



# Original Instructions:

A CHALLENGE TO PHILANTHROPY TO EXPAND HEALTH  
AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIVE YOUTH



Schott Foundation for Public Education  
*in partnership with*  
Native Americans in Philanthropy



NATIVE AMERICANS  
IN PHILANTHROPY

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## **Special appreciation to the leadership of these organizations who make this work possible:**

### **Schott Foundation for Public Education**

Schott is a public fund whose mission is to strengthen broad-based movements that seek to provide all students a fair and substantive opportunity to learn. In its dual role as a philanthropic and advocacy partner, Schott bridges advocacy and grassroots organizations with the strategic resources, networks and collaborations needed to create systemic change.

### **Native Americans in Philanthropy**

Native Americans in Philanthropy is a membership-based organization that promotes reciprocity and investment in, with, and for Native peoples to build healthy and sustainable communities for all. NAP is a powerful and growing network of Native and non-Native nonprofits, tribal communities, foundations and community leaders committed to engaging, learning and sharing resources and best practices grounded in the Native tradition of reciprocity.

# INVESTING IN NATIVE YOUTH AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

The United States has long struggled with its history of genocide and legacy of anti-Native American racism, and the contemporary impact it has had on Native American communities. Today, the nation has an important opportunity to address this legacy. Philanthropy can play a pivotal role by reversing its under-investment in Native-led social change.

The history of Native-led movements is rife with social justice victories, great and small. This has contributed to advances for Native communities and landmark strides for all Americans. Native American tribal leaders, social change leaders, and organizations have been at the forefront of resistance in this country since the beginning of contact with Europeans and have stood resilient against great odds.

Recently, Native American activists achieved one of the most galvanizing environmental victories in years—and it all began with a group of Native American youth leaders. Images of water protectors, chanting “Mni Wiconi - Water is Life” reached the mainstream news from MSNBC to CNN and beyond for the better part of 2016 in what became popularly known as the Movement at Standing Rock. Their leadership, conviction, and voice spoke to the hearts of millions of people across the globe. Their message was simple and profound: We are protecting the most basic and precious source of life—water. Not just for Native people, but for all humans and living beings. By standing up against the Goliath oil industry, these youth—alongside an intergenerational community of water protectors—stood up for

the inherent right of Native peoples to exist, determine their future, and continue their way of life.

Within philanthropy there is a surge of interest in racial equity, accompanied by new support for Native-led organizing and social change organizations. This encouraging uptick runs counter to a long pattern of philanthropic neglect and under-investment in the infrastructure of Native American organizations and institutions. Nonetheless, questions abound. Is this new philanthropic interest in racial equity episodic? And will it translate into long-term and significant support for Native-led social change organizations to make Native American communities matter and thrive? Will race equity proponents look beyond race to understand and become allies for tribal sovereignty?

Emboldened by the youth of Standing Rock, in June 2017, the Schott Foundation for Public Education and Native Americans in Philanthropy hosted Native American leaders and funders to discuss how to support Native youth in bigger and bolder ways. If youth are the bedrock of movement and community change, there is an imperative to ensure that Native youth are educated, healthy and prepared as the next generation of leaders. As a group, these leaders grappled with such questions as: What is the responsibility of those working with Native youth during this critical time? What is the role of philanthropy in this work? What did we learn from Standing Rock as it relates to youth leadership, health and education?

Specifically, analysis and discussion sought to find solutions to:

- Help vitalize and strengthen the infrastructure for Native youth-led social change efforts by advocating for much greater philanthropic investment.
- Invest in supporting and expanding the leadership pipeline of Native youth leaders across a wide spectrum of issues and sectors.
- Strengthen strategic communications to advance accurate portrayals and images of Native youth realities.

- Help foundations review their portfolios to assess the racial diversity of the leadership of their grantees, with an eye toward Native-led organizations.

This briefing document is designed to call out the central themes and findings from the gathering, identify recommendations to advance Native youth health and opportunities to learn through philanthropic investment, and inspire everyday actions that philanthropy can take to support Native peoples' most precious resource: their youth.

