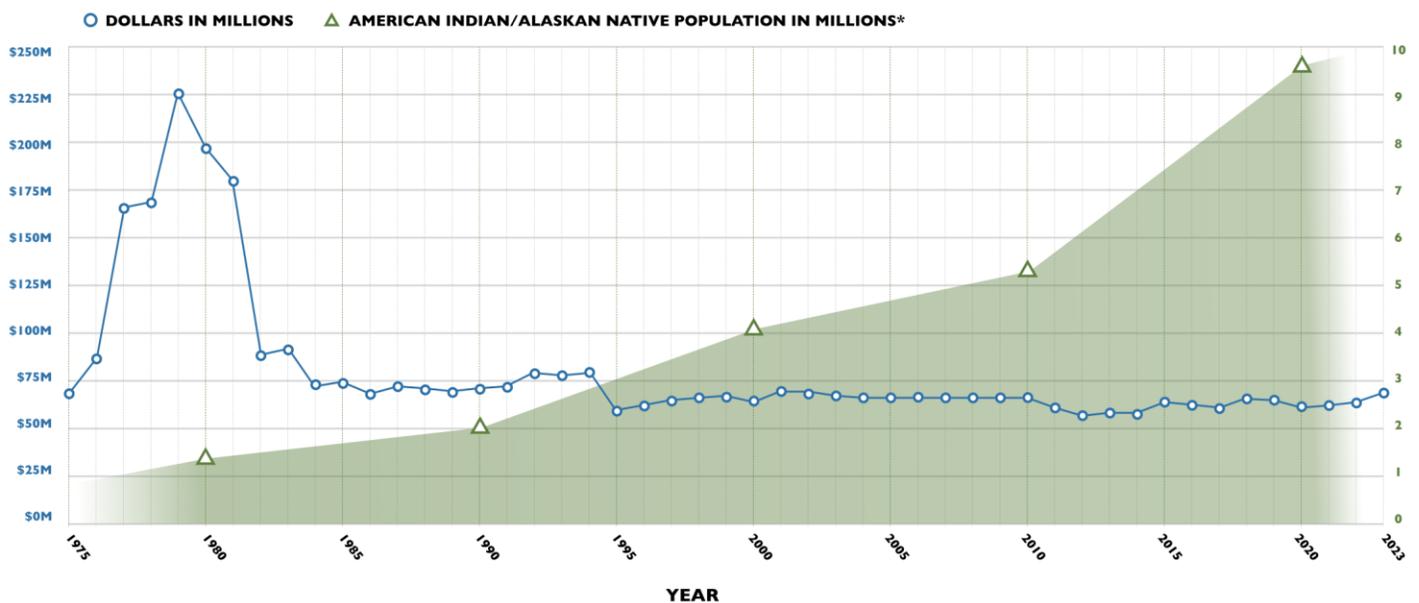
**Federal Government:** Each year, Congress appropriates funds to support development of the Native workforce through programs dedicated to Indian Country in whole or part (see page 9). However, as the graphic below reflects, the federal government has long failed to adequately fulfill its trust and treaty responsibilities to Native Nations and their citizens regarding the inadequate amount of funding it provides to support Native-led workforce development entities *and* the limitations it has historically placed on that funding, which inhibit the ability of those entities to design and implement innovative solutions customized to the needs and priorities of the Native people they serve. In addition, the scattering of funding administration across a multitude of federal agencies has created an entrenched programmatic “silo effect” across Indian Country marked by a lack of coordination between workforce development programs supported by federal dollars, a dynamic that

Native Nations and communities have worked intensively to uproot in recent decades with increasing success.

**Tribal Governments:** Due to the self-determined economic renaissance taking root across Indian Country, many Native Nations are now able to supplement federal funding for workforce development with varying levels of Tribal discretionary revenues, enabling them to serve more Native people in need than federal dollars alone could ever support, with no restrictions on how they are spent and for what purposes. This also has enabled greater specialization in the services offered to Native people, such as summer Native youth internship programs and financial and technical assistance support for Native entrepreneurs. A few Native Nations also now have the means to issue grants to initiatives run by other Native Nations.

**State Governments:** States provide some Native Nations and other eligible Native-run entities with competitive, term-limited grant funds that are unreliable over the long run. They also often serve as funding administrator or intermediary for federal programs such as [TANF](#) and [Community Services Block Grant](#), and they provide various workforce development services to Native residents.

## Historic Underfunding of DOL Native Workforce Programs



**NOTE:** Department of Labor (DOL) Native Workforce Program Funding: Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (1973-1982), Job Training Partnership Act (1982-1998), Workforce Investment Act (1998-2014), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2014-present). As the above graph indicates, Congressional funding administered by DOL has failed to keep pace with the rapidly growing Native population, their workforce education/training needs, and the rising costs of workforce education, training, and placement services.

\* Decennial U.S. Census data for the American Indian and Alaska Native population (alone and in combination with one or more other races).<sup>26</sup> U.S. Census Bureau methodologies governing how it gathers race and ethnicity data have evolved over the past several decades, as have secular trends in how people self-identify based on race and ethnicity. These two factors may account for some of the population growth cited above.

# PHILANTHROPY’S TASK: SEEDING INNOVATION, FORGING IMPACT

Even during the best of times, federal and state funding of Native-led workforce development entities falls far short of meeting the distinct needs of the country’s rapidly growing Native population. And those dollars often come with attached strings and burdens that inhibit Native innovation, drain the limited capacity of those entities, and displace Native goals and criteria for success in favor of bureaucratic conformity.

