



NATIVE AMERICANS  
IN PHILANTHROPY

# INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

A CALL TO ACTION FOR THE PHILANTHROPIC SECTOR



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*Courtesy of Navajo & Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund*

*Cover Photo Courtesy of Greater Cincinnati Native American Coalition*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been severe in tribal communities. As cases of infection increased over the last several months, particularly on tribal reservations in the Southwest, the public became even more aware of the grave community infrastructure inadequacies across Indigenous communities. These include challenges to small business and employment, lack of access to healthcare and supplies, and inadequate access to food and housing.

While the pandemic has laid bare these inequities in our communities, it has also showcased the strength and resilience of our people. This has been especially true in the way that tribal communities have organized to get resources to the ground with support from the philanthropic sector. Over the last several months, Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) has been analyzing philanthropic response funds and *GoFundMe* efforts led by Native people to better understand how tribal organizations and coalitions have served as a crucial bridge between their communities and the philanthropic sector.

NAP developed this report to better understand how this Indigenous community leadership organized

quickly to move financial and other resources to those who most needed it. We did so by analyzing philanthropic donations to response efforts led by, or partnered with, Indigenous people. Between March and October of 2020, we identified a total of \$32,202,568 in philanthropic funding distributed by nonprofit organizations and *GoFundMe* efforts. This included 71 total response funds, 15 of which were nonprofit organizations and 56 facilitated through the *GoFundMe* platform. Nonprofit organizations raised \$23,494,625 and *GoFundMe* platforms raised \$8,707,943. We examine this data further by region and other factors in the Findings section of this report.



# Executive Summary

We also interviewed several Indigenous community leaders who have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 response. From these interviews, we gained insight of key conversations that need to be prioritized and integrated into philanthropy practices: (1) prioritize partnerships and community networks' knowledge from working on the frontlines, (2) improve support for access to resource information, (3) reevaluate how philanthropy can better support building infrastructure rather than a response-based system, (4) prioritize providing general support grants to Indigenous community organizations, (5) integrate practices that empower and support Indigenous youth, and (6) reevaluate measurement standards to better understand needs and impact.

While what we have learned in developing this report comes from the immediate response to the day-to-day crisis in tribal communities that persists, we also believe there are important lessons for philanthropy about the crucial need to invest in the medium to long-term recovery. Below, is our call to action for the philanthropic sector. We further detail this call to action and resources for funders at the end of this report.

## **1. Invest in Indigenous-led organizations and initiatives:**

Indigenous people know what is best for their own communities and needs. The inspiring response we have seen in our communities across the country is only possible through our own leadership.

## **2. Maximize general operating support:**

Many funders were quick to change the existing terms of their funding arrangements or distribute new funds without restrictions during this pandemic. We call on funders to make this a long-term strategy, not just in crisis.

## **3. Diversify vehicles for investment:**

The over \$8 million invested in response efforts through the *GoFundMe* platform carries with it an important lesson for the broader philanthropic sector. Philanthropy's traditional vehicles and structures to move money do not work for the diverse range of organizations, initiatives, and mutual aid networks that organized to meet the ongoing challenges of COVID-19. Philanthropy should identify as many flexible and responsive options as possible to invest in Indigenous-led efforts.

# Executive Summary

- 4. Invest in Indigenous community strengths and leadership—not their deficits:** We call on funders to continue to identify where they are investing through a deficit framework and shift to a strengths-based framework.
- 5. Invest in tribal policy advocacy and tribal leadership:** Tribes and tribal communities have a very different set of policy needs and opportunities than other communities. In addition to investments in Indigenous-led community organizations and response efforts, it is vital that funders invest in tribal policy advocacy organizations and their leadership to ensure longer-term treaty-bound investments by the government in tribal communities.



*Courtesy of Navajo & Hopi Families  
COVID-19 Relief Fund*

# A FAILURE OF FEDERAL POLICY

## AND ITS IMPACT ON TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS AND COMMUNITIES DURING COVID-19

The effects of COVID-19 across Indigenous communities in the United States are a clear illustration of disproportionate community impact and lack of essential infrastructure support to Tribal governments. According to the New Mexico Department of Health, Native Americans, by the month of May, "laccountedl for 57% of the state's cases – despite only being 11% of the population – and have infection rates 14 times that of the rest of the population."<sup>1</sup> Tribes in the Southwest, such as the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe, have been most disproportionately impacted, especially in the early phase of the epidemic. Among other reasons, this is due to underlying health disparities, years of underfunded health systems, and significant infrastructure challenges that result in food insecurity, lack of access to clean water, and adequate housing.<sup>2</sup>

As the country experiences a severe increase of COVID-19 cases in the winter months, even more Indigenous communities are facing severe impacts as cases explode in every region of the country, particularly rural areas. On November 17, the Navajo Nation reported 146 new cases and implemented a stay-at-home order

through December 6.<sup>3</sup> The Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa has been experiencing a food shortage crisis due to the influx of non-regular residents in the grocery stores.<sup>4</sup> The situation was so significant, it led the tribe to partner with the Hunger Task Force to become a "food distribution hub," which allowed them to exercise more control over food sourcing and distribution in their community.<sup>5</sup>



