



NATIVE AMERICANS
IN PHILANTHROPY



GENERATION INDIGENOUS

#GenIndigenous

BRINGING
POWERFUL MINDS
TOGETHER

SUPPORTING THE
INDIGENOUS LIFECOURSE
TO STRENGTHEN THE HEALTH
AND WELLBEING OF NATIVE YOUTH

GENERATION INDIGENOUS



IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL EXPLOSION OF MINDS. Spread out on tables throughout the room were colorful rainbow mosaics of Post-Its and sticky notes. Young visionaries, front line and philanthropy leaders had come together to look for ways to dream, collaborate, partner, and strategize how to increase support for Native youth across the nation. This was the first in a series of visioning sessions as Native Americans in Philanthropy focuses on Native youth in philanthropic sector **#GenIndigenous**.

History was made on December 2014, when President Barack Obama launched Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) at the White House Tribal Nations Conference. The President's actions were an authentic and substantive response to a moving experience in which he and First Lady Michelle Obama had the privilege to hear the personal stories of Native youth of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North Dakota. These stories of resiliency, strength and determination in the face of extreme disparities and seemingly insurmountable barriers inspired the President to direct a government-wide focus on removing barriers to give Native Youth an equal chance at the American Dream.

This gathering, the first of three that Native Americans in Philanthropy has agreed to host resulted in a renewed energy, focus and commitment to the original goals of Gen-I. In this new era, is it doubly important that nonprofit and philanthropic leaders have now taken on the

leadership to continue this important initiative which has been improving the lives of Native youth through new investments and increased engagement, which utilizes a comprehensive, culturally appropriate approach to ensure all young Native people can reach their full potential. Native Americans in Philanthropy is welcoming foundations in the philanthropic sector to become more involved in the work, which includes the #GenIndigenous Fund, Regional Convenings and Funders Tours, and to join in on future Gen-I Visioning convenings.

During the Gen-I 2.0 Visioning session, several questions were considered:

→ **How can Native American communities and allies be more intentional in helping youth move from surviving to thriving?**

→ **What steps can we take to propel forward a youth-driven Generation Indigenous movement?**

WITH SUPPORT FROM

Casey Family Programs, the Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) and United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY), Native Americans in Philanthropy brought together the key organizations, which included: WeRNative, AISES, American Indian College Fund, First Peoples Fund, The California Endowment, True North, Native Youth Leadership Alliance, Running Strong for Native Youth, National Compadres Network, American Indian Child Resource Center, Sundance Institute, Native Cultures Fund, True North, and the International Indigenous Youth Council. Many other organizations participated remotely, including the Obama Foundation.

Exploring such questions is the goal of this report by Native Americans in Philanthropy, which, like other partners, responded to Generation Indigenous (or “Gen-I”) by supporting youth through raising funds and visibility.

The strong and inspiring youth voices in the room made it clear that they want to participate meaningfully in this work and be a part of formulating the strategy behind it. They believe that Gen-I is a manifestation of ancient prayers in a number of areas, including language revitalization, health, sports, health and healing. It provides them with hope and an important support network, and they are eager to learn more about philanthropy as they deepen their engagement.

In a way, those in the room were just following the call of Chief Sitting Bull: “Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children.” New insights can come from sharing our best ideas, thereby capitalizing on diversity of all kinds. Beyond thinking, unifying our hearts can also yield spiritual energy that has exponential, transformational power.

That **spirit** was what Native young people unchained at Standing Rock, where Sitting Bull’s gravesite overlooks the Missouri River. In 2016-17, many tribes and allies came together to protect that water, protesting construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline to carry oil beneath the river. With the whole world watching, **the non-violent action became an explosively powerful expression of indigeneity** – of respect for the environment, of core tribal values in loving and supporting one another, and of sacred shared spirit.

Standing Rock woke up something. And it was Native youth sounding the call. By bringing together grassroots people from across the country, they found a collective power that was not necessarily a new creation. It was the contemporary expression of ancient cultural beliefs, channeled from places deep within people and place, that brought together a movement of movements, inspired by, and advocating for, Native Americans.

IN THIS REPORT

- **Overview of the Generation Indigenous movement today**
- **Understanding Indigenous development of youth, families and communities**
- **Supporting the movement through an Indigenous Lifecourse framework**
- **Considering culturally grounded protective factors along the Indigenous Lifecourse**
- **Case studies of Indigenous youth programs addressing the protective factors**
- **Reflections for funder partners to consider**

UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES WITHIN A HEALING WORLDVIEW



IN 2018, NATIVE AMERICANS IN PHILANTHROPY IDENTIFIED A UNIFYING THEME FOR ITS ANNUAL INSTITUTE: “THE MOVEMENT OF MOVEMENTS: THE HEALING WORLDVIEW OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES.”

Understanding this relational worldview – which is based on a concept that everything is related – provides a foundation for the development of Native individuals as well as communities. The worldview is based on collectivist-orientation rather than individualist values, with Native and non-Native advocates from across the spectrum working together to shift the country’s social dynamics towards equity and advancement. In the worldview, healing is much the same as learning, growing and leading.

It is about human development. The Lakota word for children means “sacred beings,” and Indigenous culture puts supremacy on individual autonomy. Acknowledging each person and offering her respect are significant values. Listening equitably to every voice (as in a talking circle) can pay both individual and collective dividends.

Sacred children are raised to discover their own positive core and find their own path, an empowering child-centered approach that uses gentle guidance rather than punitive direction. Teachers are balanced and centered, humble co-learners with youth. In this way, talents emerge organically and learning takes on deep personal meaning.

At the same time, a child’s identity is tied inextricably to family and extended family. Through relationships, a child finds safety, support to grow and, over time, opportunity to lead. In the interdependent collective, everyone is a leader with a role to fulfill. Sustaining this collective – and the relationships that define it - is the actual practice of such core values as giving and helping. Youth learn the values by observing this family ecosystem.

The healing worldview forms a foundation for sustainable development. Individuals are empowered to find their best selves, which maximizes all strengths and encourages creativity. Then people apply those gifts in order to support the community’s well-being.

There is a delicate dance between each autonomous individual and the collective, which has its own shared power and wisdom. Strong relationships and core values keep the circle strong. Picture a circle, consisting of individuals. The circle represents the family or community, and it can resemble a bird’s nest. In the nest, relatives do not break the eggs, but instead take turns



INDIGENOUS STUDENTS DISPLAY INVENTIONS FOR 3M COMPANY ENGINEERS AT THE 2014 AMERICAN INDIAN SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING CONFERENCE.

nurturing them. Indigenous leadership development, then, is about being a good parent (or a good relative) to one another. Through reciprocal, side-by-side support, the circle stays strong; and the eggs hatch into soaring birds, each representing new skills and dreams. As youth find their wings, others step back and allow them to lead and flourish. The circle reaches its fullest sense of sovereignty. Circles of circles become movements, all using the same operating framework: a healing, relational worldview.

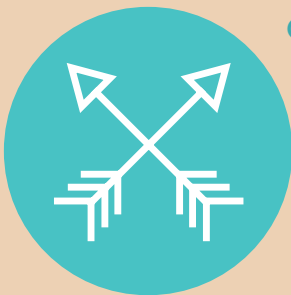
This is Indigenous philosophy, movement philosophy, and human development philosophy all wrapped into one — how individuals as well as collectives fulfill their potential. Healthy Indigenous people want to share their gifts within the circle. The circle's keepers do not try to control everything: if they just maintain the relationships, the empowering process will yield positive results. Like a process that emphasizes the process as much as the product, nurturing the circle is the work of Indigenous development.

From system to institution to community and to individual, there is a kind of parallel practice at each level: acknowledge every person and nurture the circle in order to yield new insights and energy. For even those Native institutions working at levels of systems or higher, there can be a strong pull to serve grassroots stakeholders, making their circle as inclusive as possible.

“LIVING A GOOD LIFE” IN AN INDIGENOUS LIFECOURSE, WITH CULTURALLY RELEVANT PROTECTIVE FACTORS

In a worldview that assumes a sacred and positive core, strength-based approaches flow naturally. There is an array of assets on which to build, and Native practitioners have long chafed at narrowly framed, deficit-based models. Working with Indigenous scholars,* Native Americans in Philanthropy has identified key assets supporting the development of individuals, families and communities. Social services practitioners might call the assets “protective factors” that are a source of strength and resiliency in facing difficulties. The Indigenous Lifecourse is different as it was developed by Indigenous Researchers with an asset based lens.