## **Top 5 Actions Funders Can Take to Make a Difference in the Lives of Native Youth**

- 1. Ensure your portfolio includes investments in Native communities. Native Americans are 2 percent of the population yet receive less than 0.3 percent of philanthropic dollars. Advocate for your institution to fund Native communities at a minimum, proportionate to Native population size.**
- 2. Invest in Native youth and communities to re-establish traditional language and culture as a critical means of restoring holistic Native youth health, education, leadership and well-being.**
- 3. Understand how historical colonization, forced assimilation, and ensuing trauma affects Native youth today, and invest in community-controlled solutions to these challenges, versus foundation-driven solutions.**
- 4. Educate your philanthropic peers. To achieve the dramatic shift that is needed in philanthropy, Native Americans and allies need to educate, inform, and inspire deeper philanthropic investment. This begins by being vocal. Talk about Native youth issues within your organizations and networks.**
- 5. Make a long-term commitment to center the Native youth experience. The systemic challenges experienced by Native youth have been compounded over several hundred years and will require a long-term commitment to achieve change. Ensure that Native youth issues are part of all racial equity undertakings and conversations and that Native issues are visible within philanthropic spaces.**

Each of these actions also require humility and a willingness to understand the Native American worldview. Tribal communities and their youth are lifted up by the strength and knowledge of their ancestors, and their traditional ways.

# UNDERSTANDING ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS: A TIME-TESTED MODEL FOR ADVANCING NATIVE YOUTH HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Native American societies were traditionally structured to ensure that all members of the community, including children and youth, were cared for. Children and youth were raised within the context of families, extended families, clan systems, and their tribe—all of which provided for a deep grounding in their sense of identity, connections, and purpose. Furthermore, traditional child-rearing practices emphasized modeling self-discipline, rather than punitive discipline approaches. Resilience, and other positive coping behavior, was modeled by adults and reinforced through storytelling, ceremony, and other cultural and oral traditions.<sup>i</sup> In short, traditional Native communities were sophisticated examples of social structures and cultures. They provided what we now know through advances in brain science, are essential for healthy formation of young children, adolescents, and young adults: social connections, resilience, familial and community support during crisis; and social and emotional competence of themselves and the adults around them.<sup>ii</sup>

Native Americans in Philanthropy embarked upon a process in 2016, led by Native American scholars Karina Walters, Michael Yellowbird, and Rosalee

Gonzalez, to analyze the research on child and adolescent protective factors from an Indigenous perspective. Through an extensive literature review, their own original research, and discussion among themselves and other Native academics, they developed *The Indigenous Lifecourse*,<sup>iii</sup> a model for advancing Native youth health and wellness. The framework recognizes that a colonial legacy prevails in the structures that Native youth interact with every day, which contributes to alarming rates of youth suicide, substance abuse, and other socioeconomic indicators. Yet, the framework advocates that the way to solve these challenges is not by focusing on the problems alone, but by returning to Native American traditional tribal teachings, stories, and culture, also known as returning to Native peoples' *Original Instructions*.<sup>iv</sup> In this way, the framework advocates for the need to approach Native youth development and leadership through a decolonized lens. The framework identifies seven protective factors that keep Native youth healthy and strong, even in the face of adversity.

## Most Significant Protective Factors for Native American Youth, Families and Communities

### 1. Cultural Identification and Connectedness.

Native youth success depends on knowing who they are. Youth must engage in effective decolonizing practices, which serve to undo any ambivalence of how or why they came to this moment in time and engage in Indigenizing practices that promote developmental growth rooted in traditional knowledge(s) and philosophy.

### 2. Youth Self-Efficacy and Leadership.

Increase the visibility of Native American leaders and issues. Develop the capacities of youth leadership to promote and protect human and Indigenous peoples' rights. Restore Indigenous peoples' rights to land, sacred places, traditional knowledge and language, education and judicial systems, all of which were deliberately altered or simply vanished over time.

### 3. Family Connectedness.

Parental connectedness has proven a significant predictor of Native youth mental and physical wellness. Promote and protect the positive influence and monitoring of Native parents upon youth.

### 4. Extended Kin Bonds and Networks.

To decolonize (*neuro-decolonize*) oneself or a community, you must understand what has invaded your well-being, mental, or physical health. According

to *The Indigenous Lifecourse*, Native people have been “made into individuals,” transformed to individualists as opposed to collectivist communities. We must create connections again from the neurological to the community level. Promote the restoration of kin relationships that are healthy for kids and parent/adult mentor roles.

### 5. Community Control.

Sustainable economies cannot exist without land and control over natural resources. Promote and support Native youth leadership to restore a relationship with land, community, and the environment. Support leadership models rooted in the Original Instructions and sustainable social change.

### 6. Spirituality and Ceremonies.

Healing at multiple levels is necessary from the child to his or her environment. Promote and restore Native American Original Instructions.

### 7. Healthy Traditional Food.

Promote and protect access to Native Ancestral diets and food habits. Strengthen Native American microbiome and traditional medicinal knowledge and its use to protect necessary traditional knowledge and philosophy that restores and supports holistic well-being—physical, mental and spiritual health.