# A Failure of Federal Policy

## AND ITS IMPACT ON TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS AND COMMUNITIES DURING COVID-19

For Indigenous people, the deep impact of a public health crisis like this is not a surprise given generations of underinvestment and failures by the federal government to live up to their responsibility to tribes. The federal government has a unique and crucial role to play due to its nation-to-nation relationship with tribal governments, rooted in the constitution and individual treaties. For decades, the federal government has failed at many of its obligations to support tribal healthcare and other social support systems. Failures by the federal government to support tribes over the years have resulted in many of the inequities we see playing out today. A recent report by the Center for American Progress (CAP) outlined a thorough analysis of how critical it is for the federal government to address systemic inequalities by implementing policies that uplift and support the well-being of tribes based on their needs. In their policy recommendations, CAP points to four particularly structural challenges that underlie much of the disproportionate impact we're seeing from COVID-19 in tribal communities and recommends:

1. Ensure the inclusion of American Indian / Alaska Native people in COVID-19 data;
2. Support the development of Tribal economies;
3. Address the chronic underfunding of the Indian Health Service system; and,
4. Support the development of Indian Country's critical infrastructure.<sup>6</sup>

Tribal organizations have been advocating for these structural policy changes for generations, but the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the extreme vulnerability of tribal communities resulting from this chronic underinvestment. These recommendations are crucial in supporting a sustainable long-term funding model, and also highlight the importance of evaluating research and data efforts that drive federal government funding to tribes. CAP underscores the challenges related to the use of census data in tribal funding formulas and policy decisions. Due to the 2010 census undercount of American Indian and Alaska Native people by 5 percent more than any other demographic group, the U.S. Department of Treasury's Coronavirus Relief Fund negligently recorded a population of zero for 20 tribes. These

# A Failure of Federal Policy

## AND ITS IMPACT ON TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS AND COMMUNITIES DURING COVID-19



*Courtesy of Community Outreach & Patient Empowerment (COPE)*

tribes were then only eligible for \$100,000 in emergency relief funds.<sup>7</sup> This is only one example of the urgent need to reevaluate and modify research practices and data metrics that form federal funding models.

While tribal governments have been struggling with the crisis, so has the broader tribal nonprofit sector. According to a recent survey of over 300 Native community-based organizations by the First Nations Development Institute (FNDI), 69% of Native nonprofits expect to see a revenue decrease as a result of COVID-19. 43% of respondents expect

to see a decrease of 25% or greater. Perhaps just as importantly, FNDI found that most of these nonprofits expect that the worst impacts of the pandemic will occur over 3 months from when the survey was taken.<sup>8</sup>

Urban Indigenous organizations have also taken a serious hit. More than 78% of American Indians and Alaska Natives live in urban areas and are often left out of national policy discussions.<sup>9</sup> According to a recent report by the National Urban Indian Family Coalition (NUIFC), urban Indigenous organizations in their network experienced a decline of \$9.9 million of expected revenue due to COVID-19. These organizations uplift and support the current needs (employment placement, housing stability, food security and mental health services) of communities across 24 cities.<sup>10</sup>

An inherent tension within the philanthropic sector is its role as a funder in relationship to the federal, state, and local governments. This is especially apparent during moments of national and international crisis. For Indigenous communities, there is an important obligation for private sector funders to understand the



# A Failure of Federal Policy

## AND ITS IMPACT ON TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS AND COMMUNITIES DURING COVID-19

unique responsibility of the federal government to support tribes and tribal communities. The federal government is treaty-bound to provide these resources, but it has failed in this obligation for generations.

There is no clear roadmap for the best allocation of private resources from the philanthropic sector in relation to the federal investments owed to tribes by the federal government. However, the COVID-19 crisis and eventual recovery presents an opportunity for the philanthropic sector to learn more about these important funding and legal complexities and develop stronger funding strategies through meaningful and trusting relationships with tribes and Indigenous-led organizations.



*Courtesy of Navajo & Hopi Families  
COVID-19 Relief Fund*

# INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES SPRING TO ACTION

## WHAT PHILANTHROPY CAN LEARN FROM INDIGENOUS ORGANIZING DURING A CRISIS

Tribal communities were some of the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic early on, and that trend has continued as the crisis permeates every part of the country this fall and winter. As a national philanthropic advocacy organization for tribal communities, Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) fielded questions from a wide range of funders about supporting tribal communities. Some of these funders had a lot of experience working with tribal communities, others were very new. Most wanted to move financial resources quickly to response funds and our primary goal was directing them to those led by the communities that were being impacted.<sup>11</sup>

While tribal communities were in crisis, the way they organized to raise and distribute resources was nothing short of heroic. That is why we decided to develop this report. Within days of the initial COVID-19 impact, tribal organizations, youth leaders, and tribal governments sprang into action and leveraged their best resource as Indigenous people—their relatives and relations. These resource networks took the form of traditional response funds, mutual aid groups, youth-led coalitions, and more.

## Culture of Care

*Jheri Neri (Diné/ Mescalero) - Executive Director of the Greater Cincinnati Native American Coalition*

Jheri Neri, Executive Director of the Greater Cincinnati Native American Coalition (GCNAC), manages a membership of over 1,200 urban Indigenous people in his region. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the coalition has connected with other Native groups and organizations, creating a network of mutual aid support.

Jheri notes the incredible efforts he witnessed among Native people to support their home communities. “We saw people gathering supplies, pooling what few resources they had, or even undertaking large-scale financial efforts to support areas where the US government fell short.” One such effort was a drive to gather funds to purchase laptops for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s public schools. Another effort was a personal protective equipment (PPE) drive that delivered thousands of dollars’ worth of supplies to the Navajo Nation. “People take care of one another. That is the big lesson in how Native people think about this emergency situation—people are willing to give generously, and with everything they have to support one another—and they aren’t looking for praise, or appreciation, but instead, it is out of deep respect and responsibility for one another.”