For the individual youth, one’s journey of growth moves along an Indigenous Lifecourse, from pre-birth through adulthood and elderhood. Across this lifecourse, protective factors relate to individuals, families and communities in interconnected ways. The protective factors themselves are embedded within the cultural worldview and its interrelationships:



CULTURAL CONNECTEDNESS

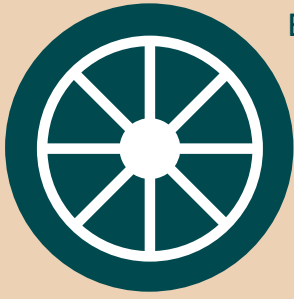
This is the foundation for growth and development that assumes a positive core in both Native youth and their culture. While boarding school generations were forced to disavow culture, youth today are hungry to know who they are.



FAMILY CONNECTEDNESS

Parents are the first teachers, and youth need a firm sense of security and support from which to develop and grow. Individuals define their full selves not alone but in the context of family relationships.

*Doctors Rosalee Gonzalez (Arizona State University), Michael Yellow Bird (North Dakota State University) and Karina Walters (University of Washington) developed an initial framework for protective factors and strength-based determinants of development. See the 2016 Native Americans in Philanthropy report *The Indigenous Lifecourse: Strengthening the health and well-being of Native youth*.



EXTENDED FAMILY, KINSHIP AND NETWORKS

By nature, Native families are extended families. In the cultural way, a child considers her mother's sister as a second mother. "Cousins" are brothers and sisters. Helping each other in the extended family is a predominant cultural norm. Clan roles also can drive behavior.



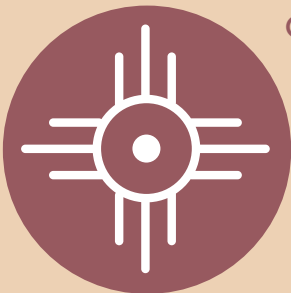
YOUTH SELF-EFFICACY

From within their positive core, youth find their gifts and skills. Accomplishment leads to confidence, and sharing their gifts within the circle increases a sense of fulfillment. In order to increase this sense of giving, youth take more positive risks (i.e., learning opportunities) that increase their skill and knowledge base.



HEALTHY TRADITIONAL FOOD

Natives once were very healthy people who thrived on plants and animals of Indigenous lands they had come to know over centuries. In the shift to post-conquest diets, Natives experienced high rates of obesity and diabetes. While good nutrition is critical, the connection to traditional foods reinforces the importance of "food as medicine" feeding the body, mind and spirit.



COMMUNITY CONTROL

The instinctive human urge to be in control of one's destiny extends to communities and tribal nations, which put supreme value in self-determination. Having a sense of ownership increases buy-in to new ideas and solutions. In addition to their programs and institutions, Native communities also seek to control their land and natural resources.



SPIRITUALITY AND CEREMONIES

Similar to Native language, ceremonies are the cultural expression of the worldview and of its interrelationships – among people, all living things and other dimensions. Ceremonies take on many forms, including everyday practice like touching the ground as part of prayer. Healing and addressing trauma in all its forms is a significant need in Native communities.



The Indigenous Lifecourse is not unlike the framework of “lifespan development” familiar to health experts. That is a wide area of interest spanning from pregnancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and beyond – health, development and well-being over the lifespan. In both frameworks, what happens to children early in life has ramifications for how they live as adults. In order to thrive, people need access to such other determinants of health as basic physical needs (e.g., shelter, clothing, medical care access), safety (e.g., fear from violence), and adequate incomes and sustainable economies. The Indigenous Lifecourse is different as it was developed by Indigenous Researchers with an asset based lens.

In the Indigenous Lifecourse, the phases of life not only build on one another but also involve cultural rites of passage and ceremonies. These represent stepping stones as well as teachings. The Ojibwe term **Mino-bimaadiziwin** refers to living this “good life.” The Diné people refer to a traditional living system, **Sa’ah Naagháí Bik’eh Hózhóón**, which places human life in harmony with the natural world and universe.

The Lifecourse springs from a tribe’s “Original Instructions” – the many diverse teaching, lessons, and ethics expressed in the origin stories and oral traditions. In a 2016 Native Americans in Philanthropy overview on the Indigenous Lifecourse, this is how the authors further described Original Instructions:

*Native American cultures think primarily in terms of **space** and Western Europeans think in terms of **time**...Native Americans understand the world and the meaning of life in terms of nature, and nature and space are indissociably linked to thought and experience. This worldview orients Natives spatial concepts of natural cycles—*

seasons, harvesting cycles, moon patterns, etc. Native Americans, therefore, see their responsibility as living in harmonious and balanced relation with all creation, including other tribes and racial/ethnic communities. In contrast, Western Europeans understand the world and the meaning of life in terms of history and tend to orient their life towards the future, towards goals, destiny and original purpose. That worldview reflects temporal concepts of development (and colonization).

In the lifecourse of too many Native youth, one sees ruptures – the impact of childhood and historical trauma on healthy development. Such historical trauma as the impact of boarding schools caused generations of Native people to disavow their language and identity. Punished for speaking their language, children stopped doing so; and, as parents, did not pass it on to their own children. Culture was seen as inferior and school was not a positive experience for many people. Some cultural practices – such as the Ghost Dance on the Plains and the hula in Hawaii – were literally outlawed by the Government.

Compounding the lack of cultural connectedness as a source of resiliency, many Native youth experience weakened bonds of family and extended family due to abuse, addiction and violence (all contemporary manifestations of historical trauma). Studies show correlation between trauma occurring in childhood (or “Adverse Childhood Experiences”) and later rates of abusive/violent behavior, addiction or even poor chronic health outcomes, as adults. As brain science and epigenetics are beginning to demonstrate specific links between trauma and neurobiological development, more service providers are asking “What happened to that person?” rather than “What’s wrong with that person?”

Citing more studies showing intergenerational transmission of trauma, an author of the Native Americans in Philanthropy report on Indigenous Lifecourse calls for “neurodecolonization” of Indigenous people, through traditional ceremonies to train the mind and change the brain’s capacity to heal from trauma.

“We recognize now that what our people did in traditional contemplative practices activates particular parts of the brain,” says Michael Yellow Bird, MSW, Ph.D, of North Dakota State University.. “When youth are exposed to spiritual meaning, it activates (that part of the brain where)...they see more compassion.... We need to have knowledge of our epigenetic inheritance. It’s really disrupted lives.”

Such a shift involves a return to the healing Indigenous worldview that is based on interrelationships among people, all living things and higher powers.



YOUTH MARK MILESTONES ALONG THEIR INDIGENOUS LIFECOURSE. UPON GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL IN 2017, FOSTER COURNOYER-HOGAN RECEIVED AN EAGLE FEATHER FROM HIS FAMILY.

GENERATION INDIGENOUS: NATIVE YOUTH LEADERS ARE RISING

IN THE LAST DECADE, THERE HAS BEEN A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY NATIONWIDE AIMED AT IMPROVING THE LIVES OF NATIVE YOUTH, DEVELOPING A NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS, SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND MOVEMENT BUILDING, AND AMPLIFYING NATIVE VOICES CALLING FOR CHANGE.

Native protests have grown over such issues as environmental degradation and loss of treaty rights. More communities have successfully persuaded municipalities to recognize Indigenous Peoples Day (sometimes supplanting Columbus Day). More schools are giving up their Indian warrior mascots. More Natives are running for public office. More non-Native advocacy groups are recognizing, connecting with and including Natives in their work.

A spark came with recognition that Native communities are very young. Young people age 24 and younger make up 42 percent of the total Native population. (By contrast, 34 percent of the total U.S. population is of a similar age.) Native youth are a critical mass, which President Barack Obama observed first-hand in a 2014 visit to the Standing Rock Reservation.

Native youth today are wrestling with the impacts and long-term effects of genocide and historical trauma. They face unusually high rates of addiction, suicide, health disparities, low academic achievement, suspension, expulsion, domestic violence, gender violence and sexual assault, human trafficking, incarceration and family separation. These issues can be seen early on as children experience racial and gender- or sexuality-based teasing, bullying, and unhealthy dynamics at school and in homes impacted by trauma. Native teens experience the highest rate of

suicide of any population group in the U.S. In 2009, the Centers for Disease Control reported startling 31 percent rates of obesity in Native children – a rate higher than that of any racial or ethnic group.