### **Native Youth Leadership and Wellness at Standing Rock**

The Native youth suicide rate is more than double any other population in the United States. The reasons for this are complex, yet include several inter-related risk factors including historical trauma; poverty, unemployment, and geographic isolation; feelings of hopelessness; and lack of mental health resources and supports among other factors.

Like many other tribes, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has combatted the Native youth suicide epidemic within its community. Upon visiting the tribal administrators during the Standing Rock prayer camps in September 2016, youth suicide prevention workers reported that the incidences of suicide attempts and suicides fell to a dramatic all-time low.

Youth suicide prevention workers shared that the youth reported feeling a sense of newfound purpose, hope, and power. They shared stories about being re-integrated into traditional Lakota language, culture, and ways of learning from elders, being in substance-free environments, and connecting with Indigenous peoples from throughout the country. This was part of a visit to Standing Rock by Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP), as part of NAP's efforts to support the tribe in generating resources for Native youth and other tribal priorities.

Although there were no evaluations of this phenomenon, youth workers wanted to share this story as being instructive to what Native youth are yearning for: culture, belonging, and purpose. The Standing Rock example holds rich teachings about Indigenous movement building, that includes but is not limited to environmental concerns. In returning to the Original Instructions of the *Oceti Sakowin*, the youth were re-aligning with Indigenous protective factors, and that in turn kept them holistically healthy and strong.

# ISSUE SPOTLIGHTS

Participants of the June 2017 gathering argued for a holistic approach toward working with Native youth, but they acknowledged that Native youth are engaged through different entry points. The conversation focused on three in particular: education, Native youth development and leadership, and health and wellness.

## Issue Spotlight: Education<sup>v</sup>

### What You Need to Know

- Indigenous Cultures Thrived before Europeans.** Indigenous peoples had sophisticated forms of governance, science, architecture, agriculture, languages, and ways of learning and knowing prior to contact with Europeans.
- Colonization Disrupted Traditional Systems.** Traditional ways of knowing were disrupted through forced assimilation most often through public and private educational systems. One of the most glaring examples is the legacy of U.S. Indian Boarding Schools, which disrupted entire generations of traditional child-rearing and knowledge, and were often rampant with physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.
- The Tribal-Control Education Movement Took Back Education.** A movement to promote tribally controlled education was seeded in the late 1800s and gained momentum during the formation of tribal colleges and the American Indian Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Navajo Nation was the first to found a tribal college in 1968, and today, there are 32 fully accredited tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) in the United States.
- Federal Trust Responsibility.** Government funding for Indian Education is based upon treaties that were entered between tribal governments and the United States, which often traded land for the right to health, security, and education for members of the Tribe in perpetuity. The government has a federal trust responsibility through these treaties, which the U.S. Constitution mandates is the “supreme law of the land.”
- Drastic Underfunding.** Despite the constitutional protections for members of federally recognized tribes, programs for health care and education remain perpetually underfunded—by some estimates upwards of 30-60 percent.
- Bureau of Indian Education.** The Bureau of Indian Education oversees 183 elementary, secondary, residential, and peripheral dormitories across 23 states. One hundred-thirty schools are tribally controlled under P.L. 93-638 Indian Self Determination Contracts or P.L. 100-297 Tribally Controlled Grant Schools Act. Fifty-three schools are operated by the Bureau of Indian Education. The Bureau of Indian Education also oversees two postsecondary schools: Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute.
- Native Graduation Rate.** The national graduation rate for American Indian high school students was 49.3 percent for the 2003-04 school



year, compared with 76.2 percent for white students. Just 13.3 percent of Native Americans have undergraduate degrees, versus 24.4 percent of the general population.

- **Native Peoples Are Diverse.** Native Americans are not homogenous. There are more than 1,000 tribes in the United States, including 562 that are recognized by the federal government and approximately 400 that are unrecognized.
- **Geography Matters.** While Native Americans contend with similar historical, structural, and

systemic challenges, geographical differences in where Native American students live account for different environmental conditions that require different solutions. For example, rural communities often have challenges recruiting teachers and administrators because of the remote location of many tribal reservations, which urban communities don't necessarily face. Urban communities are challenged with Native student isolation within a broader school community, where they are often the only Native American in their school, which reservation-based students don't face.