# Indigenous Communities Spring to Action

WHAT PHILANTHROPY CAN LEARN FROM  
INDIGENOUS ORGANIZING DURING A CRISIS



*Courtesy of Community Outreach & Patient Empowerment (COPE)*

This report sought to understand: (1) how many dollars were being raised by the wide range of response efforts being organized by Indigenous communities across the United States; and (2) how those response efforts were being organized and promoted. In the remaining sections, we share our analysis of the financial resources raised during the first 7 months (March – October) of the crisis along with interviews with some of those Indigenous leaders on the ground who helped make it happen.

## METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study is to provide current research about how the philanthropic sector invested in Indigenous communities in response to

the COVID-19 pandemic. Philanthropic efforts used in this research include those led by Indigenous people as well as those organized by allies in partnership with Indigenous people. This study is conducted through a regional analysis (Southwest, Northeast, etc.) of philanthropic efforts directing financial donations to Indigenous communities. Organizations and *GoFundMe*'s included in the data set are philanthropic efforts from the 7-month period of March – October 2020. The data associated with this research study are aggregated by effort type: organization or *GoFundMe*. It is important to note that this research does not capture every COVID-19 relief fund, philanthropic or grassroots effort established to support the needs of Indigenous communities. We made our best efforts to be as exhaustive in our analysis as possible.

The organizational efforts included in the report are gathered through consultation and approval of Indigenous-led organizations and grassroots organizers. *GoFundMe* efforts that are included in this research were gathered by varying keyword searches online of: *GoFundMe*<sup>12</sup>, Native American<sup>13</sup>, Indigenous Peoples<sup>14</sup>, American Indian<sup>15</sup> and regions listed below.

# Indigenous Communities Spring to Action

## WHAT PHILANTHROPY CAN LEARN FROM INDIGENOUS ORGANIZING DURING A CRISIS

Regions where both nonprofit organizations and *GoFundMe* efforts directed philanthropic donations includes the Midwest, Multi-Regional, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest and West (North and South). 'Multi-Regional' is created for efforts that direct support to Indigenous communities from multiple regions based on the organizer(s) funding strategy (i.e., need-based support, grants, etc.). For instance, an effort directing philanthropic support to communities of the Southwest and Northeast regions is reported as a Multi-Regional effort.

Many of the organization and *GoFundMe* efforts associated with this report directed support to Indigenous communities across multiple regions. Based on these varying distributions, our analysis of efforts conducted in the Midwest, Northeast, West (North and South), and Southeast is limited. We had a much stronger understanding from efforts focused specifically in the Southwest in our analysis. For this reason, most of the funding that was distributed to other regions of the country are captured in this research study as 'Multi-Regional'.

All data is sorted by (1) effort type: nonprofit organization or *GoFundMe*. The data is then further sorted by: (a) region, and (b) philanthropic donation (\$). Philanthropic donation (\$) is defined as the amount of donation dollars directed to Indigenous communities.

### INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY-LED PHILANTHROPIC EFFORTS DATA SET

- Total **organization efforts** included: 15
- Total **GoFundMe efforts** included: 56
- Total **philanthropic donation** (\$) directed to Indigenous communities: \$32,202,568
- Total **organization donation** (\$) directed to Indigenous communities: \$23,494,625
- Total **GoFundMe donation** (\$) directed to Indigenous communities: \$8,707,943

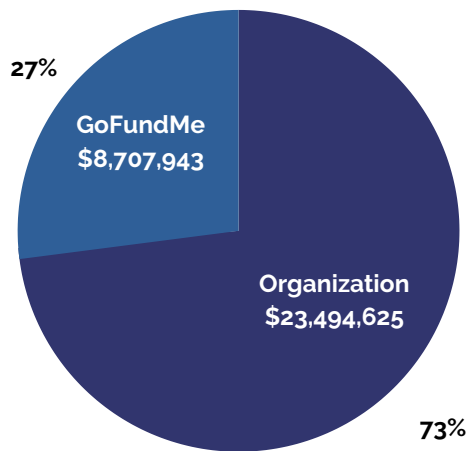


Courtesy of Navajo & Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund

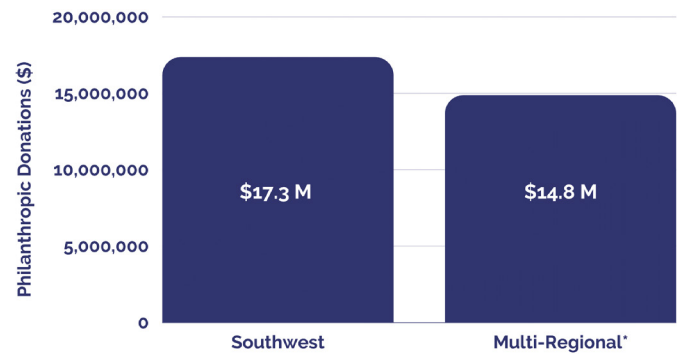
# Indigenous Communities Spring to Action