That’s where philanthropy comes in. When so inclined, philanthropy is uniquely positioned, nimble, and equipped to support the building of strong Native Nations, communities, and individuals in part by providing *flexible, long-term, and deferential* funding to Native-led workforce development entities that enhance their ability to design, implement, grow, and refine innovative, tailored workforce development solutions that advance the long-range priorities of the Native communities they serve.

But philanthropy has a way to go in this regard. Consider:

- Less than 1.5 percent of philanthropic funding resources go to Indian Country, and less than 0.3 percent go to Native-led organizations.<sup>27</sup>
- Almost two-thirds of foundation leaders say they provide little or no grant dollars to organizations primarily serving Native communities.<sup>28</sup>
- Only 20 percent of large philanthropic funders award grants explicitly designated to benefit Native people and causes. Of these, nearly half only give *one* Native-focused grant each year.<sup>29</sup>
- Of the grant dollars targeting Native communities and causes, only 15 percent fund general operating support.<sup>30</sup>
- About two-thirds of Native-serving nonprofit leaders report they did not receive new foundation funding in the year 2020, when racial unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic prompted many foundations to increase funding to nonprofits serving communities of color.<sup>31</sup>
- Native-led nonprofit leaders rate “their foundation funders lower than nonprofit leaders of other races/ethnicities on the strength of the funder-grantee relationship, funders’ understanding of their organizations and the contexts in which they operate, and funders’ impact on their fields.”<sup>32</sup>

However, glimmers of hope are emerging. Some philanthropic funders across the United States with established Indian Country programs are rethinking, recasting, and expanding their giving through self-exploration processes guided by their listening to and learning from the Native communities they support.



**Native youth ages 14-21 receive training on how to install solar energy arrays through Migizi’s Green Tech Internship program, a paid internship program made possible by significant investments from three corporate foundations; these investments also support Migizi’s First Person Productions media career pathways program. (Photo: Migizi)**

Others are co-designing initiatives in true *partnership* with Native-led entities to develop the Native workforce and implement other self-defined community development priorities. In so doing, they are “giving without strings attached,” “avoiding harmful stereotypes that position funders as the saviors and Indigenous Peoples in need of saving,” and using “an asset-based approach to invest in Indigenous community strengths and leadership.”<sup>33</sup>

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, for example, made a sizable, multi-year funding commitment to [Change Labs](#), a start-up nonprofit that today is rapidly growing the entrepreneurial workforce on the Navajo Nation.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, the James Irvine Foundation funded the [California Indian Manpower Consortium](#)’s launch of a cutting-edge initiative providing tailored supportive services to Native workers to complete apprenticeship programs.<sup>35</sup> In 2010, the Bush Foundation launched [Native Nation Rebuilders](#), a professional development program that cultivates the next generation of Native political and programmatic leaders; in 2016, the program transitioned to the Native Governance Center, a Native-led nonprofit advancing the work started at Bush.<sup>36</sup>

These funders and others are proving that investing in Indian Country and Native-led workforce development is a low-risk, high-reward proposition that will generate transformative benefits for Native Nations, communities, and individuals. As the vice president of one Native-supporting foundation put it, “Take a chance. Even if it’s small. Even if it’s new for you and doesn’t look like your other partnerships. Learn, build trust, and gain experience. Because there’s extraordinary work happening in Indian Country. With some financial investment, Indigenous genius can drive Indigenous empowerment.”<sup>37</sup>

# MAXIMIZING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S IMPACT ON NATIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The lived experiences of the philanthropic funders chronicled on page 11; the perspectives shared by Tribal leaders, Native nonprofit leaders, and Native workforce development practitioners; and a growing body of research on philanthropic giving conducted by Native organizations together illuminate a number of common, effective strategies deployed by funders to grow fruitful partnerships with Indian Country that advance the goals of Native Nations, communities, and individuals through creative, customized, community-based solutions they design and implement. Featured below and on the next page are 11 key strategies your organization should integrate into its funding of Indian Country and Native-led workforce development to maximize the transformative impacts of its giving on Native Nations and communities (for Related Resources for Further Learning about these Strategies, see page 16).

## KEY STRATEGY #1: IDENTIFY AND ELIMINATE BIAS WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION

Philanthropy has long embraced negative stereotypes about Native people that either (1) discourage giving to Tribal governments and Native nonprofit organizations, or (2) paternalistically structure the funding they do provide. As one Native nonprofit leader explains, “Without any background, foundation staff have tendencies to either idolize or romanticize Indian people or view us as incapable of higher thought or not having the ability to manage resources and do the work we have described in our proposal.”<sup>38</sup> Your organization, learning from trusted Native partners (see Strategies #5 and #6), should conduct a comprehensive self-assessment to uproot and remove any such biases from how it engages and partners with Native communities and grantees.

## KEY STRATEGY #2: INDIAN COUNTRY IS UNIQUE – FUND IT THAT WAY

Is your organization's existing or planned giving to Indian Country-based grantees embedded in some larger racial equity initiative that fails to account for the distinct status, circumstances, and goals of Native Nations, communities, and Native-serving workforce development entities? If so, it needs to step back, reassess, and redesign its Indian Country giving accordingly. To that end, your organization should build an informed understanding of the unique political status of Native Nations, their governance and decision-making systems, and how Tribal governments, Native nonprofits, and other entities support the development of the Native workforce (see page 16).