## What's At Risk for Native Education in this New Political Reality

- **Budget cuts.** Proposed budget cuts under the current administration would eliminate \$64 million in federal Native American funding for education.
- **Teacher hiring freezes and training cuts.** Teacher hiring is at risk, given there is a current hiring freeze within the Bureau of Indian Education. Training for educators around suicide prevention, health interventions, and other helping supports have been reduced or eliminated altogether.
- **Attacks on bilingual education.** Funding for bilingual education programs, which have restored traditional language use and Indigenous culture in many communities, has been cut, leaving a critical gap with which tribal educators are contending.
- **Divestment in tribal early childhood education.** Funding cuts have impacted early care and education programs, including but not limited to Head Start programs in tribal communities.
- **Government financing for Native controlled schools.** Funding for tribally controlled schools is at risk. Despite this fact, tribes and communities are ready to fight for the gains they have made in the past years.
- **Lack of funding for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education.** STEM workers earn on average \$40,000 more per year than any other career path. Yet less than half of Native American students are being prepared for college with the science and math education needed to do well in college. Bridging that gap was among the priorities of the previous administration, and now there is virtually no federal support for this work.
- **Trend toward standards-based education.** While standards-based education and investments from the private sector are worrisome, there is an opportunity to reform based on tested community-oriented, culturally based practices.

## What Philanthropy Can Do

- **Move dollars to community controlled solutions.** Native peoples and communities know their communities and are in the best position to decide what will work best for them.
- **Invest in supports-based education, rather than standards-based education.** The goal is not delivering test scores, but completing what our ancestors want us to do.
- **Invest in innovation.** Transcendental meditation and mindfulness have supported students with focus and empathy in Native-controlled schools. More is needed with regard to testing trauma-informed teaching models. Philanthropic support can demonstrate effectiveness that can then spread through a broader system-wide approach.
- **Support safe schools.** Native youth talk about needing schools to be a safe place of support. Invest in efforts to create healthy and safe learning environments for Native youth.
- **Invest in all youth.** National philanthropic work around men and boys of color is admirable, but alone insufficient. There is a need to focus on women and girls of color being engaged in their future, as well as gender non-conforming youth.
- **Resist the reservation-urban binary.** It's not enough for philanthropy to only fund on reservations or in urban places. To elevate outcomes for Native youth, efforts must be inclusive of all Native youth, wherever they reside.
- **Rely on trusted relationships.** Understanding Native history and context can be difficult, given that the mainstream educational system does not do a very good job of educating Americans about Native history and contemporary peoples. It's okay not to know everything. Cultivate relationships with Native peoples, organizations, and networks to help you navigate the details.
- **Value Indigenous worldviews.** It's important to respect and understand what success looks like from an Indigenous perspective. Funders must make sure evaluations and reporting tools don't unintentionally impose a Western worldview onto an Indigenous program.
- **Support school-community partnerships.** Although schools themselves are often overtaxed with responsibilities, local community-based organizations are positioned to manage extracurricular programming on school campuses.

“About return on investment: Vine Deloria shared that the 1950s were the bottom of the bottom for Native people. If we look at the 1950s until now, if anywhere funders can place investment, it's in tribal education. Tribal colleges were able to build in 50 to 60 years what took Harvard and other colleges 200 years to develop. We have to remember that context when thinking about challenges. If you are a funder, the best place to put your money is Indian Country.”

—Justin Kii Huenemann, CEO, Notah Begay III Foundation

## Barriers that Foundation Leaders Experience in Funding Native Communities

- **Siloes.** Native communities view their work holistically. That is not always easy to translate to foundations' funding categories and priorities.
- **Diversity.** It's difficult to translate the diversity and complexity of Native communities and experiences into traditional grantmaking processes and cycles.
- **Invisibility.** There is severe under-representation of Native peoples within philanthropy, which contributes to an overall lack of visibility of Native issues and peoples. One respondent at the gathering put it simply: "People forget about Native communities."
- **Lack of understanding.** There is a general lack of knowledge and understanding of Native history and contemporary experiences among all Americans, as well as in philanthropy. Because of this, there is a notion that working with Native communities is too big, too hard, and too much. One participant shared, "there is a pervasive ignorance of tribal sovereignty and how to invest in Native communities." There are also misunderstandings about similarities and differences among Native communities in rural and urban spaces.
- **Lack of data.** Philanthropy requires that communities substantiate need through data and statistics, yet data for Native American youth is often non-existent, and much more unreliable than other groups of people.
- **Capacity.** Foundations have constraints on the types and sizes of organizations it can fund. Often, small grassroots organizations that have community connection, do not have enough capacity to manage large grants.
- **Staff turnover.** There is high staff turnover in philanthropy and Native organizations, leading to difficulty with building long-term relationships, and a dynamic in which the point person frequently changes.

