



CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

*Reflections On Strengthening Partnerships Between
the Philanthropic Community and Native Americans*

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Cover image *She, Her and Her Honor Dancing* by Sam English

S U M M A R Y

Native Americans face extraordinary challenges when entering the philanthropic maze created by foundations. While \$5.4 billion is awarded in grants across the United States, less than one percent is targeted toward Native American communities and causes and some of those funds are granted to non-Native controlled institutions with limited participation by Native people. The reasons for this persistent under funding of Native communities are complex. One common problem is pervasive negative stereotypes about the lives and work of Native people by even well meaning foundation staffs. Another issue is the presence of an enormous cultural gap. For example many Native American communities value relationships and network approaches to solving social problems rather than a system that promotes individual achievement and narrow, targeted funding.

To understand Native American concerns foundations must first recognize the importance of building a respectful relationship over time. That requires learning about each unique Native community and its specific issues. Currently there is a propensity among foundations to lump all tribal people together which results in some of them being hesitant about funding Native projects based on the assumption that what didn't work for one Native community won't work for any Native community. In an effort to bridge the gap between Native people and foundations, this paper provides an overview of the impediments to partnerships between the two parties and offers strategies for overcoming them. Drawing on in-depth interviews with people who are fundamental to the process – leaders of Native non-profits, foundation staff members and donors – this paper concludes with a series of specific recommendations for forging stronger partnerships between the philanthropic community and Native Americans.

LESS THAN ONE PERCENT

A significant amount of research has been conducted and many authoritative papers have been written about how foundations persistently under fund projects in Indian Country. The most recent figure available shows that \$5.4 billion a year is given away by U.S. foundations, but less than one percent is directed toward Native American issues and causes. This paper does not attempt to replicate or augment the existing literature; rather we set out to listen to the stories of leaders of Native non-profits and selected foundation staff and donors (see appendix) with the single purpose of discovering the specific strategies that could strengthen partnerships between the philanthropic community and Native Americans. Our intent is to provoke thought, dialogue and action that will strengthen partnerships between Native Americans and the philanthropic community.

All the people interviewed were generous with their time, provided thoughtful information and made practical recommendations on the best way to move forward. This paper summarizes the findings of these interviews and includes the views of the authors: Michael Chapman (Menominee), David Cournoyer (Lakota) and Wilma Mankiller (Cherokee)

Building strong relationships

Reciprocal relationships and an abiding belief in the interdependence of all living beings are at the heart of Native culture. Foundations and tribal communities must approach each other as equal partners in a joint endeavor, with each side taking responsibility for establishing the trust on which a truly collaborative relationship depends. That means taking the time to understand each other's perspectives, re-educating respectfully when necessary, and adapting existing practices to accommodate and honor tribal values and traditions.

NATIVE CULTURE AND HISTORY

There is a lack of knowledge and understanding in the general public about Indian people and tribes. This lack of knowledge is often reflected in the interests of foundations and the projects they fund.
– Sherry Salway Black

There is enormous diversity among the approximately four million Native people who are citizens of more than 560 tribal governments in the United States. Each tribal group has a unique history, language, culture, system of governance and way of life. While some Native people, particularly in Alaska, continue to subsist on fishing, hunting and gathering food, others manage large, multi-faceted enterprises.

Despite these differences, Native people face common challenges in their efforts to revitalize their governments, maintain culture, protect lands and rebuild whole, healthy families and communities. One universal obstacle is the pervasive negative stereotypes about Native people that make the lives and work of Native people immeasurably more difficult. With little accurate information about either the history or contemporary lives of Native people, it is almost impossible to understand current Native issues.

Perhaps the most important thread in that context story is survival because Native people have outlived the idea that they are “vanishing Americans.” There are more Native Americans in this century than in any previous one – and while there has been the loss of languages and ceremonies there is also a cultural renaissance and vitality in many tribal communities.