WHAT PHILANTHROPY CAN LEARN FROM INDIGENOUS ORGANIZING DURING A CRISIS

Philanthropic Donations by Effort Type

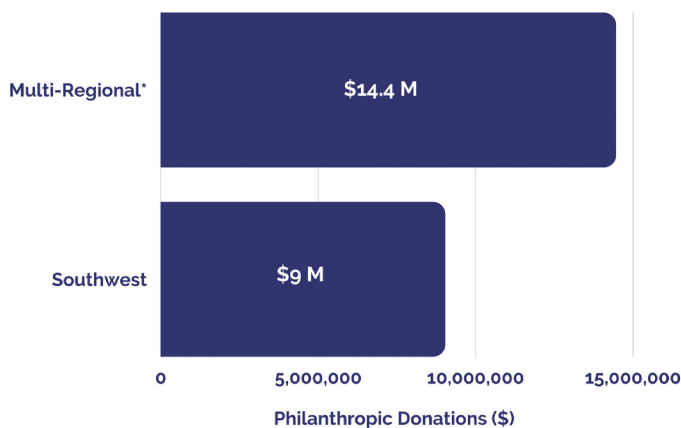


Total Philanthropic Donations (\$)



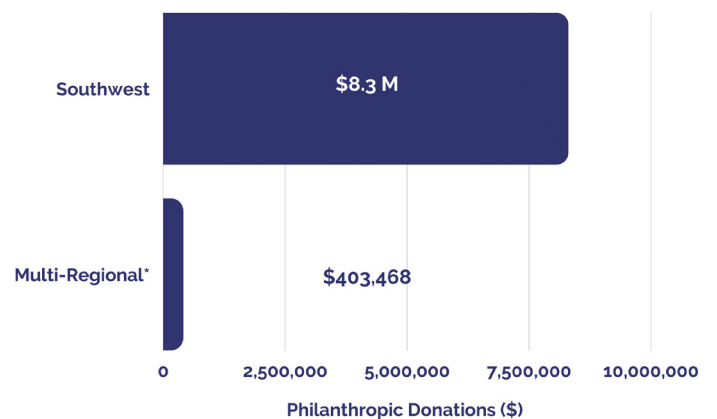
\*Multi-Regional contains efforts that direct philanthropic donations to multiple regions.

Organization: Philanthropic Donations (\$)



\*Multi-Regional contains efforts that direct philanthropic donations to multiple regions.

GoFundMe: Philanthropic Donations (\$)



\*Multi-Regional contains efforts that direct philanthropic donations to multiple regions.

# Indigenous Communities Spring to Action

WHAT PHILANTHROPY CAN LEARN FROM  
INDIGENOUS ORGANIZING DURING A CRISIS

## FINDINGS

According to our research, we identified a total of \$32,202,568 in philanthropic funding distributed by nonprofit organizations and *GoFundMe* efforts, under the leadership of Indigenous communities, between March and October of 2020. This included 71 total response funds, 15 of which were nonprofit organizations and 56 facilitated through the *GoFundMe* platform. Nonprofit organizations raised \$23,494,625 and *GoFundMe* platforms raised \$8,707,943.

The fact that such a wide range of donors moved over \$32 million to the ground in tribal communities is inspiring. Perhaps the most obvious finding in the data is the significant disparity in where the funding went in the country. As shown in the Total Philanthropic Donations figure, over \$17 million was focused in the Southwest. Given the severe impact, especially in the first wave, of the pandemic on tribes like Navajo and several of the Pueblos, we expected funding to be weighted heavily in that region. It was surprising just how disparate this funding was compared to other regions, however. We were not able to further analyze the specific parts of the country where Multi-Regional funding was directed, but



*Courtesy of Indigenous Life Ways*

# Indigenous Communities Spring to Action

WHAT PHILANTHROPY CAN LEARN FROM  
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the lack of funding to the Midwest, Northeast, West (North and South), and Southeast was particularly stark.

Another clear finding to emerge from this data is the importance of online fundraising platforms like *GoFundMe*, especially for emergency response efforts. Donors gave more than \$325 million through *GoFundMe* to COVID-19 related causes between March and September alone. This was comprised of over 9 million donors and 150,000 individual fundraising efforts.<sup>16</sup> One of the most successful Indigenous-led response efforts during the pandemic was the Navajo & Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief fund, which used *GoFundMe* to raise over \$6.6 million to date. In the Indigenous Community Responses section below, we interview Shandiin Herrera, one of the community leaders supporting this innovative effort.

One of the keys to their success was a combination of significant earned media attention and a dynamic platform to donate like *GoFundMe*. Especially during crisis relief, media attention really matters. According to a headline search conducted by Native Americans in Philanthropy, we found 31,600 media hits from articles focused on Native Americans and

COVID-19 from the period of March – October 2020. Of those articles, 53.5%, or 16,900 media hits, mentioned tribes of the Southwest. Although we were not able to do a deeper analysis on the connection of media attention to specific response funds, it is important to consider the implications of communications capacity for raising philanthropic resources.



*Courtesy of Indigenous Life Ways*

# INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

## ON THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

The quantitative data gathered points to important lessons for philanthropy and should include the voices of Indigenous leaders and stakeholders. This is vital if philanthropy is to improve its impact and potential to improve its practices in Indigenous communities. Although no two communities are alike, the devastating impacts of COVID-19 continue to illuminate similar needed resources in rural, urban, and on/off reservation communities. This was illustrated by the influx of organization and GoFundMe efforts initiated to provide support in financial, food, housing, and healthcare resources.