By 2015, the White House held the inaugural Tribal Youth Gathering in Washington, DC, for 1,000 young people representing some 230 different tribes. Many youth in attendance had accepted a “Gen-I Challenge” to create positive change among their peers and within their communities by volunteering, initiating projects or becoming mentors for other youth.

Various organizations pledged to a similar challenge in providing tangible support and opportunities for youth networking. Organizations identified exemplary Native youth champions and ambassadors whose stories of service could inspire others. Tribal youth ambassadors were incorporated into the annual White House Tribal Nations Conferences. (Involving all 660-plus sovereign tribal governments, the conferences formalized a nation-to-nation governing status between tribes and the U.S. Government.)

Seeking resources for youth-focused efforts, Native Americans in Philanthropy took funders to Standing Rock and, later, made a funders tour to Native communities in Northern California. Tribes appreciate visits to their territories, allowing them to show off both strengths and challenges as well as building relationships that are fundamental to effective partnership. The tours fostered increased understanding and connection between funders and tribes that resulted in a number of positive outcomes including over \$1.25 million in awards and grants by the Wallace Global Fund to the Standing Rock Tribe.

FOSTERING FIRST-HAND LEARNING AND FUNDING PARTNERSHIPS

The first funders tour of the Generation Indigenous movement went to Standing Rock in October 2016, for a first-hand look at the sprawling effort to resist the Dakota Access Pipeline. Visitors saw the campsites housing activists, visited with water protectors (preferred over the term protestor) and met with Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault, Jr. Visitors saw how the voluntary organization was managing communication, coordination and donations to sustain the camps. The tour began with Lakota songs from children participating in a language immersion program.

In 2017, Native Americans in Philanthropy and The California Endowment organized a visit for funders to Northern California in order to see programmatic needs and opportunities in Native communities there. At an opening dinner in Smith River, the Tolowa Dee-ni’ Nation chairman welcomed visitors to tribal lands. A boat ride on the Klamath River highlighted its ecological and cultural significance to the Yurok people, including struggles between the Yurok and federal government over usage rights, restrictions and the river’s health. During the visit, the Endowment showcased an initiative involving Native and non-Native partners focused on developing a model for a healthy rural community. Other sessions addressed food sovereignty, education equity, youth media and youth organizing activities under Generation Indigenous.

In 2016, Native Americans in Philanthropy co-organized a funders convening on Native youth at the White House that examined Native-led and Native-driven promising practices in serving Native youth. Key philanthropy partners included Casey Family Programs, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Philanthropy Northwest, Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers and CHANGE Philanthropy.

In the wake of the convening and tours, Native Americans in Philanthropy established a fund to provide meaningful support to organizations serving Native youth. Grants from the Gen-I Response Fund are described below. The fund builds on the impact of an existing fund for advocacy and justice, Native Voice Rising, on which Native Americans in Philanthropy partners with Common Counsel Foundation. That effort has awarded more than \$600,000 in grants since 2013.

In late 2017, the Native Americans in Philanthropy, the Center for Native American Youth (CNAY), and the United National Indian Tribal Youth, inc., (UNITY) co-hosted a visioning convening with many non-profit leaders who work with Native youth for the first time since the Obama Administration. This visionary meeting was the first of several convenings planned to bring the leaders in Indian Country together to build the bigger vision of supporting Native youth with Native Americans in Philanthropy's focus on philanthropic sector.

That initial convening for "Generation Indigenous Visioning" was an opportunity for participants to network and increase their communication and coordination in seeking a common vision to support Native youth. Attendees highlighted key benefits of the Generation Indigenous movement:

- **"Inspired action to create change. Gives youth hope and a support network. Shifts focus on deficiency models to what's working."**
- **"Shines a light on Native youth on a national level. Including both disparities and innovations, strengths and young leaders. The needs are lifted up including the disparity of philanthropic funding in Indian Country. The Gen-I map makes it easy for youth to see one another."**
- **"Grassroots youth organizations are still moving forward with the initiative both internally and externally."**
- **"A demonstration that ancient prayers are coming true including language revitalization, health and healing, and sports."**
- **"Gen-I has given Native American youth an opportunity develop their leadership, lead organizing activities, determine for themselves priority issues, messaging and ultimately help their communities."**

CNAY coordinates the Generation Indigenous Native Youth Network to provide a sustainable platform to connect, engage, and provide opportunities for Native youth. The network enables the exchange of resources ranging from attainment of higher education to career opportunities,



DAKOTA LANGUAGE LEARNERS AT LOWER SIOUX INDIAN COMMUNITY, WHICH IS LAUNCHING A NEW PRESCHOOL LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAM.

professional networking and community initiative development. Annually identifying young Native leaders who are “champions for change,” CNAY also provides a platform to elevate Native youth voices into the national dialogue.

More recently, CNAY is launching an effort to expand Native leadership capacity for age 18-24 year olds so they can secure a Native seat at the table with other major youth-driven movements, such as the one gun control that followed the high school shootings in Parkland, Florida. A separate CNAY project is to bring together Native youth from rural and urban areas in the region. Even though the youth will meet in four cities, the Fresh Tracks Action initiative will use the local outdoors environment as a platform for the youth to find common ground. The cities are Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and another to be determined.

The mission of the national Native youth organization UNITY is to foster the spiritual, mental, physical, and social development of American Indian and Alaska Native youth and to help build a strong, unified and self-reliant Native America through greater youth involvement. UNITY sponsors a large annual conference attended by upward of 2000 youth who serve on UNITY youth councils in Native communities across the country. UNITY provides other opportunities for leadership through its executive committee and such initiatives as “earth ambassadors.”

In Minnesota, hundreds of Indigenous youth are to gather at a first-ever statewide event, hosted by Governor Mark Dayton in July 2018. To become eligible to attend the Minnesota Tribal Youth Gathering, youth ages 14-24 complete the Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) Challenge, a pledge to make a positive difference in their communities. Youth are encouraged to document their projects and share their stories through social media. At the event, youth will discuss common concerns and interests, as well as strategies in addressing them.

NATIVE AMERICANS IN PHILANTHROPY RESPONDS TO GENERATION INDIGENOUS: A GEN-I RESPONSE FUND IS CREATED



JUST LIKE STANDING ROCK WOKE A COLLECTIVE POWER THAT WAS ALREADY PRESENT IN THE HEARTS OF YOUTH IF NOT WITHIN THE INDIGENOUS LAND AND WATER, NATIONAL NATIVE LEADERS ARE CONVINCED TODAY THAT NATIVE YOUTH LEADERS JUST NEED A PLATFORM FROM WHICH THEY CAN LAUNCH DREAMS THAT ARE ALL BUT “SHOVEL-READY.”

Initial efforts sought to increase visibility of “Champions for Change” like Dakota Brown, who was named in the first cohort named by CNAI in 2013. Along with his brother, Dahltan, Brown founded Native Education Raising Dedicated Students (NERDS), which works to decrease the dropout rate of Native high school students by improving grades and making up required credits. NERDS claims a 100 percent graduation rate for its youth. In a peer-run summer school, students take online courses to stay on track to graduate. Other programming includes mentoring with sober, educated role models, talking circles and cultural gatherings. NERDS sponsors an annual college awareness and preparation conference (held in 2017 in Jackson, California, for some 250 youth), which is the largest youth-run gathering of its kind in the state.

In 2017, NERDS received a grant from the Gen-I Response Fund, one of 23 such awards from Native Americans in Philanthropy for a range of diverse activities to promote youth voice and advocacy, community organizing, language and culture, networking and sharing, youth-elder exchange, and youth self-efficacy/education.

With **cultural connectedness** a critical protective factor, language and culture-based efforts were major components of at least half of the grants. At a high school located near the original resistance camp at Standing Rock, students are using buffalo hair in new and traditional art forms. Indigenous language represents the fullest expression of tribal values and Original Instructions. On the Crow Reservation in Montana, the Crow Language



PACIFIC NORTHWEST INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES MAKE AN ANNUAL CANOE JOURNEY, TRAVELING MULTIPLE WEEKS TO A HOST TRIBAL SITE FOR CEREMONY AND CELEBRATION.

Consortium is holding a three-week summer language camp at Little Big Horn College in 2018. Native youth are part of a California Indian Museum and Cultural Center project to revitalize the Pomo language, with youth “ambassadors” engaging language speakers and other community members in developing a geographic story map of Pomo place names and improving use of digital media language learning tools.