## KEY STRATEGY #3: FUND INDIAN COUNTRY COMPREHENSIVELY

As mentioned on page 11, a small minority of philanthropic funders have *dedicated* Indian Country giving programs that provide Native communities a significant percentage of their giving. For philanthropy to seed transformative, sustainable impacts across Native communities, funders need to develop stand-alone programs for Indian Country that support the development of the Native workforce no matter where they reside, which importantly should include the many Native people living outside of Tribal lands in urban areas.<sup>39</sup>



The key concepts guiding the Northwest Area Foundation's (NWAFF) Grantmaking for Native Communities include “Collaboration Is Key,” “Grantees Inform Us,” and “Culturally Anchored Models Work.” (Photo: NWAFF)

## KEY STRATEGY #4: FUND ONLY NATIVE-LED ENTITIES AND NATIVE-DESIGNED SOLUTIONS

As noted on page 11, the gap between philanthropic giving in support of Native communities and giving to Native-led organizations is stark – and troubling. In supporting Native workforce development, funders should commit to funding *only* Native-led entities (Tribal governments and their departments, Native-led nonprofits, Tribal colleges and universities, etc.) and the solutions they have designed to address the particular workforce development challenges and priorities of Native communities based on their intimate understanding of those communities.<sup>40</sup>

## KEY STRATEGY #5: SEEK MENTORSHIP FROM EXPERIENCED INDIAN COUNTRY FUNDERS

If your organization has had little if any experience giving to Native Nations and organizations, it makes little sense to develop a meaningful philanthropic commitment to Indian Country on your own. As a former program officer with the Northwest Area Foundation explains, “The most effective strategy to bring a new funder in is by a peer funder. When an organization has a good relationship with Indian Country and brings other funders on a learning tour and helps make those introductions, new relationships can develop.”<sup>41</sup>

**“In practicing true philanthropy, I have learned that I need to invest for the long term, be patient and take risks...We have much to learn from the original peoples of this land, if we have the wisdom to be curious, lead with our hearts and become informed.”**

**– Ren Dietel, Senior Partner, Dietel & Partners<sup>42</sup>**

### **KEY STRATEGY #6: ENLIST NATIVE INTERMEDIARIES TO ENGAGE INDIAN COUNTRY**

If your organization has no genuine philanthropic relationships with Indian Country, engaging in “cold calling” to create them will get you nowhere. Engage trusted Native intermediary organizations (such as WGNCC, Native Americans in Philanthropy, First Nations Development Institute, National Congress of American Indians, IllumiNative, and the National Indian and Native American Employment and Training Conference) to connect you with the Native Nations and organizations with which you wish to build giving relationships.<sup>43</sup> These intermediary organizations can also (1) serve as recipients of your dollars for re-granting, and (2) play an integral role in the development of an ongoing Indian Country educational process for your organization’s leadership and staff.<sup>44</sup>

### **KEY STRATEGY #7: COMMIT TO GENUINE RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDIAN COUNTRY**

Practicing reciprocity is a cherished Indigenous principle that is still highly valued by Native people today as a prerequisite for the building of genuine philanthropic relationships. Effective keys to building genuine relationships with existing and potential Native-led workforce development grantees include: learning their particular cultures, histories, governance and decision-making systems, long-range priorities, and how funding will advance those priorities; “meeting [them] where they are – literally”<sup>45</sup> by conducting site visits to their locations and the communities they serve to deepen that understanding; and committing to regular, substantive, and frank communication.<sup>46</sup> And as Native Americans in Philanthropy stresses, “Forming authentic, trusting, and reciprocal relationships with Tribal Nations takes time and will not be successful if rushed.”<sup>47</sup>

### **KEY STRATEGY #8: EMBRACE AN ASSET-BASED FRAMEWORK WITH NATIVE-LED GRANTEEES**

For far too long, philanthropy has viewed Indian Country through a deficit lens, fixating on all that is perceived as going wrong in Native communities and not on what is improving in those communities through the innovative, customized solutions Tribal governments, Native organizations, and other community-based entities design and implement to address the workforce and other challenges they face. This deficit mentality deters many funders from investing in Indian Country and drives others to “only fund those that fit their image of the ‘lowly Indian.’”<sup>48</sup> But through genuine relationship building, more and more funders are adopting an asset-based framework with Native grantees, recognizing and supporting “the important resources and strengths that Indigenous Peoples draw from their cultural power and bring to the table.”<sup>49</sup>

### **KEY STRATEGY #9: PROVIDE NATIVE-LED GRANTEEES LONG-TERM, FLEXIBLE DOLLARS**

Philanthropy has long – and improperly – expected the Native-led workforce development entities and other grantees they fund to *swiftly* neutralize deeply entrenched workforce and other challenges in Native communities “that have been created over centuries. They are further asked to use metrics that are not designed for Native issues, communities, histories, or needs.”<sup>50</sup> For those grantees to effectively design and implement targeted, holistic, and creative solutions that can overcome those challenges, they need long-term, flexible, and stable funding from philanthropy that advances those grantees’ goals, measured by *their* distinct, often diverse criteria for what defines success.<sup>51</sup> General operating support and organizational capacity building grants are ideal.

### **KEY STRATEGY #10: RECOGNIZE TRIBAL DIVERSITY IN YOUR INDIAN COUNTRY GIVING**

As referenced throughout this guide, Indian Country is incredibly diverse, featuring more than 600 Native Nations each with their distinct cultures, governance systems, approaches to tackling community challenges and advancing community priorities, and protocols for engaging with philanthropy to help support those efforts.<sup>52</sup> Just because a program officer takes the time to learn about one Native Nation and community doesn’t mean they understand them all. Failing that recognition, philanthropy tends to “lump all tribal people together,” resulting in a status quo where “when a Native project fails, foundations often become hesitant about funding future Native projects.”<sup>53</sup> Philanthropy must not generalize about the Native-led workforce development and other grantees it chooses to support; and it must treat a perceived failure among those grantees not as a reason to end the giving relationship, but instead *deepen* it.