In this section, we highlight discussions from Indigenous leaders about how they quickly pivoted their work to raise, organize, and distribute resources to their communities. Indigenous leaders on the frontlines, in both the nonprofit and private sectors, led with their cultural values to support their communities. To better understand the wide range of Indigenous-led efforts and their approach to meeting their community needs during the COVID-19 crisis, we interviewed community leaders from these perspectives:

- Relatives, Relations, and Support Networks
- Food Systems
- Urban Centers and Communities
- Youth Leadership
- Entrepreneurship and Small Business

We would like to express gratitude to our partners that contributed to this section of the report: Indigenous Life Ways, Native American Agricultural Fund, National Urban Indian Family Coalition, Navajo & Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund, and Roanhorse Consulting, LLC.



*Courtesy of NB3 Foundation*



# Indigenous Community Perspectives

ON THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

## Relatives, Relations, and Support Networks

*Interview with Krystal Curley (Navajo) of Indigenous Life Ways*

### CAN YOU SHARE ABOUT INDIGENOUS LIFE WAYS' WORK IN THE COMMUNITY DURING THE PANDEMIC? HAS THE SCOPE OF YOUR WORK SHIFTED?

Through Indigenous Life Ways, we are both fiscal sponsors and core members in decision making for the McKinley Mutual Aid (MMA) Fund. Since the pandemic, we have been coordinating our efforts countywide and even beyond our own county to help others gain resources. Our role as a middle person involves organizing and distributing resources for those who are without food, electricity, running water or transportation. There are four organizations that are part of this work: Indigenous Life Ways, the New Mexico Social Justice Equity Institute, Strengthening Nations, and McKinley Community Health Alliance. Our networks' collaborative work prior to the focus on COVID-19 issues brought us closer together which helped us quickly establish a location, gather volunteers, and create a supply-chain system for how we distribute supplies.

**It is because of our partnerships and networks' knowledge from working in the community for 10 plus years that supported our immediate response.** Our distribution efforts continue to grow every week however we have been able to manage them during peaks. We distribute about four hundred and fifty boxes, and two hundred hygiene buckets with support from partners, every week. From our donors and community support to MMA, we built capacity where we now receive referrals from the hospital and other counties. It is amazing how these partnerships are here with the community during this time. We are thankful our work has been collaborative with our partner organizations where we can provide recommendations on community resource needs. Our donors' investment into community efforts help our operations continue.



*Courtesy of Indigenous Life Ways*

# Indigenous Community Perspectives

ON THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

## FROM YOUR ORGANIZATION'S EFFORTS, HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED RESOURCE DISTRIBUTIONS?

There is so much more ground that needs to be covered with much that needs to be done. With the second wave of COVID-19 and lockdowns in place, we are currently in the process of planning how we can continue and better organize our food distributions efforts by taking extra precautions. We leveraged our immediate initial efforts because of the support of our donors and previously established partnerships. **But now we need support to address current short-term impacts while planning for long term impact.** Moving forward, we would like to better support our volunteers because of how risky it is to be in the field. We want to support our communities' healing from this trauma by connecting them to resources.

## ARE THERE EXISTING GAPS IN SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR YOUR WORK?

The technology gap is one of the biggest challenges we experience.

**We, and our network, need support for accessing resource information.**

Thankfully, our partners continue to support us by helping find grants and different funding opportunities within their networks. If it isn't for partners like this, we couldn't have managed our efforts while we are on the ground coordinating and distributing resources.

## Food Systems

*Interview with Valerie Segrest (Muckleshoot) of the Native American Agricultural Fund*

## CAN YOU SHARE ABOUT THE NATIVE AMERICAN AGRICULTURAL FUND'S ORGANIZATION'S WORK DURING THE PANDEMIC? HAS THE SCOPE OF YOUR WORK SHIFTED?

We think through a lot of strategies around how to uplift a generation of people who can become food activists. There is an issue in our food infrastructure because much of what was broken down during the initial phases and panic buying. **We are inspired to think through how a food infrastructure system would feed**



*Courtesy of Greater Cincinnati Native American Coalition*

# Indigenous Community Perspectives

ON THE COVID-19 RESPONSE



*Courtesy of Navajo & Hopi Families  
COVID-19 Relief Fund*

**people in the future and what it would take.** Janie Hipp, our Executive Director, and a few of us mapped out in the early months of COVID-19 and put together a strategic vision that will support and instigate change in our food system, hopefully beginning in January.

## HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS?

We are not included in the populations that government food assistance programs are required to serve. Even when there's any surplus on the reservations through our commodity foods program - the states ask for that surplus. These large non-profit industrial complexes and hunger response organizations that exist out there do not prioritize tribes.

I witnessed this several times this

year where a large food donor wanted to get fresh produce to tribal communities, but would only go within 500 miles of the regional distribution centers, or a large hunger organization stepped in. I'm from the Northwest, the Muckleshoot Tribe, and we had several eastern Washington farmers who were harvesting their crops and were trying to reach tribes. However, there is no central food distribution center for tribes. We were also missing on this part because tribes were lacking the infrastructure to receive, store and distribute food properly. That's why we kept going back to the drawing board around how critical it is for food system infrastructures to be put in place throughout Indian Country so that we can accept food and distribute in an efficient way.