The late Dakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr., once observed:

The fundamental factor that keeps Indians and non-Indians from communicating is that they are speaking about two entirely different perceptions of the world. Growing up on an Indian

reservation makes one acutely aware of the mysteries of the universe. Medicine men practicing their ancient ceremonies perform feats that amaze and puzzle the rational mind. The sense of contentment enjoyed by older Indians in the face of a lifetime's experience of betrayal, humiliation and paternalism stuns the outside observer. It often appears that Indians are immune to the values which foreign institutions have forced them to confront. Their minds remain fixed on other realities.

An August 2007 study by the Public Agenda Foundation, *Walking a Mile: A First Step Toward Mutual Understanding*, confirms these two different perceptions of the world. The study, based on 12 focus groups, documented the generalizations and stereotypes non-Natives have about Native Americans. "Many non-Indians we spoke to, particularly those living far from concentrated Indian populations, had a vague, simplified knowledge of Indian history, almost as if their thinking ended with the battle of Little Big Horn," the study said. Native people were viewed (even by some on the foundation staff) through a narrow, one-dimensional lens.

While Native Americans do live in the modern world, many of the current problems have roots in the colonial past. Native people are bound by the common experience of having been "discovered" and subjected to colonial expansion into their territories which led to the loss of an incalculable number of lives and millions and millions of acres of land and resources. The most basic rights of Native people were disregarded as they were subjected to a series of policies designed to assimilate them into colonial society and culture. The legacy of these policies was often poverty, high infant mortality, rampant unemployment, substance abuse and all its attendant problems. When many Native communities develop plans to address social and economic issues, they do so as part of a larger effort to rebuild their families, communities and tribal nations.

Yet even as they address other critical issues, most tribal people place a

high premium on preserving culture, languages, healing arts, songs and ceremonies. Nothing can replace the sense of continuity that a genuine understanding of traditional knowledge brings. There is no doubt that in some Native communities the original languages, ceremonies and knowledge systems have been irretrievably lost, but in many others the culture is vibrant. Native languages are still spoken and hundreds of ceremonies commemorate seasonal changes in the natural world and the lives of human beings. Each year Native people develop more ways to maintain and pass on to future generations aspects of their culture ranging from language to use of medicinal plants.

Given the enormous adversity they have faced it is miraculous that many Native Americans have retained a sense of cohesion as well as some of the core values that have sustained their people over time. Even in the most challenged tribal communities there is a sense of reciprocity and a clear understanding by tribal people that their lives are part of and inseparable from each other and the land. This enduring value of interdependence fuels a duty and responsibility to help other people and to conserve and protect the natural world that is a sacred provider of food, medicine and spiritual sustenance.

The value of reciprocal relationships is central to Indigenous communities where the most respected people are not always those who have amassed material wealth or achieved great personal success. Indeed, in some tribal societies, the contrary is true where the greatest respect is reserved for those who give away material wealth or those who are viewed as the essential people whenever help is needed.

If many Americans lack a basic understanding of either the history or the culture of native people, even more fail to recognize the intellectual history of Native people. Native Americans have made enormous contributions in the scientific, political and economic spheres from the beginning of time.

Long before astronomy was formally taught in American educational institutions, the Navajo and Lakota, among others, possessed extensive knowledge of the galaxy and some communities even arranged their camps to mirror star and planetary formations. In recent years, the National Aeronautics and Space Agency has consulted a Navajo scholar in order to obtain traditional astronomical knowledge.

Certainly a major intellectual achievement by any standard is the development of the Cherokee alphabet by George Guess better known as Sequoyah. The written language created by Sequoyah in the 1820s was later used to publish the first American Indian newspaper, the Cherokee Phoenix. In the history of mankind there are few examples of an individual genius creating a viable syllabary in a two year span of time. And there are similar stories of great intellectual achievement from many other tribal communities.

“How many know that at the time of initial European contact in the Americas, two of the five largest cities in the world were located in this hemisphere?” asked Richard West, founding director of the National Museum of the American Indian when it opened in September 2004. “Or that, during Europe’s Middle-Ages, a city called Cahokia, near what is now St. Louis, and with a population estimated at some 50,000 people, was much larger than London, England, at the very same time? Or that, during approximately the same period of history, the knowledge of astronomy and geometry in several Native civilizations in North and South America, matched or exceeded anything known in Western Europe?”