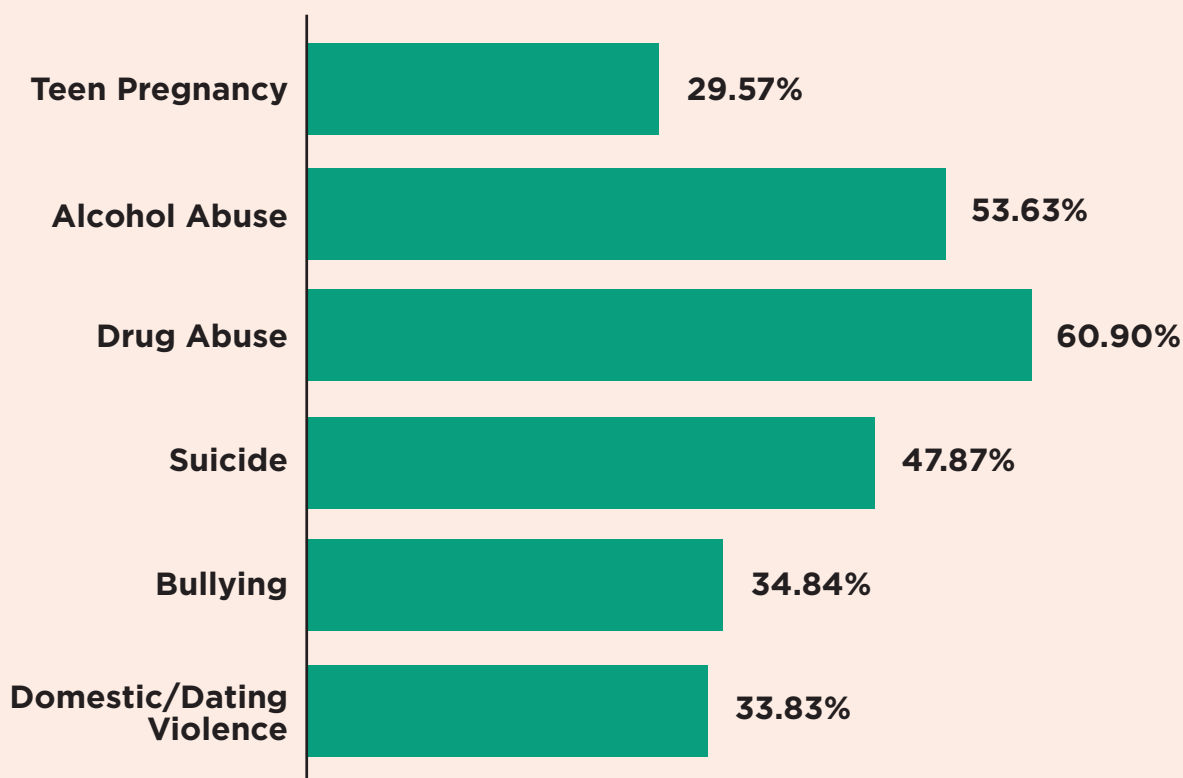
## Strategies to Increase Investments in Native Communities

- Champion financial transparency with constituents that seek to hold philanthropy accountable for more equitable distribution of resources. Native Americans represent 2 percent of the population, yet receive less than 0.3 percent of philanthropic funding.
- Be creative in grantmaking approaches. Consider funding across program areas, joining pooled funding opportunities and working through trusted Native intermediaries.
- Increase visibility of Native issues through Native-specific funder briefings, and other similar strategies to increase visibility and strengthen relationships with philanthropic leadership.
- Develop and disseminate practical tools, data, and other resources that can help bridge the knowledge gap between funders and Native communities.
- Commit to long-term membership in networks, coalitions, and other alliances that support Native communities.
- Support strategic and effective Native intermediaries that expand access and avoid gatekeeping between philanthropy and Native communities.
- Lift up positive stories and successes of tribal communities. Funders want to know what works. Whether it's through a report, storytelling, or other creative communication, Native stories of resilience, success and hope need to be seen and heard.
- Increase visibility of Native organizations in other funding networks, for example, the Groundswell Model, which harnesses public opinion to raise money, build power, scale promising ideas, ultimately effect systems change.
- Foundation partners need to demand authentic Native voice representation within the Council of Foundations, Grantmakers in Health, and other influential spaces. This means that there is a intentionality around ensuring there are Native speakers, panelists, planners, facilitators, and participants within these organizations and their gatherings.
- Create Board-mandated funding quotas that require funding to go to Native communities. For example, the Northwest Area Foundation committed to giving a percentage of their funding to Native communities. Engage a small group of champions that will commit and challenge their peers to do the same. Track this progress, and offer evidence of success.