## HOW CAN PHILANTHROPY PRACTICES BETTER SUPPORT FOOD SYSTEMS IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES?

I think about how to solve all these issues: the environment, the banks, the financial system, the food systems, health systems, and trying to figure out the economics of it all. **And then I remember, if we can fix it in Indian Country, we can fix it anywhere.**

What is at risk here in the sector? The people philanthropy could reach, and

# Indigenous Community Perspectives

ON THE COVID-19 RESPONSE



Courtesy of Indigenous Life Ways

## Urban Centers

*Interview with Janeen Comenote (Quinault, Oglala Lakota, Hesquiaht and Kwakiutl First Nations) of the National Urban Indian Family Coalition*

### CAN YOU SHARE ABOUT THE NATIONAL URBAN INDIAN FAMILY COALITION'S WORK DURING THE PANDEMIC? HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED URBAN CENTERS?

We are a coalition of forty-five urban American Indian centers in thirty-two cities with a focus on information distribution. Our primary work in the last few years has been civic engagement and voter engagement in the census. Once the pandemic hit, we were mid-stride on our census work planning. As a result of COVID, it interrupted the work we planned for the 2020 census and election year. At the end of March, I began talking to our executive directors to get an idea of how many of the urban Indian centers throughout the country were shut down at this juncture.

We were the first to shut down here in Seattle. In late March, I began noticing that almost all our urban centers shut down as stay-at-home orders began.

the pivots that the sector could make to grassroots efforts, are dependent on people with the pulse of their community needs.

I hope to see philanthropy support something [responsive], where we're building infrastructure and not just a response to a fire being put out. How are investments in sustainable food systems feeding people during a time of crisis, and into the future as well? We are inspired to get to know the grassroots efforts and be involved in supporting this movement in our communities.

# Indigenous Community Perspectives

ON THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

After this, our first step was to change our grant funding to general operating support. During this time, we started seeing big upticks of unemployment, homelessness, and mental health challenges in Arizona. **We told our centers that they could use our funding as emergency funding if they need PPE or other resources;** many centers took advantage of this opportunity.

The second step is where we immediately got to work in the early weeks of the pandemic by surveying all our centers. Our COVID-19 impact paper discussed the early impact on organizations, future impacts on the horizon and impact on the 501c(3) sector. Then after, we began fundraising to provide emergency grants to purchase resources or use the funding for any needs. We also invested our own money to purchase masks and PPE for the center, which was then distributed to our centers. This was early June where things started partially opening and our focus shifted towards ensuring we were working socially distance and safe. **This was another way COVID-19 impacted how we approach work in our centers and requiring us to rethink how we do our work.**

## HOW CAN THE PHILANTHROPIC SECTOR BETTER SUPPORT THE WORK OF URBAN INDIGENOUS CENTERS?

There's a two-pronged answer.

**Philanthropy needs to (1) increase their payouts to more than 5% (increase to 10-15% in my estimation) and (2) they should be doing grants that help those on the ground who need it.** This should be done by

providing general support grants to urban Indian organizations because they understand community needs best from their frontline efforts. Additional roles of philanthropy are to get centers the immediate help they need and help our sector better operate at the policy level. Tribes received funding from federal efforts while urban centers received nothing while these centers provide services to many.

This is where policy advocacy is important in the long term. It is vital to ensure that urban centers are included in policy discussions so that measures and resources that follow do not ignore our communities. Philanthropy can help us work on things that policies cannot address or implement, like new initiatives to help centers build sustainability.

# Indigenous Community Perspectives

ON THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

## Youth Leadership

*Interview with Shandiin Herrera (Navajo) of the Navajo & Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund*

### CAN YOU SHARE ABOUT THE NAVAJO & HOPI FAMILIES COVID-19 RELIEF FUND'S EFFORTS DURING THE PANDEMIC?

When COVID-19 hit, there was an executive order from the Navajo Nation President that shut down all one-hundred and ten chapters. After this, I felt like our community was really left in the dark. That is when my mentor, Ethel Branch, the former Attorney General of the Navajo Nation, reached out to me to discuss what we could do to help our people before there were any cases on Navajo Nation. **We wanted to be proactive by providing some type of relief which sparked my mentor's idea of making a GoFundMe with the purpose of using that money to purchase food and supplies for elders and immunocompromised community members.**

The Navajo & Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund is an initiative of the nonprofit we simultaneously created called Yee Ha'ólnii Doo. Through this work, I connect with smaller rural

Utah communities, specifically the Monument Valley region, to coordinate distributions in partnership with Navajo healthcare systems. Every month we have two to three distributions for elders, immunocompromised community members, and struggling families. I appreciate how our work has grown to be very impactful and offsetting to the delays from CARES Act funding and tribal government approval timelines. Our organization became prominent because community members knew they could reach out to us and receive a faster response with our large volunteer network. **Whether it be getting supplies to families in need and/or under stay-at-home orders, we take pride in being able to create an expedited process to support our communities.**

### HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED INDIGENOUS YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND PRESENCE IN COMMUNITY EFFORTS?

Many Native youth are trying to find their role in supporting community relief efforts because of the nature of COVID-19 requiring our elders to stay safe at home. In my community, tribal government office representatives are still working right now when they should be staying home and limiting

# Indigenous Community Perspectives

ON THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

contact with others. This pushed me to become more involved by gathering community members who are able and willing to do this work so that our elders can stay home and stay safe.

Youth have new approaches of coordinating and directing, but do not have access to needed resources. I have been contacted by Native youth from different tribal communities who ask – How do I start something like what you're doing? I provide as much advice as I can to help guide the process, but it all depends on access to resources. I also serve on the Youth Advisory Board for the Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) where they provide an amazing example of how to connect youth with funding opportunities and applications for community project programs. **It's a two-pronged approach when it comes to this work: (1) make sure Native youth feel empowered to step up in their communities and (2) provide them with the support they need while not overburdening them.** It is easy for youth to become overwhelmed in this work, so it is important to create a supportive system and leadership team.