A grant to the International Traditional Games Society seeks to increase support in Montana public schools for tribal traditions and art forms such as Native dance, foods and traditional games. In 1999, Montana passed the Indian Education for All Act, which sought to implement the state’s constitutional mandate to “recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and...(commitment) in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity.”

The project supports Blackfeet high school students in exploring ways to full express their language, culture and customs through extra-curricular activities. Leading development of K-12 curriculum, tribal colleges created the Games Society, which is considering such sports as doubleball, lacrosse and hand games; music; art; dance; oral tradition; and expression of gathering, preparing, and storage of traditional foods.

Some projects are examining lessons from history and elders. In North Carolina, more than 200 Lumbee tribal youth are visiting sacred Indian burial grounds, identifying existing markers and considering the relevance of such history to contemporary times. At United American Indian Involvement (the largest provider of human and health services to Native families living in Los Angeles County) and in Spokane, Washington, projects focus on elder-youth exchange. The Native Youth Council of Spokane is taking a more prominent leadership role in a community powwow celebration by recognizing the contribution of elders. Although elders are held in high community regard as a general rule, youth want to give them more formal recognition by sponsoring special dances and honorings.



JEANETTE FAYE GEORGE IS CHAIR OF THE YAKAMA NATION YOUTH COUNCIL,
A VEHICLE FOR YOUTH VOICE AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.

Several Gen-I Response Fund grantees promote positive Native identity, youth voice and advocacy. In Seattle, Red Eagle Soaring seeks to empower American Indian and Alaskan Native youth through the performing arts, to build their confidence and clarity of expression. Spotlighting youth, the group stages such plays as “The Boy Who Became A Bear” as well as regular workshops.

In San Diego, a social justice organization seeks to engage college-age Native young people and youth from the Rincon Band of Luiseno Indians in spoken word and media arts programming. LIT (Leaders Igniting Transformation) is a youth of color-led coalition in Milwaukee seeking to engage Native youth in its campaigns to dismantle systemic racial inequity. Focusing on people most impacted by systemic issues, LIT supports more Native youth storytelling and community engagement.

In South Dakota, the Native American Community Board is engaging tribal youth in existing efforts to raise awareness of sexual violence and promote positive reproductive health. In New England, youth are planning a special youth day at a gathering of Native people who identify as two-spirit (or LGBTQ) and their allies.

Concerned about the violation of First Amendment rights of the water protectors at Standing Rock, Native Public Media envisions “First Amendment Protectors.” With training in freedom of expression rights, Native youth and young adults can “harness the power of media and raise narratives based on truth, analysis and hope.”

A handful of projects are sponsoring training in advocacy and community organizing. UNITY is providing special training to 12 youth leaders of the national organization’s executive committee to engage their local communities in solutions regarding a common challenge. Past initiatives have targeted violence against women, suicide prevention and anti-bullying.

In San Antonio, American Indians in Texas is engaging urban Native young people and youth



SIBERIAN YUPIK TEEN AGRAGIQ "CHRIS" APASSINGOK IS HONORED FOR HIS SUBSISTENCE HUNTING PRACTICE BY ALASKA'S GOVERNOR AND LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR AT THE 2017 FIRST ALASKANS INSTITUTE ELDER'S AND YOUTH CONFERENCE.

of the Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nation in its Warrior Roots community organizing training camp. In Alaska, Native Movement is conducting a two-day youth training session on organizing and direct action tactics for political change in partnership with Native Peoples Action, a 501c4 nonprofit organization. Facing numerous oil drilling and mining interests across the state, the partners target environmental/climate justice campaigns as well as promote Alaska Native peoples and such traditional lifeways as subsistence harvesting.

The nonprofit organization Honor The Earth has sought to expand a group of youth "climate interveners" in the public process opposing the Enbridge Line 3 pipeline in northern Minnesota, developing curriculum and a training process to engage school-age youth statewide. Based on the White Earth Reservation, Honor The Earth seeks to ground its work in an Anishinaabe worldview of positive thinking, *Ji misawaabandaaming*, or "how we envision our future."

Such perspectives are part of other projects promoting leading and healing. The Phoenix Indian Center is sponsoring a well-known engagement process called the Gathering of Native Americans to help youth and community members examine the impact of historical trauma. Various programming of the New Mexico organization Diné Introspective – family circles, men's circles and women's circles – addresses the need to strengthen **family connectedness** as a resilient protective factor.



IN ALBUQUERQUE, NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY OFFERS STUDENTS LIKE ZOE SLOAN CALLAN EXTRA TIME FOR ARTS AND CULTURE ACTIVITIES DURING AND AFTER SCHOOL.

THE CHALLENGE TO PHILANTHROPY: SUPPORT NATIVE LED PROGRAMMING THAT CULTIVATES WHAT WORKS: PROTECTIVE FACTORS THROUGH AN ASSET BASED LENS

IT IS TIME TO END THE DEFICIT-BASED AND COLONIAL PERSPECTIVES AND BEGIN TO LIFT UP THE INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW AS A SOURCE TO SUPPORT THE STRENGTH, RESILIENCE, AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS THAT STRENGTHEN THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF NATIVE YOUTH AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES.

Working and living this way requires people to believe in each other. To see their sacredness and promise. Guided by shared values such as reciprocity and humility, leaders keep the circle strong so that more eaglets hatch from the nest, soaring into their personal sovereignty. Lifted by all those wings, the tribal nation enjoys its own sovereignty and self-determination.

Funding partners seeking to impact youth outcomes can invest in the assets along the Indigenous Lifecourse and in the collectivist process that keeps the circle strong. Indigenous youth are hungry to know who they are, and practitioners want to “re-indigenize” programming with culture thoroughly integrated. Funders can invest in the capacity of community-rooted entities that are doing promising work, and that — with investment — can do even more. Partners can help bring leaders together to

share and learn about what's working. They can invest in intermediaries and networks that seek to expand the circles for greater impact.

In about 2010, Northwest Area Foundation and the Foundation for Community Vitality in Montana underwent a process to engage funders and Native leaders to define partnerships based on mutual understanding. Some 20 funders developed a set of principles and values, while examining "gaps and misconceptions, develop a far-reaching vision, and outline a long-term framework for grantmaking in Native communities." (The effort is described in a 2012 report by Philanthropy Northwest, *Journey into Indian Country*.)

Many of the principles and values reflect an understanding of the Indigenous philosophy of human development - how individuals, groups and communities can thrive. They reflect the relational Indigenous worldview and even make space for the emergence of spirit. Like the culturally grounded protective factors, the values reflect the philosophy that all people have gifts that can contribute to the full potential of the group. With trust, support and a long view, honoring the Indigenous circle process can yield powerful results.

PRINCIPLES FOR FUNDER-NATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

- **Engage in and encourage long-term relationships that are contextual to the community of focus.**
- **Trust that the community knows best for its current and future vitality, and respect their right to act as they choose.**
- **Leadership is a primary need for progress, should be authentic within the community, and sustained by the community.**
- **The nature and form of our relationships will promote truth and transparency as we learn and grow together.**
- **Be committed to collaboratively realizing our full potential while demonstrating that each person has a place in community vitality; we are in relationship with each other and the world around us.**
- **No participant is without wealth that should be shared with each other, so our collective wealth will resolve our collective poverty.**
- **A vision is a journey that has not happened, which will be different than conceived, is better experienced in relationship with others, and requires the community to achieve success.**

VALUES FOR FUNDER-NATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

- Be mindful of tribal sovereignty and value the uniqueness of each tribe.
- Seek to understand Native culture and customs.
- Appreciate Native intelligence and embrace affirmative, asset-based frameworks.
- Deepen understanding of shared values.
- Build long-term, reciprocal relationships based on respect, trust, honor and humility.
- Invest for the long-term; be patient and willing to take risks.
- Be willing to recast what success looks like and use a Native lens to do so.

There are considerations for funders, too, relative specifically to the protective factors identified by Native Americans in Philanthropy that support the healthy development of individuals, families and communities.