Not surprisingly the pervasive stereotypes about Native people that go hand in hand with fundamental ignorance about Native history and culture can also be found even among foundation staff. Many Native grant seekers understand that it is necessary to provide basic education, often described as “Indian 101,” to help foundation staff learn about their history and culture and understand their issues.

When LaDonna Harris, one of the most respected leaders of our time, was asked about foundation fundraising, she had a visceral reaction. She described the process of having to deal with so many misrepresentations about Native people as “emotionally and mentally draining.” She recalls foundation meetings in the early 1970s that made her “feel like a street walker in New York City – the dynamic was akin to prostitution.”

One Native non-profit leader said, “Without any background, foundation staff have tendencies to either idolize or romanticize Indian people or view us as incapable of higher thought or not having the ability to manage resources and do the work we have described in our proposal.” He attributed their attitude to a “cognitive alien perspective” in which they filter everything they know through misinformation, misperceptions and stereotypes.

In one instance, a Native grant seeker with a postgraduate education was accompanied by a white colleague as he visited various foundations in search of funding for Native projects. In the foundation meetings, the staff related to and conversed with the white woman and ignored the Native American. Yet he was the one with expertise on the issue being discussed.

And if the stereotypes were not dismal enough there is a perception among foundations that the need for funding in Indian country has significantly decreased because of Indian casino revenue. “It is unfair to expect the few successful gaming tribes to take care of every financial problem in Indian Country,” said Lori Pourier. “It would be equally unfair to expect the successful oil companies in countries like Nigeria or India to lift up the entire population.”

Terry Cross said the misconception has become so prevalent that he now “...prepares a summary of Indian gaming for nearly every foundation project officer to answer questions from their trustees.” One prominent Native non-profit leader illustrated how intractable the assumed link between Native communities and gaming is when he related that he

attended a Council on Foundations meeting in San Diego and was asked what he was doing there. It was suggested that he should attend the National Indian Gaming Association meeting that was being held nearby at the same time.

In fact, less than half of the 562 federally recognized tribal governments operate casino enterprises and only those located near large population centers are highly profitable. Indian gaming is a highly regulated industry that operates within the legal framework of the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. It's a complex structure with oversight by tribal governments, a federal agency, and in some cases, states through compact agreements. Many tribal governments operate casinos primarily to provide employment for tribal members. More than three-fourths of all the tribal governments operating casinos use the revenue to fund services for tribal members or to fund basic government. Under a regulation that requires approval of the Secretary of Interior only one-fourth of tribal governments make direct per capita payments to tribal members.

The many erroneous and harmful perceptions of Native people will not change without a major educational effort. Until more data is produced that documents the extent of those unmet needs in Indian country the notion that the social and economic needs of tribal communities are being met with proceeds from casinos will continue.

Common misconceptions about Native Americans that are a barrier to funding

- *They are all the same. What works (or fails) for one will work (or fail) for all.*
- *Now that they have casinos, they no longer need funding.*
- *Tribal communities are unstable and rife with factionalism.*
- *They can't manage their own funds and projects.*
- *Urban tribal communities have little in common with Native people living on reservations.*
- *Native people live a life of unrelenting hardship, with little capacity for self-sustenance and growth, let alone joy.*

TRIBAL CHARITABLE GIVING

We must form and fund our own, Indian-controlled, Indian-funded, and Indian value-centered philanthropic organizations. And we must operate these Indian philanthropic organizations “better” than any mainstream foundation. In “better,” I mean more value-centered, more community-responsive, and more managerially sound.

– Mike Roberts

Tribal giving programs have changed the landscape of philanthropy and created many new opportunities for partnerships with foundations. The gaming tribes have contributed over \$200 million in philanthropic donations to their members, to other Native Americans, and to non-profits across the United States as well as a few gifts to organizations addressing needs in other countries. The tribal charitable giving programs create an enormous opportunity for partnerships with foundations and donors.