### What Do the Youth Say?

In partnership with the Nick Lowery Youth Foundation, the United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY) surveyed nearly 400 youth at the 2016 National UNITY Conference about issues that were of most concern to them. Fifty-two percent of survey respondents were rural, and 47 percent were from urban areas. Sixty-one percent were female, 38 percent were male, and 1 percent were non-binary gender or two-spirit. Youth identified drug, alcohol abuse, and suicide as their top three concerns. The Indigenous Lifecourse Protective Factors provide meaningful support to mitigate these concerns.





## Issue Spotlight: Native Youth Development and Leadership

### What You Need to Know

- **Culture is prevention.** Whether on reservations, in suburbs or in urban areas, Native youth all report wanting a higher connectivity with their culture. Programs that focus on culture and language preservation make a difference in the lives of Native youth and is a critical foundation of their personal leadership development.
- **Honor youth leadership.** Native youth-serving organizations work hard to ensure that Native youth are provided the space, training, and opportunity to speak on behalf of themselves and communities. This can look like ensuring there is substantial youth representation on organizational boards, that youth are engaged as active decision makers within programs and community, and are represented in meetings, panels, and conferences where community issues are being discussed.
- **The Digital Divide is real.** Online outreach methods alone are insufficient to reach Native youth due to the lack of broadband access Native American youth experience in rural areas. In some communities, fewer than 10 percent of Native youth have access to broadband or smartphones. Youth councils, grassroots outreach at community events such as flea markets and powwows, and youth organizing are critical outreach and engagement activities that require personal connections, resources and funding.
- **Networks make a difference.** Networks comprised of communities, grantees, and funders were cited as effective vehicles for spreading innovation and best practices. As dire as the political context might be, networks are a fairly inexpensive method for ensuring ideas and resources are re-generated and spread. Additionally, participants expressed a desire for foundations that have made large investments in Native communities to spread their knowledge and learning with their peers in philanthropy and the broader field.
- **Cooperation versus competition.** Participants at the August gathering cited the many ways in which individuals, communities and organizations are collaborating to create whole-child supports for Native youth. Working with different organizations with different expertise is critical, especially in times of real or imagined resource scarcity. Others are seeking to build partnerships with schools and other institutions in new ways. In all of this work, participants named the power of philanthropy to support partnership and cooperation versus competition over resources.

## What's at Stake for Native Youth Leadership in this Moment?

- **Standing Rock has changed the world.** Standing Rock was and is a historic crescendo of activism for Native youth. A whole generation of youth leaders were activated and mobilized and are now demanding dialogue and accountability with decision-makers. Efforts need to concentrate on continuing the youth movement momentum and support for strengthening their leadership.
- **The Federal trust responsibility is threatened.** The federal government has a trust responsibility with Native Tribes, which is currently threatened. Though already drastically under-funded, federal funding to tribes are at risk of being severely cut, including health care, education, and housing. Native youth are as concerned as adults about tribal supports for them and their families, widening gaps of educational inequity, and other supports they and their communities rely upon to survive. Meanwhile, policies designed to protect them and keep their families together, like the Indian Child Welfare Act, are under attack.
- **Anxiety level of youth has risen.** Youth workers have reported that Native youth have expressed an increased level of anxiety as a result of pipeline development, police violence, and other issues that have been made more visible in the past year, including impending federal budget cuts.

## What Philanthropy Can Do

- **Invest in culture as prevention.** Native youth are contending with historical, institutional, community, familial, and individual stressors in their daily lives. Cultural connectivity, including a sense of identity, belonging, and pride help to create a protective buffer against those challenges. Philanthropy should view cultural activities as an evidence-based practice.
- **Adopt cultural humility when working with Native people.** Each tribe has its own history, traditions, and culture. Rather than trying to achieve cultural competency, adopt an attitude of cultural humility—a process of careful and ongoing self-reflection, self-awareness, and critical consciousness about one's own beliefs, values and worldview.
- **Support leadership pathway from youth through early adulthood.** It's important that Native youth be supported on a lifecourse trajectory from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood. Due to age-specific funding streams, too many Native youth “age out” of services and find themselves without needed supports at the critical transition from adolescence to adulthood.