CULTURAL CONNECTEDNESS Just as not all Indigenous youth are fully connected to their cultural identity and practices, relatively few Native programs have had an opportunity to fully ground their programming in cultural perspectives and such teachings as Original Instructions. Many have sought – not always successfully – to add Indigenous touches to programs imported from dominant sectors. Native youth programs are hungry to know what works, in terms of strength-based perspectives relative to culture and protective factors rather than deficits. Youth practitioners need space and support for learning, reflection and adaptation, as well as data collection and analysis. Culture (in all its forms – from “big C” Ceremony to “little C” cultural values) must be embedded in the ground floor of programming - not become an add-on.



FAMILY CONNECTEDNESS Many interventions target individual youth who may receive helpful services. However, youth go home to environments that may reinforce negative attitudes or behavior. Therefore, dual generation approaches, serving youth as well as parents/caregivers, are critical. The Fort Peck Tribe in Montana no longer refers to youth programs; instead, they are “family programs.” With the impact of trauma, many parents have not learned their child-rearing roles or responsibilities to teach cultural values. Individualist-oriented approaches seem to have less promise than do holistic, collectivist-oriented ones.



EXTENDED FAMILY, KINSHIP AND NETWORKS Native people are relational, and nurturing relationships is a required precursor to conducting business. Honoring relationships is the work. At home and work, relationships are part of an Indigenous ecosystem. When Native communities and organizations do function effectively, it is not uncommon for their stakeholders to act like extended family – even when they are unrelated by blood. Core cultural values (i.e., “family values”) such as responsibility and reciprocity guide behavior. The primacy of relationships in Native settings is similar to a youth development adage: youth don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.



YOUTH SELF-EFFICACY Generally speaking, Native youth are experiential, hands-on learners. They typically observe, try together with a teacher, try alone, reflect, and then adapt for next time. Youth need space and resources to explore and try – fancy tools, virtual spaces, arts and spoken word that can demonstrate their creativity and give them confidence to take more positive risks. All youth programs seek to increase the capacity of individual youth. However, too few have the necessary resources to deliver truly individualized opportunities that maximize development. Because taking positive risks and getting out of one’s comfort zone is learning, diverse programs seeking similar goals could make unusual linkages (e.g., outdoors adventure and youth entrepreneurship).



HEALTHY TRADITIONAL FOOD Good nutrition is vital for everyone. A growing number of Native youth initiatives are targeting healthy eating and drinking, and active living. Some entities have adopted healthy beverage policies. However, culture advocates say that while drinking more water or growing a garden is positive, it is insufficient. They maintain Native people also need to return to their Indigenous foods and plants traditions - rooted in tribal homelands - in order to be fully healthy. Encompassing more than physical wellness, these traditions also involve spirituality and practice of such values as feeding other people and caring for the land.



COMMUNITY CONTROL Ideas as well as institutions (e.g., tribal college and universities) that enjoy community ownership can thrive and become more sustainable. However, Native communities have a history of mandates by the U.S. Government, churches and funders about how to conduct their affairs. Such outside approaches have been adopted wholesale, and many if not most have failed to deliver positive outcomes. Tribes are working to reclaim lost homelands – due to broken treaties and to such government policies as land allotment – and to regain control of their natural resources.



SPIRITUALITY AND CEREMONIES Culture includes worldview and beliefs, but it also involves practice. The beliefs are expressed through Native language and daily practices (both simple daily lifeways and others more ritualistic in nature). Youth learn by doing, and passing on cultural knowledge to youth is challenging without the experience of active practice. In terms of healing and wellness, more state governments are providing medical reimbursement for some ceremonial practices in addressing substance abuse and mental health.

CASE STUDY

PROJECT VENTURE CREATING A CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM OF SUPPORT



IN A CLASSROOM AT CRAZY HORSE SCHOOL ON THE OGLALA LAKOTA NATION, YOUTH CIRCLE UP FOR “FACETIME.” They pass a message person to person, to see how it evolves through a dozen exchanges. (In the version known as “Telephone,” the message is whispered.) Here, youth pass a facial expression in turn, privately, with each person trying to duplicate it for the next.

Laughter fills the room. The point of this interactive lesson is how complicated communication can be, especially when many people are involved. Another lesson is how – with today’s technology – the intended meaning of communication can take twists and turns across social media.

The circle is guided by young adults from **PROJECT VENTURE**, a youth development program invited by the school to support its middle-grades students in their own positive Indigenous identity as well as how they relate to others. While much school focus is on teaching to academic standards, Project Venture helps address non-cognitive skills like group cohesiveness and youth confidence and motivation.

“You’re trying to give them that motivational push,” says Thomas Yellow Cloud. “Even get them to that line to try the activity, whether it’s the jump rope or anything. Just try.”

Moving to the cafeteria, the adults twirl a long rope, which bounces off the floor in rhythmic waves. Youth try to run through without touching it - individually at first, then in pairs and, finally, in groups.

“If they don’t succeed, that’s ok,” says Yellow Cloud. “One of our guiding principles, one of our values, is ‘letting go and moving on.’ (By trying)...they can succeed and know that they can overcome certain challenges, whether it’s at school or at home.”

It requires blending encouragement and patience. On this day – right before a three-day holiday weekend – the kids are wound up. Youth and school staff members greet the outsiders knowingly, and the school cook insists on offering lunch. These are positive signs – because strong relationships are so significant in effectively engaging youth, not

to mention earning appreciation of busy school workers. In Indigenous communities, such relationship-building usually comes first, before one eases into formal business.

“Give them that time, sit there and wait for a while,” says Celeste Yazzie, a Project Venture coordinator who has helped local adults implement Project Venture at Crazy Horse and three other Oglala Lakota sites. “(Youth cannot) be pushed...right then and there. Allow them to be loud, to do what it is they need to do. When it’s kind of winding down, they engage. It’s important to have that space to do that – (and know that) ‘it’s our time.’”



CREATING A POSITIVE CLIMATE

In Lakota tradition, there is great respect for the autonomy of individuals. In fact, the Lakota word for children is **wakanyeja**, or sacred beings. Crazy Horse School’s mission is to “provide a sacred environment for students to achieve academic, Lakota language and cultural excellence.” It speaks not only to deep respect for youth but also to the importance of a supportive environment with the right climate.

Enter Project Venture, which is working with Indigenous youth in 70 sites in the United States and Canada. Project Venture aims to develop social and emotional competence in middle-grades youth, through grant-funded supplemental student services in schools, alternative schools, treatment centers, diversion programs or camps. There is culturally grounded group development, service learning and outdoor adventure activities – all offered through a strengths-based, experiential learning process that aligns with Indigenous culture. Project Venture focuses on both individual growth and group growth, creating a positive climate in which youth can thrive.

“It’s all positive, which came in advice from talking to elders over a long period of time,” says Mac Hall, executive director of the National Indian Youth Leadership Project (NIYLP), which runs Project Venture. “Elders said keep our program positive with everybody, even the most hard-core kids that are in a treatment center....You still have to approach them with that respect and treat them in a positive way, and it works....We get amazing results in substance abuse prevention, teen pregnancy prevention, suicide prevention.”

Hall knows this because of extensive evaluation of Project Venture over nearly 30 years with government funding targeting prevention of negative attitudes and behavior. In 2009, the National Registry of Effective Programs and Practices based at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) recognized Project Venture as the first



Native American program to achieve evidenced-based status in the area of substance abuse prevention. Furthermore, First Nations Behavioral Health Association has identified Project Venture as a “best practice.” A SAMHSA Registry overview describes it this way:

Project Venture is an outdoor experiential youth development program designed primarily for 5th- to 8th-grade American Indian youth. It aims to develop the social and emotional competence that facilitates youths’ resistance to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. Based on traditional American Indian values such as family, learning from the natural world, spiritual awareness, service to others, and respect, Project Venture’s approach is positive and strengths based. The program is designed to foster the development of positive self-concept, effective social interaction skills, a community service ethic, an internal locus of control, and improved decisionmaking and problem-solving skills. The central components of the program include a minimum of 20 one-hour classroom-based activities, such as problem-solving games and initiatives, conducted across the school year; weekly after-school, weekend, and summer skill-building experiential and challenge activities, such as hiking and camping; 3- to 10-day immersion summer adventure camps and wilderness treks; and community-oriented service learning and service leadership projects throughout the year. (<https://nrepp.samhsa.gov>)

Project Venture has many facets, but its all-Native staff believes a key reason behind its effectiveness is not due to **what** strategies it utilizes, but to **how** they actually implement them. It is more process than product. That process is informed by a strengths-based philosophy and commitment to experiential learning. Other tenets include strengthening connections to family, community and culture; an ethic of service to others; and a connection to land and the natural world.