### **KEY STRATEGY #11: PREPARE TO BE PATIENT AND ADAPT**

Longtime philanthropic supporters of Indian Country and Native workforce development commonly stress patience and adaptability as key to the long-term success of the funding they provide. Funders need to expect, respect, and accommodate dynamics such as grantees’ evolving needs, circumstances, and priorities; trust and recognize the appropriately iterative nature of Native-led workforce development solutions; and support grantees through staff turnover and capacity-building challenges. They must also continually and thoughtfully adjust their grantee relationships and giving accordingly.<sup>54</sup> As one foundation program officer explains it, “Cultural humility is important, as is adapting yourself as a funder rather than asking Native leaders and organizations to adapt themselves to you.”<sup>55</sup>

# TOOLS FOR PHILANTHROPIC SELF-REFLECTION

Featured below are a set of 16 self-reflection tools that philanthropic organizations, leaders, and staff can use to seed fruitful internal conversations that inform and catalyze their support of Native-led entities and initiatives serving the self-determined workforce development needs of Native people. These tools include self-assessment questions (“Ask Yourself”), evidence-based organizational policy suggestions (“Strategy Tips”), and mind-broadening statements from leading Indian Country voices (“Food for Thought”). They can be used in long-term strategy setting, regular team meetings, and discussions with your grantees and partners.

 <h2>ASK YOURSELF</h2> <p>What stereotypes and biases do I, my organization, and our leadership hold and perpetuate about Native Nations, communities, and people? How can we uproot them?</p>	 <h2>STRATEGY TIP</h2> <p>Avoid “philanthrospeak” in building relationships with Native-led workforce development entities by learning the terms (and meanings) they prefer to ensure you are on the same page.<sup>56</sup></p>	 <h2>FOOD FOR THOUGHT</h2> <p><i>“Funders must understand that giving is about much more than a simple exchange of resources. It is about building authentic relationships that aim to support the existence of different cultures, values, and languages.”</i></p> <p>~ Native Americans in Philanthropy<sup>57</sup></p>	 <h2>ASK YOURSELF</h2> <p>What is my and my organization’s working knowledge of the Native Nations in its giving area, specifically their governance systems and workforce development priorities and approaches?</p>
 <h2>STRATEGY TIP</h2> <p>Learn how the Native community and workforce development entity serving it define “success.” Base the goals, methods, and evaluation of your organization’s giving on that definition.</p>	 <h2>FOOD FOR THOUGHT</h2> <p><i>“When communities are at the center of the work being supported, provided some flexibility with long-term general operating support, and allowed some time to do what they see needs to be done, the effects are incredible.”</i></p> <p>~ Hester Dillon, NoVo Foundation<sup>58</sup></p>	 <h2>ASK YOURSELF</h2> <p>How is our organization’s existing/planned support of Native-led workforce development entities prescriptive? How can we adapt to make our giving deferential to their goals and methods?</p>	 <h2>STRATEGY TIP</h2> <p>Develop a multifaceted and adaptive Indian Country engagement plan and infrastructure that prioritizes listening, collaboration, patience, and identifying and uplifting Native ingenuity.</p>
 <h2>FOOD FOR THOUGHT</h2> <p><i>“Innovation is the springboard of the good things that have happened in Indian Country for so many years. It’s innovation from the tribal level up that drives development.”</i></p> <p>~ Norm DeWeaver, Former National Rep., Indian and Native American Employment and Training Coalition<sup>59</sup></p>	 <h2>ASK YOURSELF</h2> <p>How was our organization’s wealth generated from Native lands and resources? What does this mean for our obligations to Native people today and how to fulfill those obligations?</p>	 <h2>STRATEGY TIP</h2> <p>Provide long-term general operating support grants to Native-led workforce development entities to strengthen their sustainability and ability to innovate.</p>	 <h2>FOOD FOR THOUGHT</h2> <p><i>“The workforce development solutions can’t just be boilerplate templates dropped into our communities by philanthropy.”</i></p> <p>~ Tatewin Means, Executive Director, Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation<sup>60</sup></p>
 <h2>ASK YOURSELF</h2> <p>What percentage of our giving is to Native-led entities? What is the average amount of those grant awards? Is that sufficient for helping those entities foster transformative change?</p>	 <h2>STRATEGY TIP</h2> <p>Assess your organization’s giving to ensure it is not penalizing (through decreased funding) all Native-led entities for the perceived failure of one of them. These entities are as diverse as those they serve.</p>	 <h2>FOOD FOR THOUGHT</h2> <p><i>“The need to heal from historical trauma and its present-day legacies should be part of funding conversations.”</i></p> <p>~ John Fetzer, Program Officer, Northwest Area Foundation<sup>61</sup></p>	 <h2>ASK YOURSELF</h2> <p>How many Native people serve on our organization’s staff? On our board? If none or less than there should be, why is that? And how can we change it?</p>

# KEY MESSAGES TO SHARE WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES

Readers of this guide are encouraged to share the key messages featured below with their organizational leaders and colleagues to socialize the need to make greater, more flexible investments in Native-led workforce development entities based on *their* definitions of success and priorities for enduring workforce impacts.

## 1. NATIVE NATIONS ARE SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENTS

Native peoples governed complex societies for millennia before colonization and the establishment of the U.S. This inherent sovereignty endures today in the affirmed political status of 574 federally recognized and 60+ state-recognized Native Nations *as governments with inherent sovereign rights*, which distinguishes the Native citizens of those nations from other communities of color in the U.S. Philanthropy needs to understand this sovereignty and its importance to effective workforce development solutions; it also must follow Tribal protocols for engagement with funders.