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community has taken a lead in meeting with foundations to seek common ground and possibly collaborate on funding projects that benefit Native Americans. With assistance from Native Americans in Philanthropy, a non-profit based in Minneapolis, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community Chairman Stanley Crooks hosted a meeting with Minnesota foundation executives on May 28, 2009. The purpose was to exchange information and open the door to conversations about potential joint funding of projects. Chairman Crooks reported their community had given a total of \$146 million since they opened their first bingo hall in the 1980s. He provided a chart detailing the tribe’s giving history and explained that annually Shakopee tribal members vote on a specific budget for donations.

Many other tribal governments operating casinos are moving forward

with community grant programs, ranging from support for public schools to direct grants to non-profit organizations. The Grande Ronde Tribe of Oregon, for example, institutionalized its giving programs by establishing the Spirit Mountain Community Fund, which distributes more than \$5 million annually to community organizations. And the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians has a remarkable giving program that has supported a wide range of programs from a \$4 million gift to the University of California to many more millions donated to medical facilities, educational institutions, tribal colleges and organizations. In a wonderful humanitarian gesture, the band donated \$500,000 to the Darfur Relief Fund and in early 2010; they donated \$1.4 million to Haiti relief efforts.

To encourage and assist tribes in creating and managing their philanthropic efforts, First Nations Development Institute developed the Strengthening Native American Philanthropy program in 1995.

Louis Delgado, the highly regarded co-founder of Native Americans in Philanthropy, authored an informative demographic profile of 36 independently operated Native American foundations, Native grant-making institutions and tribally created funds. His study found: “Native philanthropy has grown considerably over the past decade, not only in the amount of grant-making, but also in the variety and number of Native institutions doing this work.” But he concluded in order for the growth to continue, it needs the “involvement and support of the larger, non-Native philanthropic community.” Delgado also encouraged Native funds to create endowments or increase existing endowments to ensure their long-term viability. Too many tribal foundations rely solely on annual appropriations of revenue from casino operations.

The challenge is formidable, however. According to research conducted by the Harvard Project on American Indians, “Even if on-reservation Indian per capita incomes were to continue to grow at the 1990s rates, it would take half a century for the tribes to catch up.” With the poverty

rate of Native Americans remaining more than double that of the national average, it will clearly require a long-term strategy and the combined efforts of foundations, Native and non-Native, to revitalize and rebuild whole, healthy tribal communities.

What foundations need to know about Native peoples

- *They are a richly diverse group of people whose opinions and needs are equally diverse.*
- *They thrive on reciprocal relationships built on mutual trust and respect and take a collective approach to achieving social change.*
- *They have a long history of sovereignty that must be honored.*
- *They have deep, spiritual ties to their homelands.*
- *They are unlike any other minority group in America.*

A DIFFERENT REALITY

Native people are included in the same category as other people of color with little recognition of the fact that Native people are politically situated differently because of sovereignty and treaty rights.

– Lori Pourier

A considerable hurdle facing Native grant seekers is the necessity to continually differentiate Native Americans from other minority groups in the United States. While Native Americans share many common bonds and needs with other people of color, there are significant historical and cultural differences.

Unlike other minority groups, or indeed any other Americans, Native Americans are not only citizens of the United States and of the state where they reside; they are also citizens or members of tribal governments that maintain a government-to-government relationship with the United States. The term “federally recognized tribal government” refers to a native entity that is formally recognized by the federal government and whose relationship to it is codified by treaty, Congressional Act or other appropriate legal document and are formally recognized by the United States government. In addition to existing federally recognized tribal governments. In addition a number of other Native American groups with historical and cultural bonds are seeking formal federal recognition.

Without any historical or cultural context, it is difficult to understand contemporary tribal issues or culture. As Gail Small pointed out that there is such a wide cultural gap that many philanthropic efforts fail to get off the ground. And few cultural differences are as stark as the very different way in which Native and non-Native people view the land. In the larger American society there is less commitment to remaining near their homelands or extended families. The idea of home is very different to Native people, even those living in urban areas. If you ask a tradition-oriented Native person

where her home is, she will define her home as where her homelands are. If you ask a non-Native person the same question, he will probably describe home as the place where he lives; where he sleeps at night. Very few non-Native people have any concept of the depth of the historical and cultural ties Native people have to their homelands, tribal governments, extended families and community.