“Many of the concepts that are the foundation of the outdoor experiential education movement – service learning, self-directed learning, mentoring, challenge-based learning and so on – have parallels in Native American traditions,” says Hall, who is Cherokee.

To foster a positive climate, Project Venture starts with six core values that provide guidance for everything youth and adults do. The “full value commitment” is simple:

- **Be here, and be present.**
- **Be safe.**
- **Speak your truth.**
- **Care for self and others.**
- **Set goals.**
- **Let go and move on.**



These values help set consistent norms for individual and group behavior. Youth advocates speak universally to the importance of consistency in young people’s lives. Youth can get discouraged, too, when they see adults in the community fail to uphold their espoused values, so Project Venture is vigilant about walking its talk. Additionally, Project Venture adults seek consistency across a school year, through weekly sessions (20-week minimum) encompassing 150-200 hours of total contact.

“For the in-school component, we build a lot of communication, trust, team-building, problem-solving, building the virtues and values of what Project Venture is,” says Yazzie. “(We are) instilling values within the student. They actually get to see their personal strengths but also their weaknesses, and to build those weaknesses into learning....(We stress) communication, listening, sequencing, to be able to finish a task....It has to be sequenced and it has to be ongoing and continuous.”

PROJECT VENTURE’S VARIETY IN PROGRAM DELIVERY

IN SCHOOL	AFTER SCHOOL	WEEKENDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → One class period per week (45-60 minutes) → Team building, group problem solving, decision making → Themes introduced, can be connected to academic curriculum → Help change classroom environment → Recruiting opportunity for after school program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → In-depth follow-up to In-School lesson plan (1 to 2 hours) → Introduce students to outdoor equipment and outdoor activities (e.g., fire-making, camping gear, setting up tents, map and compass, GPS) → Cultural Activities, elders, speakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → One-day activity or overnight → Outdoor adventure outings (e.g., rock climbing, mountain biking, kayaking, canoeing) → Cultural Activities (powwows, ceremonies) → Practicing with outdoor equipment



Yazzie says Project Venture uses an “experiential cycle” that sequentially moves youth through activities – first low- and then high-energy – always ending with time for reflection. In-school activities complement what happens on weekends or monthly trips, which emphasize outdoor- and adventure-based exploration. Project Venture culminates in a multi-day summer camping trip, which for the Crazy Horse youth means going to the Lakota’s sacred Black Hills.

“A lot of them don’t know the history that that is Lakota land...that was theirs and now what it’s become,” says Yazzie. “Now to take them back to the Black Hills to show them... that experience in the outdoor world. The proper way (to visit is including) the Indigenous perspective of why it is important to be thankful or grateful, why is it important to leave an offering...or why is this considered sacred. What story is with these sacred sites?”

Because Indigenous communities have such deep connections to the land, it seems like a no-brainer for most any Native youth program to include an outdoors component. Besides cultural perspectives, Project Venture integrates adventure learning, which utilizes a series of activities involving some type of challenge or risk.

“The outdoor stuff is magical – from rock climbing to mountain biking, canoeing and kayaking,” says Hall. “Kids are into risk-taking developmentally. That’s where they’re at, at that age; and they want to be doing stuff that’s risky but we try to mediate the risk (laughs) so the risk is perceived rather than real...helping kids build their own self-confidence and overcome whatever limitations they’ve grown up with.”



Going outdoors is Yazzie’s favorite part of Project Venture.



“For instance, ...(in) a mountain biking trip, there are so many lessons,” she says. “The metaphor is like your life goal – your goal is a path. Whatever path you have, there are ruts, hills, up and downs. Or another way we could take it is balancing. We need balance in order to ride a bike and what does balance look like in our lives? What’s happening in life, at home, school...in sports? If you’re struggling...how are you going to be able to learn how to balance that?”

SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS FOR YOUTH, ADULTS LOOK WITHIN THEMSELVES



With a long list of challenges facing Indigenous youth, decisionmakers are anxious to find solutions. In early 2018, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau heard first-hand about the promise of Project Venture when he visited the First Nation of Pikangikum in far northern Ontario. In spring 2018, groups from three American Indian communities as well as a team from a Native Hawaiian school traveled to New Mexico for a three-day immersion in Project Venture. Leaders from Project Venture’s national office in Gallup, N.M., put the adult teams through many of the same interactive exercises they do with youth, blending individual skill-building with group development.

“You’re looking within yourself, but you’re still looking out in a way to – ‘how can I help people?’ said Diane Sekaquaptewa, who works in behavioral health at the Yakama Nation in Washington. “I really like that part, I’m going to work with you but I’m really learning about me....So this is something about personal growth besides seeing how I can help kids.”

Some activities seemed aimed at bringing out everyone’s inner child. In one, teams competed (hilariously) to quickly act out “rez life” activities like sheering a sheep or using an outhouse. The adults were encouraged to begin addressing in their own lives what they seek in youth – social and emotional wellness, and connection to culture and nature.

“I think one of our bigger rooted issues is we really need to work with our staffs so they have a sense of confidence and are resilient themselves so they can teach the kids in a meaningful way what that is,” said Tim Shim, principal of Kalama Intermediate School on the Hawaiian island of Maui.

Shim liked how Project Venture interweaves cultural teachings and values – “high respect for people, there’s a high respect for the environment, for the land, for creation and for taking care of each other.”



The Hawaii school team is looking to expand an existing Project Venture site and others want to start new programs. Besides energizing prospective new sites, the session also helped the national coordinators assess the readiness of the communities to take on Project Venture. Readiness factors include a commitment to strength-based, positive youth development; local funding and partnerships; availability of cultural experts and elders; and qualified local staff.



Additionally, those staff will need their own specific experience and skills in cultural competency and youth development, as well as outdoor skills and certifications, and medical- or first aid-certification.

In early 2018, Project Venture founder Mac Hall – a former school teacher and principal – joined a panel discussion on social emotional learning at a national conference on service learning. Hall noted that more Bureau of Indian Education leaders are acknowledging that greater focus on non-cognitive learning is essential for youth success. Hall endorses creating a positive, experiential climate for youth rather than teaching them abstract concepts. “Social emotional learning, I don’t think you can teach it,” he said. “I think you have to create an environment where it can happen. We don’t attempt to do that in a [strictly] academic setting.”

With many moving parts, Project Venture comes down to providing support for youth to thrive. Together, its strength-based principles, programmatic values and culturally grounded approach help create a positive environment in school and out of school. When youth get outside in the natural ecosystem, they further learn about themselves, their culture and each other in powerful ways.

“Project Venture is a way...to connect them with who they are, to give them an understanding that our culture wasn’t a culture of disparity and it wasn’t a culture of neglect, it was a culture of excellence, it is a culture of excellence,” said Pauahi Hookano, a teacher at Kalama School in Maui. “Once you get an understanding of who you are, and that’s how you move out in the world, there’s a core within you that nothing and no one can touch, and nothing and no one can break.”



CULTURALLY GROUNDED PROTECTIVE FACTORS AT WORK

Native Americans in Philanthropy is developing a framework for growth and development relative to Indigenous youth, families and communities that is grounded in culturally based assets. Although the assets apply to families and communities, they specifically support youth along an Indigenous Lifecourse of development.

Although Project Venture has not been developed with this particular framework in mind, it shares a similar centeredness. Project Venture seeks to nurture a positive ecology, or the web of relationships among humans, living things, natural forces and land forms. Individual behavior is the result of interactions among the person (throughout their lifecourse) and sectors of their environment. Promoting strength-based protective factors is seen in multiple ways in Project Venture:



CULTURAL CONNECTEDNESS

Project Venture seeks to connect youth to the land, to their culture and to themselves. The outdoors emphasis aligns with Indigenous culture that itself springs directly from the land. Adventure-based (and classroom) activities help Native youth learn about themselves and each other.



FAMILY CONNECTEDNESS

A big part of Project Venture involves teaching youth about healthy relationships. A child's identity is tied inextricably to family. Through relationships, a child finds safety, support to grow and opportunity to lead.



EXTENDED FAMILY, KINSHIP AND NETWORKS

In the relational Indigenous worldview, everyone is a leader with a role to fulfill in an interdependent collective. Sustaining this collective – and the relationships that define it – is the practice of such core values as service, which is an essential Project Venture ethic.