## ARE THERE EXISTING GAPS IN SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS YOUTH IN PHILANTHROPY PRACTICES?

The first part in this discussion of existing gaps and challenges that must be considered are Native youths' tremendous responsibilities in their personal lives and families. As an organization, we had trouble finding volunteers because of the nature of this work also being without compensation. These youth come from multi-generational households that are trying to financially support themselves and their families, especially during COVID-19. Volunteers want to give back to their communities without potential risks or financial burdens. This is something that often gets overlooked especially with volunteer efforts, relief groups or non-profits. When we question how to get more youth engaged in their communities, we need to start the conversation with a more personalized approach. What are youth sacrificing to do this work?

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## Entrepreneurship and Small Businesses

*Interview with Vanessa Roanhorse (Navajo) and Olivia Roanhorse (Navajo) of Roanhorse Consulting, LLC.*

### CAN YOU SHARE ABOUT ROANHORSE CONSULTING'S WORK DURING THE PANDEMIC?

Our firm focuses on redefining and shifting the framework of being "just a consultant" to our communities. We integrate this practice through supporting efforts that create opportunities and space for our communities in entrepreneurship and access to capital. For instance, Native Women Lead (NWL) is a collaborative effort we developed with our network and community partnerships to create space and access to capital for women in our community. We focused on curating and bringing resources together to move capital to support Indigenous women. Indigenous women are the economic stabilizers of the nation and we need to look to put more capital to Indigenous women.

It is important to integrate this holistic perspective when working in the community. For instance, during NWL's last in-person summit, we held space

for Native women entrepreneurs by creating and providing employment opportunities. We wanted to demonstrate that we need to also consider how we direct support towards economic development, financial health, and healthcare of our community members. **There is a need to reevaluate our measurement standards; we need to bring in this holistic approach towards understanding impact, support, resources, and community needs.**

### HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED THE SCOPE OF YOUR EFFORTS?

When COVID-19 hit our communities, without thinking about contracts and compensation, we put out assets to help. **We turned to our relationships and our network to use our privilege as a consulting firm to help move conversations and commit to action in our communities.** There was [never a] question [about] whether we were going to support - we [simply asked] 'what do you need help with?' We are a small Indigenous-led team that holds and uplifts value systems in our work, unlike traditional consulting firms. This approach to business is something we believe in by aligning values rooted in ourselves with business. This is intentional; it has changed our



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relationships across multiple partners and networks.

We are fortunate to have resources to shift and support family needs in our Native communities. If we invest in each other, we are investing in the community. With this mindset, NWL purchased products for Native women in our communities and distributed free care packages. Our community is incredibly entrepreneurial. Under NWL, we also created the Matriarch Response Loan Fund where we provided character-based loans. We didn't request credit collateral conditions and capacity; we offered a 0% [interest rate] for the life of the loan.

### ARE THERE EXISTING GAPS IN SUPPORT FOR ENTREPRENEURS AND SMALL BUSINESSES IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES?

The [process to successfully receiving a] federal payroll protection plan loan, as well as the ability for communities to move resources, did not happen to the extent [in which they were intended]. The ability for people to benefit from the stimulus money is one of the biggest issues faced in our communities. This comes from the issues with 7A bank certification requirements. We started to refer community members to those

within our network whose intention and alignment with the mission to serve Native community's needs was evident, such as the Native American Bank.

Another part of the challenge that exists for our communities is knowing how important long-term investments are. **This conversation of sustainable and long-term resources in our communities needs to be continued;** it is critical when working towards minimizing the rippling effects faced in many of our communities today.

### HOW CAN THE PHILANTHROPIC SECTOR BETTER SUPPORT ENTREPRENEURS AND SMALL BUSINESSES?

**The moment for Indigenous wisdom is now. Stakeholders in the sector must consult with our Indigenous relatives through informed support relationships.**

There needs to be a new future, pathway, and system created.

The sector needs to support financial models that separate general operating dollars from programmatic dollars and understand that grant work is a partnership between funders and communities. There is great change our communities are experiencing, which will require funders to be more understanding and integrate flexible guidelines in grants.

# INVESTING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

## LESSONS AND A CALL TO ACTION FOR PHILANTHROPY

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a broad range of inequities and disparities across the nation. Simultaneously, it has revealed the strength and solidarity of individuals and institutions to invest philanthropic resources—and the inspirational ways those resources are reaching the communities in need. As we have discussed throughout this report, the impacts of the epidemic have been fast-moving. When it comes to philanthropic investment, speed also matters.

For too long, philanthropy in tribal communities has been driven by a desire to fix problems and define their communities by their needs and deficits, not their strengths. This charity approach to philanthropy is not only misguided, but often traps tribal communities in a narrative they do not define for themselves. This often leads to false narratives and harm to communities. Indigenous communities are comprised of rich cultures and nations that represent so much more than a perpetual crisis. Native Americans in Philanthropy developed this report to showcase how Indigenous communities relied on their own strengths to spring to action, invite philanthropy to change their approach, and invest their resources quickly.

As tribal nonprofits and community leaders continue to support their elders, frontline healthcare workers, and children and families throughout this latest wave of the pandemic, we hope funders will continue to support the many response efforts we profile in this report and on our COVID-19 resource center on our website. Just as importantly, we call on funders to commit to our communities for the long-term by strengthening their investment in Indigenous community leadership.