“ I like to build a message about HOPE. Hope serving as an acronym. H for hearing voices of our youth. O being open minded and accepting our youth where they come from, no matter where they're at, accepting who they are. P for prayer, ancestors, our ceremonies, our culture, our songs. E for empowering our youth. I have a nephew that just recently passed from cancer. One thing that moved him was an Apache prayer song. We held it to his ear and he lit up. He started moving to the music. That for our people, going back to where we come from, who we are, our language, our songs, are so very powerful. ”

—Mary Kim Titla, United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY)

**Philanthropic partners shared their views on everyday actions philanthropy can take to make a difference in the lives of Native youth, including:**

- Take the time to understand tribal cultures. There are inherent strengths and teachings from Indigenous cultures that all people can learn from, and that are applicable to global, national and local problems.
- Educate your peers. Talk about Indigenous issues. Ask about how your peers are funding in Native communities, and advocate for representation of Native communities and peoples in conferences, panels, and reports. Do your part to counter the invisibility of Native peoples.
- Invest in youth assets. Native youth are activists, and their worldview of activism is unique compared with past generations. Invest in the capacity, passion, and determination of these youth to sow seeds for the next generation.
- Ensure Native youth are meaningfully represented at the table, on panels, and as decision-makers, and avoid tokenizing them.
- Understanding Native youth and where they are at in terms of culture, identity, immediate needs, and hopes and dreams for the future.
- See Native youth as whole human beings, who are situated within the context of their history, tribe, community, and family.
- Understand that Native youth needs are both unique and similar to other youth. While all youth need healthy self-esteem and confidence, for example, Native youth have a unique culturally grounded way of achieving that self-confidence.
- Challenge philanthropy to support Native youth beyond social services to movement building, activism, and leadership.

**Funders named a variety of ways that collaboration across foundations can be achieved toward deeper and more meaningful investments for Native youth, including:**

- Create new donor collaboratives or joining existing collaboratives. Frame issues more broadly so more partners can participate. Create educational opportunities for newcomers that is inviting and not overwhelming.
- Coordinate funding across issue areas in specific communities.
- Cultivate funder networks through monthly calls, trainings and learning communities.
- Organize more Native-focused funder tours so that philanthropic leaders have a deeper experiential understanding of working with Native communities, including their assets and challenges.
- Create accountability mechanisms. How will philanthropy hold themselves accountable to achieve real change toward increased investments for Native youth?
- Plan for more strategic conversations within philanthropy that are sustained over time, for example, quarterly funders calls, periodic webinars, and more strategic conversations.
- Cultivate collective of funders that have a long-term commitment to supporting Native youth issues.
- Develop Native youth best practices bank to alleviate lack of data on Native youth. Funders and communities can both contribute to database of community-led solutions. Funders can share their successful approaches with one another.
- Build bridges and networks across movements, for example with Dreamers, Black Lives Matter, Indigenous Women Rise, and founders of the Women's March.
- Create a central information hub for funders, which can include national conference notes, reports, data, and can facilitate a learning community, including calls and webinars.
- Inspire more foundations to join Native Americans in Philanthropy.

## A Collaborative Network in Action: GENERATION INDIGENOUS

Launched by President Obama in 2014, the Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) initiative is a cross-sector call to action to strengthen resources to support Native youth and build platforms for their advocacy and leadership. Since its launch, Gen-I has engaged thousands of Native youth across the country and fostered new partnerships with a wide range of organizational and governmental partners.

President Obama launched Gen-I on the heels of his visit to the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Nation in North Dakota with First Lady Michelle Obama in June 2014. There, they met local youth who shared their struggles, as well as their inspiring stories of hope and determination. Upon their return to the White House, the President told his staff to “find new avenues of opportunity for our Native youth . . . [because] if we do, there’s no question of the great things they can achieve — not just for their own families but for their nation and for the United States.”<sup>i</sup> In De-

cember of that year, President Obama officially launched the Gen-I initiative at the White House Tribal Nations Conference and welcomed the first group of Gen-I Youth Ambassadors as part of the National Native Youth Network. The following summer, the White House organized the first ever White House Tribal Youth Gathering and grew the Gen-I Network by 1,000 Native youth who accepted the challenge to do something positive in their communities.

Although the administration has changed, Gen-I continues to thrive as a platform for Native youth across the country. The Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) manages the Gen-I National Native Youth Network, connecting and engaging more than 2,000 Gen-I Native youth across the country. CNAY is investing in new partnerships with other organizations to develop a sustainable and robust Native youth opportunity and resource network. CNAY’s collaboration with Native Americans in Philanthropy is one such partnership, leveraging the power of Gen-I and the Network to educate the philanthropic community about the challenges Native youth face, and the innovative community solutions they are leading. CNAY has developed similar collaborations with organizational partners that develop new Gen-I opportunities in science and engineering, professional development, the arts, communications, and other areas where we can leverage multiple organizational resources in innovative ways to support Native youth. Native Americans in Philanthropy has also been working to amplify the stories of Native youth across philanthropy as well. From hosting an event at the White House last year to holding regional convenings and funder tours that engage Native youth and provide a platform to share their experiences.

i. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/nativeamericans/generation-indigenous>