Land is critical to the cultural survival and revitalization of tribal governments. As tribal governments have generated revenue of their own, they have developed formal land acquisition policies and bought back their original homelands. A number of prominent Native people recently formed Indian Country Conservancy with the specific goal of reacquiring ancestral lands. The Osage Tribe of Oklahoma recently purchased one of the last remaining mounds in the St. Louis, Missouri area. They plan to prohibit archeological digs on the property and develop it as an interpretive historical site. The Pechanga Band of Luiseno Indians paid millions of dollars to purchase ancestral land with cultural significance. The land included ancient burial sites and the Great Oak Tree, which served as a gathering place for generations of Pechanga people. The Great Oak Tree is one of the oldest and largest oak trees in the world.

“Our knowledge is profound and comes from living in one place for untold generations,” said Oren Lyons, the Onondaga Turtle Clan Faithkeeper. “It comes from watching the sun rise in the East and set in the West from the same place over great sections of time. We are as familiar with the lands, river and great seas that surround us as we are with the faces of our mothers. Indeed we call the earth Etenoha, our mother from whence all life springs.”

The role of women in tribal communities is also misperceived by the general public. While the role of Native women in the family and community, now and in the past, differs from nation to nation, they have always played a very powerful role in tribal society. Native women are not only responsible for continuing time-honored traditions; they are also

teachers and interpreters of Native culture. As Native women work for the benefit of future generations, they are embraced by the memory and stories of their ancestors and the line between the past, present and future is not as distinct as it is in the larger society.

Native women sometimes hold titled positions, like Principal Chief, Governor or Clan Mother and sometimes they help select male leaders who are accountable to them. At Onondaga, it is the women who select their formal chiefs and participate in a special ceremony when they are seated in office. And the women can remove those leaders. In the distant past, Cherokee people believed that the world existed in a precarious balance and that only right or correct actions maintained that balance. An important part of the balance was equity between men and women. Women were consulted in matters of importance to the community, the clan, the family and the nation. When a man married a woman, he took up residence with the clan of his wife. Cherokee people trace their clan ancestry, their very identity, through women. There was once a women's council composed of women representing each of the seven Cherokee clans. A special woman served as the Ghighau or chief beloved woman. And Cherokee women could choose to join men on the battlefield. Considered tribal dignitaries, these women were called War Women or Pretty Women. At the beginning of the 21st century, Native women continued to play a critical role in many Native communities in formal and informal leadership positions in every sector of tribal society and the larger culture around them.

How Native fund seekers can talk to foundations

- *Ask who sits on their boards, what their priorities are, and what kinds of projects they fund.*
- *Describe your own community's history and culture and explain its current needs and issues.*
- *Explain the role of reciprocity, interdisciplinarity, and collaboration in Native working relationships.*
- *Be forthright about your community's ability to meet current foundation requirements and if necessary suggest changes to those requirements to accommodate Native issues.*
- *Invite foundation staff to a site visit to deepen their understanding of Indian country.*

U R B A N M Y T H

At the end of World War II, the great majority of Native Americans lived on or near their reservations or homelands. By the dawn of the 21st Century, more than half of all Native Americans were living in urban areas. This dramatic change can be attributed in part to an obscure federal program that facilitated the movement of thousands of Native Americans to urban areas such as Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Phoenix and other large cities. In the early 1950s the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs developed the Relocation/Employment Assistance program, which aggressively encouraged Native Americans to leave their homelands and relocate to urban areas. The program was part of a larger federal effort to terminate its treaty and legal obligations to tribal governments and assimilate Native families into mainstream American society. In order to persuade often low-income and unemployed Native Americans to participate in the relocation effort, the Bureau of Indian Affairs covered travel costs, provided job training and placement as well as temporary housing assistance. Regrettably, many relocated families ended up in very low wage jobs and some were eventually forced to live in public housing projects.