*Courtesy of Community Outreach & Patient Empowerment (COPE)*

# Investing in Indigenous Community Leadership

LESSONS AND A CALL TO ACTION FOR PHILANTHROPY



*Courtesy of Indigenous Life Ways*

The pandemic is far from over. Indigenous communities have organized innovative resource networks and response funds to meet the most immediate and urgent needs, but they are also looking toward a future beyond crisis—and even recovery. We call on our philanthropic partners across the country to build on the important lessons from this report. It is time to shift from crisis response to investments in thriving, self-determined, and sustainable futures led by Indigenous people in their own communities.

## **1. Invest in Indigenous-led organizations and initiatives:**

One of the primary reasons we developed this report was to shine

a light on the important role of Indigenous community leadership in meeting the many challenges in this crisis. Especially in disasters and crises, funders too often prioritize speed and familiarity with intermediary partners that do not always represent the communities they're trying to reach, including Indigenous communities. We feature many of these Indigenous-led efforts in this report and on our website's COVID-19 resource center.

## **2. Maximize general operating**

**support:** Many funders were quick to change the existing terms of their funding arrangements or distribute new funds without restrictions during this pandemic. This shift was crucial to Indigenous-led organizations across the country that needed the flexibility to meet needs in a fast-moving situation. We call on funders to maximize unrestricted and general operating support as a long-term strategy because it shifts power to the leaders who know how to best serve their communities and provides a more sustainable future for their organizations and initiatives.

# Investing in Indigenous Community Leadership

LESSONS AND A CALL TO ACTION FOR PHILANTHROPY

### 3. Diversify vehicles for investment:

The over \$8 million invested in response efforts through the *GoFundMe* platform carries with it an important lesson for the broader philanthropic sector. Philanthropy's traditional vehicles and structures to move money do not work for the diverse range of organizations, initiatives, and mutual aid networks that organized to meet the ongoing challenges of COVID-19. We analyzed *GoFundMe* as one clear example of community leaders acting quickly and locally while leveraging their personal networks. As we learned from Krystal Curley, Shandiin Herrera, and other community leaders, dollars need as many avenues as possible to get to the ground through trusted community partners. To help build new partnerships between Indigenous-led organizations with diverse organizational structures and funders, Roanhorse Consulting developed a COVID-19 resource map for New Mexico.<sup>17</sup> We encourage further efforts like this to support a wider range of resource networks in tribal communities.

### 4. Invest in Indigenous community strengths and leadership—

**not their deficits:** Indigenous communities face a number of structural barriers to success while struggling with historical trauma. Though these are important challenges to understand and acknowledge, they should not define the hundreds of rich and diverse tribal cultures across the countries. Focusing on these deficits also ignores some of their most important resources and strengths, drawn from their cultural power. We call on funders to identify where they are investing through a deficit framework and shift to a strengths-based framework. NAP has developed an Indigenous Lifecourse framework to help guide funders in this process.<sup>18</sup> We are also in the process of developing a new toolkit with practical strategies to achieve this shift in approach to be more in-line with an Indigenous worldview. NAP and Candid have also developed an *Investing in Native Communities* platform that provides additional resources and a map to explore funding to tribal communities.<sup>19</sup>

# Investing in Indigenous Community Leadership

LESSONS AND A CALL TO ACTION FOR PHILANTHROPY

## 5. Invest in tribal policy advocacy and tribal leadership:

As we discussed in the earlier part of this report, tribes and tribal communities have a very different set of policy needs and opportunities than other communities. The federal government also holds a solemn legal obligation to tribes that requires unique policy leadership. In addition to investments in Indigenous-led community organizations and response efforts, it is vital that funders invest in tribal policy advocacy organizations and their leadership to ensure longer-term treaty-bound investments by the government in tribal communities. We encourage funders to visit the *Investing in Native Communities* platform to explore more of these organizations and opportunities.



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- Eastern Navajo Nation Covid-19 Relief Fund
- Far East Navajo Covid-19 Response Fund
- Fighting Covid-19
- Havasupai Tribe Covid-19 Relief Fund
- Help First Nations Tribes Recover From Covid-19
- Help Navajo Nation Elders Suffering Coronavirus
- Help Navajo Nation Families During Covid Crisis
- Help The Navajo Nation Recover From Covid-19
- Help The Navajo People During Covid-19
- Nape Un Okiyapi Oto Covid-19 Relief
- Native American Covid19 Community Relief Fund
- Native American Covid-19 Relief
- Native American Tribes Need Covid-19 Relief
- Native People Of Hwy 89 Covid-19 Relief Fund
- Navajo & Hopi Families Covid-19 Relief
- Navajo And Tribal Clinical Relief Support
- Navajo Covid 19 Relief Efforts
- Navajo Covid-19 Relief Fund
- Navajo Covid-19 Relief Fund
- Navajo Nation & Hopi Nation Covid-19 Relief
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- Navajo Nation Covid-19 Relief Fund
- Navajo Nation Covid-19 Supply Run
- Pine Ridge Rez Food Relief
- Protect Diné Mountain Communities From Covid-19!
- Protect Native Elders
- Relief For The Lakota People Of The Rosebud
- Shelter For Navajo Families Struck By Covid-19
- Southern Az Urban Native Indigenous Covid Relief
- Support Indigenous Organizers During Covid-19
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- Utah Tribal Covid-19 Relief
- White Mountain Apache Tribe Covid-19 Relief Fund
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