## Issue Spotlight: Health and Wellness<sup>vi</sup>

### What You Need to Know

- **Federal government trust responsibility.** The Indian Health Service (IHS) carries out the federal government's trust responsibility to provide federal health care services to Native populations. More than half of the Indian health programs are contracted or compacted from IHS and operated by the tribe or tribal organizations. The IHS directly operates 122 hospitals, health centers, health stations and school health centers, and assists tribes in managing 538 such facilities and Alaska Village clinics.
- **Historically underfunded healthcare.** The IHS estimates that historically, annual Congressional appropriations have only met 52 percent of American Indian and Alaska Natives' health care needs.
- **Lack of health insurance leads to health disparities.** About 24.1 percent of the Native population lack health insurance coverage and rely solely on the Indian health system. This is one factor leading to major health disparities among the American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) population, including:
  - Alcoholism mortality rates are **514** percent higher than the general population.
  - Native teens experience the highest rate of suicide of any population group in the United States.
  - Diabetes incidence is 177 percent higher, with the highest rate of type 2 diabetes of any specific population in the nation.
  - Tuberculosis incidence is **500** percent higher.
- **Violence is a leading cause of death.** Violence, including intentional injuries, homicide, and suicide account for 75 percent of deaths for AI/AN youth ages 12-20.

### What's At Stake for Native Youth?

- **ACA Repeal.** Repeal of the Affordable Care Act will jeopardize tribal health care, including care received by nearly 300,000 Native Americans through the Medicaid expansion. Additional budget cuts would cut \$23 million from human services.
- **IHS Crisis.** If the current budget proposal is accepted, the Indian Health Service (IHS) will face a certain crisis. IHS is already funded at only 52 percent of need.
- **Need for More Health Advocacy.** Native youth health is in a dangerous position. There is a need for expanded Native health policy advocates, as well as need to help educate lawmakers and the broader public through private foundation support.





## What Philanthropy Can Do

- **Be mindful of capacity constraints.** Philanthropy needs to understand that there is a spectrum of capacity when it comes to tribes and Native organizations. Funding must take into account the continuum of capacity support, including making funding mechanisms more streamlined and direct.
- **Leverage investments.** While foundations alone don't have the resources to solve all resource issues in tribal communities, philanthropy can be catalytic in piloting solutions, investing in systems change advocacy and organizing, and otherwise support Native controlled solutions that can be leveraged through other investments, economic development strategies and federal funding.
- **Educate peers.** Those in philanthropy are best positioned to educate their peers in philanthropy. Native peoples continuously educate about their communities and issues, but non-Native philanthropic leaders are needed to carry the message in philanthropic spaces as well.

“For our communities, healing is always based in re-connection, relationship, love. Philanthropy must work to heal the divide between institutions, in order to have money function as a tool of relationship/love rather than divisiveness, exploitation, power-hoarding.”

—Edgar Villanueva, Vice President of Programs and Advocacy,  
Schott Foundation for Public Education

### NOTES

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- iv. Gonzalez et al. (2016).
- v. All data for this section retrieved from the Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute's *Fast Facts on Native American Youth and Indian Country*. Available at <https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/images/Fast%20Facts.pdf>.
- vi. *Ibid.*



## Looking Toward the Future, Success Looks Like:

- Native people defining their own success.
- Youth leadership network and infrastructure is developed.
- There is collaboration and solidarity across Indigenous peoples and people of color.
- Community defined measures of success are being used, and not funder-driven measures.
- The base amount of funding for Native-led organizations increases from 0.3 percent to 2 percent, and there are mechanisms to effectively track this progress.
- There is more visibility for Native Americans at the table, from other fields and disciplines.
- More inclusive and intersectional grantmaking strategies are visible.
- Native work, including culture as prevention, is seen as a “best practice.”
- Positive youth success stories are shared and known widely.
- Native people are visible in mainstream philanthropy.
- Youth action research is supported.
- There are marked improvements in Native youth education, health and well-being statistics.
- A new cohort of leaders emerges and continues to cultivate future leadership pathways.

Every day, Native youth and communities demonstrate the ability to thrive and persevere despite historical, structural and institutional inequities. We appeal to philanthropy to invest in the strengths and assets of our communities, and stand ready to partner with us over the long term to reverse the historic under-investment in Native communities.

By working in partnership, funders believe that we will see Native communities make great strides in healing, restoration, and advancement of our greatest resource – our youth. Native youth have shown that they are invested in a better future – not just for Native people, but for all Americans. Philanthropy is hereby challenged to take the lead and invest in the power of their potential to create social change. *If you stand for justice in this country, we urge you to stand with and invest in Native youth.*

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