YOUTH SELF-EFFICACY

Project Venture practices positive youth development, which seeks to support Native youth in their own discovery of their gifts and talents. With competence and confidence, youth will seek to apply these gifts in order to help others.



HEALTHY TRADITIONAL FOOD

Project Venture involves significant physical activity which brings with it attention to consuming a healthy diet and lots of water.



COMMUNITY CONTROL

Over nearly 30 years, Project Venture has found that community ownership (and community partnerships) are essential to sustaining the program beyond the period of grant funding. Local elders are important to success, and Indigenous control of land and natural resources is a consistent programmatic theme.



SPIRITUALITY AND CEREMONIES

Many cultural ceremonies support individual growth and self-reflection, and Project Venture incorporates teachings from some Indigenous rites of passage. It developed “Walking in Beauty” as a program tailored mainly to Diné adolescent girls, utilizing part of the traditional Diné Kinaalda ceremony for girls becoming young women.

CASE STUDY

NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY CREATING A MODEL OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION, TOGETHER



THE BICYCLES ROLL THROUGH DOWNTOWN ALBUQUERQUE, FOUR NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY STUDENTS WHO SHARE AN ALL-BLACK DRESS CODE AND A KIND OF BROTHERHOOD.

“I realized...these students, they need money!” says teacher Jake Foreman. “It makes you feel independent (when) you have cash in your pocket. You can buy things on your own...That’s what I wanted to create – something where students could work, learn and earn, and understand about cooperative development.”

The bicycle brotherhood is a hands-on school lesson – a holistic social-educational-cultural enterprise all in one. After a planning process, the students chose bicycles as a vehicle for both their own wellness and a joint business opportunity to create bike gear and clothing to sell.

“They are part owners and creators of this project,” says Foreman of the **Karina Colectiva** (“Compassion Collective,” in Spanish) project. “We got them all free bikes. Then we came up with a contract: ‘For \$200, what are you willing to do this semester?’”

As the youth cooperative began visioning bicycle products, it became a job to do well in school. They started doing homework together on Thursdays. To earn a paycheck, they avoid absences. They ride bikes. And they also consider their spiritual wellness.

“They decided to do ceremonies together,” says Foreman. “We did a Protection Way ceremony two weeks ago on our bicycles, where we really blessed them and they had that insight to say, ‘We don’t know where these bikes are coming from. We need to bless them. We need to cleanse them because that’s just our way.’”

A COLLECTIVE VISION

“Our Way” may best sum up the approach at the **NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY ACADEMY (NACA)** – a tuition-free, public charter school that helps Native young people thrive by supporting them to be their full Indigenous selves. At NACA, “90 percent of a student’s day is grounded in Indigenous perspectives,” says principal and executive director Kara Bobroff.

The three tenets central to NACA’s mission are Indigenous identity, holistic wellness and college preparation.

“From the very inception of the school, it was the collective connectivity to envisioning something that everybody could see,” says Bobroff, who is Diné and Lakota. “That students could be academically prepared for college, secure in their identity, and healthy. (Everyone) understands the nature of holistic education and also the importance of bringing Indigenous perspectives into learning for students and families...to really center around identity development. It’s the people who really make that happen.”



By people, Bobroff means every single stakeholder: staff, students, family and community members. In some respects, NACA feels like a private school – in terms of the breadth of learning and enrichment opportunities. Class sizes are small. After-school activities are free. NACA teaches five different Indigenous languages. Dedicated to indigenizing curriculum, teachers seem less driven by state academic standards (to which NACA still does adhere). NACA’s 400-some students take regular field trips – to spoken word competitions, camping or the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center. (NACA’s main campus is on Center land.)

“WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR MEDICINE?”

In a 12th grade history classroom, the walls are completely filled with Native posters and pictures of revolutionary figures like Che Guevara. Among the textbooks on teacher Damien Flores’ desk is *A People’s History of the United States*, in which Howard Zinn sought to present a version of history different from what he called the conventional “fundamental nationalist glorification of country.”

Like the book’s stories of struggles against slavery or unsafe factory conditions, Flores does not shy from making struggle personal. His own





family pictures and diplomas hang on the wall. Like most NACA students (85 percent are on free or reduced lunch), he grew up in tough socioeconomic conditions and recalls lessons shared by his own high school teacher a decade ago.

“We come from poor backgrounds but we’re strong because of it,” Flores says. “We know how to work hard because we have lived where we have less in our communities. And the only way for us to get more is for us to individually go out and inspire each other to succeed in life, but then also to give back to the community. So there’s a sense of duty, to where you come from. And that sense of duty is really strong within NACA’s mission statement.”

In resilience is a strong identity. Flores says his course starts with a positive view of Indigenous history.

“We get into the great civilizations that were part of the Americas that don’t get much attention in other history classes and really show students ‘your ancestors, my ancestors, were creating this – these amazing cities and governments, languages, poetry and music,’” he says. “I wanted to showcase the innovation, creativity and origins of what would eventually become our traditions that we keep and hold today. So as a history teacher, I try to do that at the beginning of the year to have this foundation, and then we move into that standardized U.S. history curriculum.”

NACA’s principal says that, like Flores, other staff members feel a deep sense of duty to serve students, exemplifying the core cultural value of responsibility. To tap inner strengths, NACA regularly asks both youth and adults “Where do you get your medicine?”



“The individuals who work in our school and (are part of our) network...have their own personal story of how they experienced education, how their family experienced education,” says Kara Bobroff. “(Then) they experienced a personal transformation around identity and/or leadership that shifted them to a place of being actively ready to take on this kind of work, and excited about it – to see how (education) can be different, unwavering in making sure that happens.”

Opening first as a middle and high school, NACA gradually is adding elementary grades. Students represent Diné, Pueblo, Lakota and other tribes; and many students come from diverse families with Hispanic, Mexican, African-American and Anglo backgrounds. As Indigenous-Filipino, teacher Jake Foreman shares such a mixed background.

“NACA is all about holistic wellness and Indigenous education,” says Foreman. “I am blessed to be teaching there, because everyone there believes that education is a form



of sovereignty. Education is a form of transformation. Education is revolutionary. And we get to do it every single day, to connect our culture and put it into practice.”

If sovereignty is about creating self-sufficient, self-directed peoples, then education must live up to its etymological Latin roots to “educere” – or bring up and nourish – the skills and brilliance of every Native youth. Education is not just about filling empty vessels with knowledge.

It also involves transforming and growing from within, building on the wisdom and culture of individuals and families.

INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

As part of extracurricular offerings as diverse as electric car club and comic booking, NACA sponsors two culturally oriented groups for boys and girls that espouse Indigenous values, gender roles and healthy relationships. The girls group is called Sweet Nation and the Hiyupo boys group often does such land-based activities as fishing or hunting. Youth’s connection to land is a major emphasis. There also are community service projects like building a sweat lodge.

Last fall, 1000 people attended the 12th annual NACA Community Feast Day, a community and cultural celebration based on feast days hosted by New Mexico’s Pueblo communities during the year. Like the Pueblo feasts, there were prayers, traditional cultural dances and a giveaway, and food for everyone. It was a chance for students dressed in tribal clothing to parade and shine.



“Our parents show up,” says Jessica Lopez of the huge turnout. “We don’t make the food; parents make the food. I think it’s the idea of saying ‘your voice counts, we’re going to make these meeting times and big decisions available to you, not in a generic, superficial way.’”

At NACA, staff spend a lot of time asking how curriculum and programs support Indigenous identity – not only that of students but also of families. NACA has adapted conventional teacher-student conferences, calling them “student-led conferences.” Further, they involve a counselor who is assigned to families when youth enter NACA and stays with them through graduation.

“Which is a really big deal,” says Lopez. “Because you have your advisor looking out for you. You’ve got those connections that are meaningful, made with the student and their family and their family at large. So it’s always this open-door, familial-based, community-shared school.”



Lopez herself is passionate about supporting student identity through self-expression and radical poetry. In 2018, she accompanied a ninth-grade NACA student to the national finals of the Poetry Out Loud competition in Washington, DC. Other students take government-oriented field trips to Washington and even New Zealand (for a senior class trip in alternating years, as part of an ongoing exchange between NACA and Indigenous Maori schools).