There is a tendency among some foundations to view urban Native families as a completely separate category from families living on reservations or in their historic tribal communities. Yet there are strong connections between urban Native families and those who continue to live on their homelands. Many Native families, even those who have lived in urban areas for several generations, retain close ties to their homelands by regularly visiting their families and participating in cultural events. There are indications that some urban Native families would return to their tribal homelands to live if there were more opportunities for employment and housing. And often when Native workers reach retirement age they return home to live.

While a significant number of Native families currently residing in urban

areas are descendants of families who were relocated to urban areas by the Bureau of Indian affairs program, it is also important to note that some cities and towns in the United States are located in the original homelands of Native people. In some tribal communities, like the Yaqui in Guadalupe, Arizona, the tribal community sits almost as an oasis in the center of a highly developed urban area. In other urban areas, the formal tribal government may no longer have a presence but tribal members continue to reside there in their original homelands.

Each urban Native community possesses its own distinct characteristics. The urban Native Community in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for example, is composed primarily of members of the tribes whose jurisdiction extends into the city – Cherokee, Creek and Osage. The Native community in Oakland, California, by contrast, is composed of tribal members from all over the United States, many relocated to the Bay Area in search of better employment opportunities.

Urban Native families share common problems with their relatives at home. They experience higher unemployment and poverty rates and are at a greater risk for a plethora of health problems. But they also must deal with some unique issues such as not being able to rely on extended families for assistance as they could at home. What's more many urban Native families are ineligible for federally mandated services such as health care and housing that are available to families living in tribal communities.

Since more than half of all Native people now live away from their homelands, either temporarily or permanently, tribal governments are developing new and innovative ways to provide financial support, cultural information, and services. Some tribal governments have even amended their constitutions to add at-large legislative representatives to serve as advocates for their urban populations.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

Without much knowledge of Native people the general public and some foundation staffs have a propensity to lump all tribal people together. For example, when a foundation funds a Native project and it fails the foundation sometimes becomes hesitant about funding future Native projects. One foundation virtually stopped funding Native projects when a major Native initiative failed. At a Native American Higher Education meeting sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation in 2006, Wayne Stein of Montana State University said, “When an Indian program fails at a foundation, they always remember. When dozens of non-Indian organizations fail, they don’t.”

The tendency to view all Native communities as essentially the same is related to the equally mistaken notion that there is widespread factionalism in tribal communities. A prominent United States Senator once described the many different viewpoints expressed by hundreds of different leaders of tribal nations as a “babble of voices.” This observation stems from a lack of understanding that diverse tribal governments from Alaska to Arizona cannot “speak with one voice,” and that within each tribal community there are many different and sometimes contrasting ideas about a particular issue. Diversity of opinions is a natural dynamic within communities where pressures to assimilate into the larger society and adapt to the power of a centralized tribal government bump up against traditional Native values, including respect for the right of individuals and groups to offer opposing views on any issue.

There is also a sense among Native grant seekers that innovative and very replicable projects in Indian country are viewed as applicable only to Indian Country. LaDonna Harris has often pointed out that Native communities have a lot to offer other indigenous communities across the globe. She encouraged foundations to fund more international indigenous programs that promote sharing of information and knowledge. “We are a

resource that is rarely called upon though we know communal societies and have managed projects in some of the most unmanageable situations,” she said. Tribal governments and communities working with very few resources have figured out new and often proprietary ways of developing their communities and economies while revitalizing their governments. In addition they possess a great deal of experience in developing cooperative agreements with state and county agencies and non-profit organizations in order to provide basic services like law enforcement, transportation, health care and education.

Gail Small tells one story that illustrates the need to improve mutual understanding between tribal groups and the philanthropic community. She is President of Native Action on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, one of the oldest reservation-based non-profit organizations.

In her own words:

A large philanthropic organization called to schedule a site visit in Lame Deer and we arranged for our non-profit board and staff to be available. The foundation staff and donor flew into Billings and held a press conference and then invited some city leaders of Billings who were at the press conference to drive with them to Lame Deer for our site visit.

We were not notified of the press conference or of the visitors this foundation was bringing with them. When they got to Lame Deer, the first thing the foundation staff wanted to do was ‘take pictures of poverty for their annual report.’ This threw all of us Cheyenne off. We were following cultural protocol and respectfully trying to serve them food and drinks. I asked if we could discuss our work projects first since some elders were present for that reason. They agreed to take the photos later.