## 2. NATIVE COMMUNITIES ARE INCREDIBLY DIVERSE CULTURALLY, SOCIALLY, AND ECONOMICALLY

Indian Country has *never* been a monolith. Philanthropy needs to explore, learn, embrace, and uplift Native diversity in its giving relationships with Native communities and Native-led workforce development entities so the initiatives and solutions it supports are tailored to the distinct challenges, needs, and long-range priorities of its grantees and the specific Native people they serve.

## 3. THE NATIVE POPULATION IS ALL AROUND YOU – AND GROWING RAPIDLY

As page 10 illustrates, Native people are among the fastest-growing populations in the U.S., which requires an equally expanding base of philanthropic support to keep pace. Also, due to the enduring effects of colonial policies and comparative access to economic and job opportunities, more than half of Native people reside outside of Tribal lands, many of them in urban areas, and they need to be part of the philanthropic equation.<sup>62</sup>

## 4. ONLY A HANDFUL OF NATIVE NATIONS HAVE “STRUCK IT RICH” THROUGH GAMING

Contrary to popular misconceptions, only a small minority (less than 15 percent) of Native Nations with gaming “operate prosperous casinos,”<sup>63</sup> and fewer still issue per capita payments from casino revenues to Tribal citizens. Most use the entirety of their gaming revenue to address critical gaps in services for their citizens and invest in developing Tribal enterprises and citizen-owned small businesses in related or different industries.<sup>64</sup>

## 5. INVESTING IN NATIVE-LED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ENTITIES IS LOW-RISK!

Tribal governments, urban Native nonprofit organizations, tribal colleges and universities, and other Native-led workforce development entities are inextricably tied to the Native communities they serve, and thus are deeply invested in and committed to advancing the workforce development priorities of those communities. Simply put, these entities make good on philanthropic investments in them, for they can’t afford to waste a cent in improving the quality of life for Native people.

## 6. NOW IS AN UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY TO FUEL NATIVE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

As mentioned, the last several decades have seen a growing movement across Indian Country to uproot failed workforce development approaches imposed on Native communities by outsiders and replace them with Native-designed approaches tailored to the distinct challenges and priorities of Native communities.<sup>65</sup> With recent developments such as the 2017 expansion of Public Law 102-477 and the subsequent interagency MOA, this movement is bound to grow more rapidly. It is incumbent on philanthropy to fuel that growth.

## 7. PHILANTHROPY NEEDS NATIVE PEOPLE TO INVEST IMPACTFULLY IN INDIAN COUNTRY

To build trust with Native communities and align giving with the needs and priorities of Native-led workforce development entities, funders need to position and heed Native voices throughout their internal organizational structures. This requires going beyond hiring a single Native program officer to ensuring Native representation across the organization’s senior staff leadership and board with experience working in Indian Country.<sup>66</sup>

## 8. GIVING TO INDIAN COUNTRY CANNOT BE TRANSACTIONAL

Philanthropy has an obligation to prove to Indian Country it is in it for the long haul, and committed so supporting self-determined, systemic change across Native communities. As Native Americans in Philanthropy explains, “funders must understand that giving is about much more than a simple exchange of resources. It is about building authentic relationships that aim to support the existence of different cultures, values, and languages.”<sup>67</sup>

## 9. COMMIT NOT TO FIXING INDIAN COUNTRY’S PROBLEMS, BUT FUELING NATIVE-DESIGNED SOLUTIONS

It is not philanthropy’s responsibility to fix the workforce development and related challenges confronting Native communities. Instead, philanthropy has an obligation to endow the solutions that those communities – and the Native-led workforce development entities serving them – develop with the resources they need to take root and grow over time. As one Indian Country funder puts it, “There’s no dearth of ideas and solutions in Indian Country, or inspired, endlessly hard-working Native nonprofit leaders. There’s merely a lack of access to funders and funding dollars.”<sup>68</sup>

## 10. BEWARE “BEST PRACTICE” INFATUATION

Philanthropy has a misguided tendency to champion a successful initiative of one Native grantee as a model that its other Native grantees should simply replicate, failing to recognize that such “best practices” tend to “vary depending on a range of issues, including population, community, culture and context...Native communities are diverse and heterogeneous and what works in one place may not necessarily work in another place.”<sup>69</sup>

## 11. FORGING TRUE IMPACT WILL – AND SHOULD – TAKE TIME

Indian Country’s complex workforce development challenges – the product of centuries of colonial oppression – will take Native-led workforce development entities decades if not generations to overcome. There are no external, quick-fix solutions that can rapidly achieve Native communities’ workforce development priorities, only those communities’ design of long-range, holistic workforce development interventions that require sustained support to implement.

# RELATED RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

Below is a comprehensive list of related resources that those working in philanthropy can use to further their understanding of Native workforce development and how best to support it.

[Workforce Grantmaking in Native Nations and Communities Initiative](#)

[Developing the Native Workforce: Understanding Indian Country and the Role of Philanthropy](#) (webinar video)

[Developing the Native Workforce on Native Terms: Success Stories from Indian Country and Their Lessons for Philanthropy](#) (webinar video)

[Native Workforce Development Policy and Data: The Current Landscape and Ways Philanthropy Can Strengthen Them](#) (webinar video)

[Workforce Matters: Workforce Grantmaking in Native Nations and Communities](#)

[National Congress of American Indians \(NCAI\): Tribal Workforce Development Decision-Framing Toolkit](#)

[NCAI Tribal Workforce Development Video Playlist](#) (videos)

[NCAI: Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction](#)

[Native Americans in Philanthropy and Candid: Investing in Native Communities: Philanthropic Funding for Native American Communities and Causes](#)

[Native Americans in Philanthropy: Language and Learning Resource for Non-Indigenous People](#)

[Native Americans in Philanthropy: Philanthropy Self-Assessment for Working with Tribal Communities](#)

[Native Americans in Philanthropy and Candid: Investing in Native Communities: Funding Map](#)



A slide from a presentation by Michael Johnson, Chief Strategy Officer with IllumiNative, which was featured in WGNNC's webinar "Developing the Native Workforce: Understanding Indian Country and the Role of Philanthropy" (see webinar video link above).