“Students can gravitate to something that celebrates them, and that doesn’t just gloss over them, or give them one day, or one month, of the year,” says Lopez. “We don’t...(say,) ‘The Native population operates at a deficit. This is how we’re going to fix it.’ We...say, ‘We’re celebrating who we are and where we come from, and we’re excited to see where we’re going!’ That’s why NACA is so successful in what it does for our students.”

HOLISTIC WELLNESS

Through its emphasis on holistic mind-body-spirit-community wellness, NACA seeks to honor the whole person in her environment. Through an external partnership, there is a school-based health clinic and a number of other support services free for students and families. Self-care is one way in which NACA frames wellness. To help juniors and seniors manage stress, for example, they learn “Wise Mind” mindfulness practices. The “eagle room” – a space for self-reflection, meditation and prayer – is said to be NACA’s most widely used program.

With a nutrition policy permitting only “healthy and natural” food and drink, soda or coffee is discouraged on campus. Besides expanding an on-site garden, the school is partnering with the nonprofit LaPlazita Institute, which operates an organic farm near the Rio Grande River where students can go for hands-on learning. Through such partnerships NACA has been able to meet the needs of more families.



NACA offers other programs in conflict resolution, social-emotional health and suicide prevention. With the school’s strengths-based focus on what’s possible, though, “healing” is a term used less frequently at NACA than at some other Native organizations. It may be that the concept of healing is simply integrated naturally within NACA’s vision and mission: when one honors every youth’s wellness and growth through vigilant practice of cultural values and traditions, one is essentially just letting culture do its work to support learning, leading and healing.

COLLEGE PREPARATION



In education, there has been a tug of war between addressing youth's developmental needs and teaching content tied to rigid educational standards. Standardized tests and curricula are geared toward such standards and do not measure the growth of a particular student over time. NACA does its best to take the long view of a student's trajectory, rather than focus too much on standardized tests that NACA students must take by state mandate.

Asked for indicators of NACA's success, principal Kara Bobroff points to three. First are the rates at which NACA graduates attend college, even though many are the first in their families to do so. "That's a big (impact)," she says. "Our students matriculate to college (at rates) four or five times greater than the national average. We have an intentional focus that all students will go to college, and engage in a program or curriculum that sets them up to do that."

Second, she cites NACA's success in revitalizing Native language and culture in youth who will be leaders in communities that have experienced severe cultural loss. Third, Bobroff points to NACA's success in activating a positive future vision for youth, unleashing not only individual talents but also positively impacting the community. "When our students are able to stand up and say this is my vision for the future, and this is how I want to help and give back to my community."

There's nothing more powerful than hearing Native youth themselves voice such visions. In May 2018, NACA held its first-annual "youth Indigenous summit of self-determination and resiliency." The two-day gathering was youth-planned and youth-led, with NACA students inviting partners to participate in workshops and discussions about land-based plants and medicines and language revitalization. With 100 youth participating, the summit included a writing workshop, poetry slam and student dance.

NACA graduates attend Ivy League schools, Stanford and other selective colleges. Many attend the University of New Mexico or Central New Mexico Community College (CNM), which awards the nation's second highest number of postsecondary degrees and certificates to Native students. In late 2019, NACA is set to open a new \$35 million campus at CNM that it will share with a dual-enrollment high school.

It surely will be a new chapter for NACA in its work to invent Indigenous Education and rewrite the old history. Connecting culture and education has bedeviled Native communities since the era of boarding schools that were designed to assimilate youth by treating their lifeways as inferior. Since the late 1960s, a relatively small number of K-12 schools and tribal colleges and universities have sought to decolonize and reimagine the entire learning proposition for Indigenous youth.

NACA clearly is on to something. A regular stream of educators visits the campus, and the school has launched a NACA-Inspired Schools Network that wants to apply the school's lessons in other

Native communities. New such schools already have started in Diné and Pueblo communities, with Las Cruces coming soon, and Oklahoma and South Dakota on the horizon.

Bobroff says it comes down to equity – Native youth should have the same learning opportunities that students in America’s best public schools enjoy.

“Where does **your** child go to school?” she asks. “Do you want them in a system sitting at a desk taking a test...focused on just a handful of things that might have been taught over and over again, or do you want them engaged in critical thinking, engaged in community and service, and engaged in identifying for themselves what their personal path is going to be or contribution? It’s shifting the frame of what education can be.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDER PARTNERS

NACA emerged from a collective process to explore shared values and vision. When an Indigenous collective process is supported, the right results and shared solutions will emerge.

NACA youth bring diverse strengths from many multiple Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds and funds of knowledge. Building on strengths is a critical component of learning and development, while student and family diversity increases in complexity. NACA seeks partners in understanding the full notion of Indigenous identity.

NACA is different, based on a worldview that is different than dominant society’s; and it works. Relationships are everything: the vehicle for youth to explore and discover from a safe base, to facilitate confidence-building and positive risk-taking, and to promote knowledge transfer. Honoring relationships starts with honoring every youth and extends to respecting existing strengths of other schools that want to apply NACA lessons.

NACA spends a lot of time and energy on adapting standard curriculum to Indigenous thinking and learning styles. It requires resources to hire a full-

time curriculum director, provide faculty weekly time for planning, and stack a library with such resources on holistic sustainable development or Indigenous plant medicines.

There are few networks in Indian Country to promote cross-boundary sharing and exchange. The NACA-Inspired Schools Network seeks to bring more educators to campus, support existing Fellows who are school leaders in an intensive program to learn NACA approaches, and share lessons widely.

Such schools need a means of advocating for changes in state and federal funding that would more effectively support a model of a community school that promotes Indigenous identity, holistic wellness and college preparation.

There are an increasing number of Indigenous language programs, schools and consortia across the country (and globe) but not a unified approach in the U.S. towards understanding promising practices in how effectively to teach Indigenous language. Such coordination, visioning and leveraging of resources would be valuable to practitioners.

CULTURALLY GROUNDED PROTECTIVE FACTORS AT WORK

Native American Community Academy seeks to infuse its programming in Indigenous perspectives, weaving protective factors that touch youth, families and the community:



CULTURAL CONNECTEDNESS

At NACA, promoting Indigenous identity is job one, and 90 percent of a student's day is grounded in Indigenous perspectives. Youth are required to take one of five Indigenous language classes NACA offers. The campus ecosystem is based in such core cultural values as responsibility and reciprocity where there is a sense of belonging and duty.



FAMILY CONNECTEDNESS

Parental connectedness has proven a significant predictor of Native youth's mental and health wellness. Parent engagement is not the challenge at NACA that it is at many other schools. Families are welcome on campus at any time and many drop-in support services are free.



EXTENDED FAMILY, KINSHIP AND NETWORKS

Strong relationships are the vehicle for learning and growing. Staff members are "aunties" and "uncles" to youth. Students keep the same counselor to maintain an ongoing relationship with youth, family and extended family. The Indigenous worldview is relational.



YOUTH SELF-EFFICACY

Competence promotes confidence, which can be even more powerful through self-directed discovery. NACA youth have many avenues to explore their interests and strengths – including art, music, spoken word, science technology and culturally oriented boys and girls groups where they learn Indigenous lifeways.



HEALTHY TRADITIONAL FOOD

NACA enforces a nutrition policy permitting only “healthy and natural” food and drink. There is a campus garden and partnership with an organic farm. Youth learn about the role of traditional plants and medicines in their path to holistic wellness.



COMMUNITY CONTROL

The principal says NACA wouldn't be the community school it is today, if not for a past career opportunity away from full-time teaching that allowed her to engage communities in understanding their dreams and needs. NACA relies on extensive community partnerships and also adheres to strict protocols in regularly consulting Pueblo and local leaders.



SPIRITUALITY AND CEREMONIES

Prayers, songs and traditional practices are part of every school day. Youth are passionate about learning their Indigenous languages, in which many ceremonies are conducted. Youth choose to hold their own ceremonies, as for the blessing of the donated bicycles for NACA's *Karina Colectiva* project.

RESOURCES

“The Indigenous Lifecourse: Strengthening the health and well-being of Native youth.” Gonzales, Yellow Bird and Walters with Native Americans in Philanthropy, 2016.

“Original Instructions: A Challenge to Philanthropy to Expand Health and Educational Opportunities for Native Youth.” Schott Foundation for Public Education and Native Americans in Philanthropy, 2017.

“Our Identities as Civic Power: The State of Native Youth 2017.” *State of Native Youth Report*. Center for Native American Youth at The Aspen Institute, November 2017.

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