As we discussed our projects, the Billings City representatives quizzed us as if they were the donors. Billings is a city that is very racially polarized and Indian people are often discriminated against there. We were not comfortable even having the city leaders in our meeting.

As the meeting progressed, the foundation staff person offered the opinion that we were trying to do too much and we had to prioritize our issues. One tribal elder explained that we could not separate our work to protect the Reservation from coal strip-mining from the youth work, or from our Indian Voting Rights Act case. The tribal elder tried to explain that we are a tribal community and everything is inter-related. The donor asked who was going to do the work since it seemed very complicated – which implied that we were not capable.

When the foundation staff person again asked if she could take someone with her to take photos of poverty, the board members talked in the Cheyenne language and told me to withdraw our funding proposal. They did not want these people's money and they wanted them to leave our Reservation. I had to tell the foundation staff and donor and the Billings city leaders that we were withdrawing our funding request and I apologized to them. They were astounded as my board members filed out the door to signify that the meeting was over.

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

The history, of course, starts before there was a United States. Tribes were independent, self-governing communities. The new federal government recognized this independence by signing formal treaties with tribal nations. Between 1779, when the Delaware signed the first peace treaty and 1871, when the treaty-making era ended, the U.S. Senate ratified 370 formal treaties. However even though treaties were and are recognized as valid legal instruments, the execution of those agreements by the United States reflects a heartbreaking history. According to the First Nations Development Institute, by the early twentieth century, the U.S. had taken more than 2 billion acres of Native land by treaty or official government confiscation.

The primary goal of the civil rights movement was to bring minority groups into the larger society as equal partners. Native Americans were part of this movement but at the same time they also waged a sustained battle to retain their own governments and their unique identity as well to maintain and protect Native languages, culture, ceremonies and life ways. Tribal governments are crucial to the protection of the rights of Native people and the maintenance of traditional knowledge systems. They exercise a range of sovereign duties, including the administration of judicial systems and police forces, operating schools and hospitals, certifying their own adoptions and foster homes, and managing a wide range of business enterprises. Tribal governments create tens of thousands of jobs and add millions of dollars to the economies of the states in which they reside.

Why some foundation-funded projects fail

- *There are few or no Native people involved in the decision to grant funds.*
- *The projects are developed by non-Native organizations, sometimes with little understanding of Native ways.*
- *The scale of the project is too great for the resources and capabilities of the organization administering the funds.*
- *The goals of the foundation do not align with those of organization seeking funds.*

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

If foundations and Native organizations really want to develop a strong partnership, they need to respect one another and each feel a sense of responsibility for helping each other achieve what they set out to achieve.

– Rick Williams

Native American non-profit leaders are extremely busy but they must assume responsibility for educating foundation staff about their history and culture as well as current issues. In order to develop a positive relationship of trust, however, the foundation staff must take the time to listen and learn. As Betsy Richards says,

“It is always about building relationships. Before you make a pitch to a foundation, talk to them, meet with the foundation staff to learn more about the foundation and also make them aware of your project before you have to make a sales pitch.”

Few Native Americans know more about the value of networking and building relationships than Lucille Echohawk, a co-founder of Native Americans in Philanthropy and a passionate spokesperson for issues related to family and children’s issues. Lucille has served as a tireless for Native people and volunteer for many local, state and national public organizations. In the process of volunteering for many local, state and national public organizations, she has cultivated relationships that have been helpful in her work in family advocacy. Lucille recommends working with organizations outside your community and “getting out of your comfort zone” as a way of building relationships with others with similar interests. For example, her service with Leadership Denver enabled her to network with people that were helpful in many of her other endeavors.

Terry Cross unequivocally stated that more than two-thirds of funding for his organization occurred only after he carefully cultivated relationships

with foundation staff or was referred to the foundation by someone with strong personal contacts inside the foundation. He noted that it took several years of meetings to develop a working relationship with the Pew Charitable Trusts, which ultimately resulted in a grant.