The Funding Map (link below left) – co-developed by Native Americans in Philanthropy and Candid – displays grants from Candid's database that are identified as benefiting Native people in the U.S. or awarded to recipient organizations whose missions focus on Native people in the United States.

[The Center for Effective Philanthropy: Overlooked \(Part Two\): Foundation Support for Native American Leaders and Communities](#)

[One Fire Development Corporation, Context Is Everything: Reflections on Strengthening Partnerships Between the Philanthropic Community and Native Americans](#)

[Common Counsel Foundation and Native Americans in Philanthropy: Native Voices Rising: The Case for Funding Native-led Change](#)

[Funder Perspectives: From a Baseline of Knowing Absolutely Nothing...to Learning So Much About Supporting Work in Indian Country \(First Nations Development Institute\)](#)

[Karla Miller \(Northwest Area Foundation\): Listening, Learning, and Re\(de\)fining Grantee-Grantor Alliances to Build Out Our New Funding Approach](#)

[Christianne Lind \(Northwest Area Foundation\): I Want to Build Relationships in a More Reciprocal Way](#)

[Native Governance Center: Beyond Land Acknowledgment Action Planning Worksheet \(and Guide\)](#)

[Native Governance Center: Indigenous Wealth Guide](#)

[First Nations Development Institute: We Need to Change How We Think: Perspectives on Philanthropy's Underfunding of Native Communities and Causes](#)

[Candid GuideStar: Identifying Native-Serving Nonprofit Organizations](#)

[Center for Indian Country Development: Native Labor Market Dashboard](#)

[Center for Indian Country Development: Dissimilarity on the Career Path: The Occupational Structure of the American Indian/Alaska Native Workforce](#)

[Reclaiming Native Truth: Changing the Narrative about Native Americans: A Guide for Allies](#)

# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this guide, “Native” generally refers inclusively to all American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people. Meanwhile, “Indian Country” broadly refers to all Native nations and communities.

<sup>2</sup> This definition is adapted and modified from the one presented in National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), *Tribal Workforce Development: A Decision-Framing Toolkit*, 2018, p. 2 ([https://www.ncai.org/ptg/WDEV\\_TOOLKIT.pdf](https://www.ncai.org/ptg/WDEV_TOOLKIT.pdf), accessed March 13, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> The Red Lake Nation in Minnesota, for example, calls its workforce development approach “Oshkiimaajitahdah,” which means “a new path” or “a new journey” in the Ojibwe language (see: <https://oshkiimaajitahdah.com/pages/oshkiimaajitahdah.html>, accessed Nov. 18, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> This section is condensed and adapted from NCAI, *Tribal Workforce Development*, 2018, p. 3, and is featured in this guide with NCAI’s permission.

<sup>5</sup> Charissa Delmar (producer), “The Rebuilding Native Nations: Strategies for Governance and Development course series” (video), Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management, and Policy, University of Arizona, 2013 (<https://nnigovernance.arizona.edu/rebuilding-native-nations-strategies-governance-and-development-course-series>, accessed Feb. 1, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Stephen Cornell and Joseph P. Kalt, “Two Approaches to the Development of Native Nations: One Works, the Other Doesn’t,” *Rebuilding Native Nations: Strategies for Governance and Development* (Miriam Jorgensen, Ed.), University of Arizona Press, 2007, pp. 3-33.

<sup>7</sup> Bryan Brayboy et al., *Postsecondary Education for American Indian and Alaska Natives*, ASHE Higher Education Report, Vol. 37:5, 2012, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Workforce Development Roundtable and Briefing, December 4, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> American Indian Relief Council, “History and Culture: Boarding Schools” ([http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc\\_hist\\_boardingschools](http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc_hist_boardingschools); accessed March 13, 2023); U.S. Department of the Interior, “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative” (<https://www.doi.gov/priorities/strengthening-indian-country/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>, accessed March 13, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Between 1953 and 1964, the U.S. government terminated recognition of more than 100 Native Nations (most of whom then spent decades securing restoration of their federal recognition status). Termination included the ceasing of federal funding for services provided to citizens of those Native Nations, including education and workforce development. The termination policy resulted in the loss of 2.5 million additional acres of tribal trust land (on top of the 90 million acres Native Nations lost through the federal government’s allotment policy of the late 1800s) (Wikipedia, “Indian Termination policy” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian\\_termination\\_policy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_termination_policy), accessed March 14, 2023)).

<sup>11</sup> Notably, the stated purposes of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act include providing “for full participation of Indian tribes in programs and services conducted by the Federal Government for Indians and to encourage the development of human resources of the Indian people” (Pub. L. No. 93-638, 88 Stat. 2203 (1975)).

<sup>12</sup> As defined by NCAI, the “silos effect” features “a lack of communication, coordination, cooperation, and/or common goal setting between governmental departments and programs responsible for workforce development and related activities, and often leads to replication of services, poor quality of services, and inefficient spending of governmental funds” (*Tribal Workforce Development*, 2018, p. 2).

<sup>13</sup> This explanation is adapted from the one found in NCAI, *Empowering Tribal Workforce Development: Policy Recommendations for the Federal Government (Version 2.0)*, 2020, p. 1 ([https://www.ncai.org/ptg/NCAI\\_WORKFORCE\\_DEVELOPMENT\\_BRIEF\\_v2.0\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ncai.org/ptg/NCAI_WORKFORCE_DEVELOPMENT_BRIEF_v2.0_2020.pdf), accessed March 13, 2023).

<sup>14</sup> For more on TCUs, see American Indian Higher Education Consortium, “Tribal Colleges & Universities” (<https://www.aihec.org/tribal-colleges-universities/>, accessed Feb. 13, 2024).

<sup>15</sup> Prominent examples of these include the American Indian Center in Chicago (<https://aicchicago.org/>) and American Indian OIC in Minneapolis (<https://www.aioc.org/>).

<sup>16</sup> See: <https://www.ihs.gov/urban/urban-indian-organizations/>.

<sup>17</sup> For example, the Native-run Northwest Indian Community Development Center in Bemidji, Minnesota serves Native people living in and around Bemidji as well as three nearby Indian reservations (see: <https://www.nwicdc.org/>).

<sup>18</sup> The South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency (SPIPA) in Washington state is one such example (for more on SPIPA, see <https://spipa.org/>).

<sup>19</sup> These five snapshots are condensed and adapted from NCAI’s *Tribal Workforce Development: A Decision-Framing Toolkit*, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Public Law 102-477, 106 Stat. 2305, October 23, 1992 (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-106/pdf/STATUTE-106-Pg2302.pdf>, accessed October 22, 2023). This summary of 477 is condensed and adapted from Ian Record, “The Biden Administration Just Righted a Tribal Workforce Development Wrong. Indian Country Needs to Work to Keep It That Way,” *Indian Country Today*, November 17, 2022 (<https://ictnews.org/opinion/biden-administration-righted-a-tribal-workforce-development-wrong>, accessed Nov. 1, 2023).

<sup>21</sup> NCAI, *Empowering Tribal Workforce Development*, 2020, pp. 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> Memorandum of Agreement Providing for Implementation of the Indian Employment, Training and Related Services Consolidation Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-93), October 2022 ([https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/default/inline-files/477\\_moa\\_signed.pdf](https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/default/inline-files/477_moa_signed.pdf), accessed Sept. 26, 2023).

<sup>23</sup> Anthony Riley, Acting Chief, Division of Workforce Development, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, email correspondence, January 30, 2024.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, “Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)” (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/dinap/laws>, accessed Sept. 3, 2023). For FY 2023, Section 166 funding was 1.8 percent (\$73.5 million) of the overall funding for WIOA Title I Programs (\$4.1 billion).

<sup>25</sup> See WGNCC, “Strengthening WIOA Section 166: Indian Country’s Policy Priorities,” *Workforce Matters*, October 2023 (<https://workforce-matters.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/WIOA-Section-166-Policy-Priorities-FINAL-10-17-23-3.pdf>, accessed Dec. 5, 2023).

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Census population data does not include Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders, who are counted separately. For FY 2023, only one of the 166 WIOA Section 166 grantees served Native Hawaiians.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Johnson, Chief Strategy Officer, IllumiNative, “Developing the Native Workforce: Understanding Indian Country and the Role of Philanthropy” (webinar), WGNCC, September 28, 2023 (<https://vimeo.com/875285379>, accessed Jan. 6, 2024).

<sup>28</sup> Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP), *OVERLOOKED (Part Two): Foundation Support for Native American Leaders and Communities*, July 2021, p. 8 ([https://cep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CEP\\_Overlooked\\_Native\\_American.pdf](https://cep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CEP_Overlooked_Native_American.pdf), accessed Jan. 13, 2024).

<sup>29</sup> Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) and Candid, *Investing in Native Communities: Philanthropic Funding for Native American Communities and Causes*, September 2019, p. 16 (<https://nativephilanthropy.candid.org/reports/investing-in-native-communities-philanthropic-funding-for-native-american-communities-and-causes>, accessed Jan. 9, 2024). According to NAP and Candid, “This means that even among funders who provide grants explicitly benefiting Native

Americans, the funding largely seems to be incidental, without a dedicated focus or intention on the part of the foundation” (Ibid.).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> CEP, *OVERLOOKED (Part Two)*, July 2021, p. 9. According to CEP, assessing the year 2020, “more than 40 percent of foundations report increasing their funding to nonprofits serving Black communities, and a little more than a quarter report doing so for nonprofits serving Latino communities. However, other communities affected by systemic inequities, including Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) and Native American communities, appear to have been overlooked. These communities have not received much increased support from foundations during the same period” (Ibid., p. 3).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> NAP, *Language and Learning Resource for Non-Indigenous People*, Toolkit, October 2023, p. 14 (<https://20951050.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/20951050/NAiP-language-resource-guide-web.pdf>, accessed Jan. 12, 2024).

<sup>34</sup> Heather Fleming, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Change Labs, email correspondence, February 8, 2024. To learn more about Change Labs, see: <https://www.nativestartup.org/>.

<sup>35</sup> Lorenda Sanchez, Executive Director, California Indian Manpower Consortium (CIMC), email correspondence, February 12, 2024. To learn more about CIMC, see: <http://www.cimcinc.org/>.

<sup>36</sup> To learn more about the Native Nation Rebuilders program, see: <https://nativegov.org/programs/leadership-development/what-is-a-rebuilder/>.

<sup>37</sup> Sean Buffington, Vice President, Henry Luce Foundation, (NAP and Candid, *Investing in Native Communities*, September 2019, p. 38).

<sup>38</sup> One Fire Development Corporation, *Context Is Everything: Reflections On Strengthening Partnerships Between the Philanthropic Community and Native Americans*, 2019, p. 9 (<https://onefiredevelopment.org/context-is-everything/>, accessed Feb. 2, 2024). According to the First Nations Development Institute (FNDI), “Substance abuse, low levels of education, and local corruption are all common stereotypes of Native communities left unchallenged within philanthropic circles. Foundations also often assume that all Native Americans live in remote rural areas, associating urban settings with Black and Latinx communities and rendering urban Native communities invisible” (*Growing Inequity: Large Foundation Giving to Native American Organizations and Causes, 2006-2014*, 2018, p. 3 ([https://www.firstnations.org/wp-content/uploads/publication-attachments/We%20Need%20to%20Change%20How%20We%20Think\\_Companded.pdf](https://www.firstnations.org/wp-content/uploads/publication-attachments/We%20Need%20to%20Change%20How%20We%20Think_Companded.pdf), accessed Jan. 14, 2024)).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> NAP and Candid, *Investing in Native Communities*, September 2019, pp. 5, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Jennings, Former Program Officer, Northwest Area Foundation (Ibid., p. 37).

<sup>42</sup> “Funder Perspectives: From a Baseline of Knowing Absolutely Nothing ... to Learning So Much About Supporting Work in Indian Country,” FNDI, 2019, p. 3 (<https://www.firstnations.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/From-a-baseline-of-knowing-nothing-RDietel.pdf>, accessed Jan. 11, 2024).

<sup>43</sup> According to FNDI, “This might involve coordinating site visits and tours, holding candid convenings or workshops, or organizing giving circles and other ‘on ramps’ for philanthropy” (*Growing Inequity*, 2018, p. 2).

<sup>44</sup> NAP and Candid, *Investing in Native Communities*, September 2019, p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 32. As Sean Buffington of the Henry Luce Foundation explains, “Going to reservations or to the offices of urban Indian organizations – rather than asking people to come to you or interacting by phone or email – demonstrates the respect that potential partners and grantees deserve. It helps to build trust and deepen your understanding as funders” (Ibid.).

<sup>46</sup> CEP, *OVERLOOKED (Part Two)*, July 2021, p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> NAP, *Language and Learning Resource for Non-Indigenous People*, October 2023, p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> FNDI, *Growing Inequity*, 2018, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> NAP, *Language and Learning Resource for Non-Indigenous People*, October 2023, p. 14.

<sup>50</sup> FNDI, *Growing Inequity*, 2018, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> According to NAP and Candid, “Long-term flexible funding allows organizations to choose how they fulfill their missions. It enables them to be creative and responsive in addressing opportunities and needs as they arise. It demonstrates trust that they understand best how to achieve their goals and meet the needs of the communities they serve. A commitment to long-term funding contributes to a relationship, rather than being merely a transaction. Conversely, year-to-year funding drains resources for grantees (e.g., time spent on reporting and reapplying) and contributes to organizational instability” (*Investing in Native Communities*, September 2019, p. 33).

<sup>52</sup> NAP, *Language and Learning Resource for Non-Indigenous People*, October 2023, p. 18; CEP, *OVERLOOKED (Part Two)*, July 2021, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> One Fire Development Corporation, *Context Is Everything*, 2019, p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>55</sup> Vanessa Daniel, Groundswell Fund (*Investing in Native Communities*, September 2019, p. 33).

<sup>56</sup> NAP, *Language and Learning Resource for Non-Indigenous People*, October 2023, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> NAP and Candid, *Investing in Native Communities*, September 2019, p. 33.

<sup>59</sup> NCAI, *Tribal Workforce Development*, 2018, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> “Developing the Native Workforce on Native Terms: Success Stories from Indian Country and Their Lessons for Philanthropy” (webinar), WGNCC, October 18, 2023 (<https://vimeo.com/875754770>, accessed Jan. 6, 2024).

<sup>61</sup> “Why Healing Became a Core Part of Our Funding Approach,” Northwest Area Foundation, January 2024 ([https://www.nwaf.org/2024/01/18/program-officer-john-fetzer-why-healing-became-a-core-part-of-our-funding-approach/?utm\\_source=Mailchimp&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_campaign=24-IF-Healing](https://www.nwaf.org/2024/01/18/program-officer-john-fetzer-why-healing-became-a-core-part-of-our-funding-approach/?utm_source=Mailchimp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=24-IF-Healing), accessed Jan. 20, 2024).

<sup>62</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior-Indian Affairs, “Frequently Asked Questions” (<https://www.bia.gov/frequently-asked-questions>, accessed Dec. 3, 2023).

<sup>63</sup> AISES, “Native Financial Cents: Supporting Financial Capability for Native Americans” (<https://nfc.aises.org/>, accessed Dec. 3, 2023).

<sup>64</sup> According to FNDI, funders commonly cite “the perception within philanthropy that Native communities have access to federal funds and ‘casino money,’ and therefore do not need philanthropic dollars. Underlying this perception is a pejorative stereotype that Native Americans have squandered these supports and are therefore undeserving of private philanthropy” (*Growing Inequity*, 2018, p. 2).

<sup>65</sup> NCAI, *Tribal Workforce Development*, 2018, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> As FNDI explains, “the largest barrier to funding Native communities is the racial makeup of foundation boards and leadership...This approach leaves little room for disrupting any bias in the conceptualization of Native Americans, and Native communities often fall completely out of sight” (*Growing Inequity*, 2018, p. 3).

<sup>67</sup> NAP, *Language and Learning Resource for Non-Indigenous People*, October 2023, p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> Ren Dietel, “Funder Perspectives,” FNDI, 2019, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> One Fire Development Corporation, *Context Is Everything*, 2019, p. 25.

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