Some foundations have figured out how to develop relations of trust with tribal communities. One of these is the Lannan Foundation based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Since beginning work in Native communities in 1991, Patrick Lannan, President of the Lannan Foundation, has consistently placed a very high premium on establishing comfortable, equal partnerships with foundation grantees. The process starts with an initial site visit by foundation staff that respectfully listen and learn as much as possible about the organization, its leadership and its capacity.

The Lannan Foundation also made an admirable commitment to work within the context of the cultural values of Native communities. For example, the Independent Traditional Seminole Nation of Florida asked the Lannan Foundation to assist them in regaining use of their traditional ceremonial grounds, which had been taken from them for agricultural development. Since the traditional Seminole did not believe in owning land, the Lannan Foundation worked with Seminoles and the Indian Law Resource Center to create the Red Bay Stronghold Foundation. The foundation then made a grant to Red Bay for the purchase of 2,500 acres of land for use by the Seminoles.

June Noronha echoed similar sentiments and offered the following advice from the perspective of a senior foundation staff member who has worked for many years with Native people:

- Listen, don't talk;
- Don't proscribe, collaborate;
- Have infinite patience;
- Don't define success in a linear or quantitative fashion;
- Acknowledge the rich intellectual and expertise capital in Indian

Country;

And, always remember that relationships matter.”

While some foundations have developed relationships with Native people that are based on mutual respect others do not appear to be interested in learning from the collective approaches to achieving social change, sustainable development and relationships of trust. The values inherent in a collective, relational way of being – honoring relationships, practicing reciprocity, an interconnected view of the world, and respect for others – do not align with a system of metrics that favors individual achievement and narrow, targeted funding.

Indeed, it is incomprehensible to some tradition-oriented Native people that foundations do not use an interdisciplinary approach to fund projects in tribal communities given the tribal philosophy of everything being interconnected. Funders who sometimes do not work even with other program areas within their own foundations often miss opportunities to partner with tribal funds and local organizations. For example, if a foundation is funding preschool education in a community with dilapidated housing and few basic amenities, it could convene other foundations or the tribal government to address the educational issues and the building of basic infrastructure. Some funders stick to inflexible funding parameters and often subscribe to theories about social change that are well intentioned but not always applicable to Native communities.

Additionally, foundations work from an expert-driven model that favors investment in “best practices” that are presumably based on evidence and data. The problem with best practices is that they vary depending on a range of issues, including population, community, culture and context. While many projects can and should be replicated, with some adaptation, not all can be. Native communities are diverse and heterogeneous and what works in one place may not necessarily work in another place.

One way to address this issue is for Native communities to conduct more research on successful projects and keep the philanthropic community informed about the methods and practices that actually work in Native communities. There is now too much emphasis on deficits and not enough emphasis on cultural and other assets in tribal communities. There is a need to develop strategic, measured grant proposals that capitalize on the assets, successes and strengths of Native communities. For example, several foundation officers described the need for more leadership development in Native communities. There is no doubt that there is a need for the development of comprehensive Native leadership programs but there is also an indication that leadership is yet another subject that some foundation officers, and more traditional-oriented Native people view quite differently.

Several Native organizations, including Americans for Indian Opportunity, have developed superlative leadership programs in the context of shared Native values. The experience of AIO and others can be used as a basis for the development of a major new Native leadership initiative that will no doubt have as much to do with instilling and reinforcing core values as with providing a specific set of leadership tools. It is relatively easy to train a bright, young, energetic person to perform a certain set of tasks but it is a lot more difficult, though not impossible, to teach people core values like compassion, respect for others, humility, honesty and generosity of spirit. The attributes that come with good values are often a drive to get things done, optimism, integrity and emotional intelligence. Shared values and a shared vision can be a steadying force in a world that does not understand or value Native people or honor their rights. Many successful Native leaders implicitly and sometimes explicitly acknowledge that the Creator is inherent in all things and central to their work.

One key to the successful long-term relationship of mutual trust between a Native organization and foundations is a clear understanding of goals, timelines and reporting requirements. Native organizations must assume responsibility for ensuring that all the information and reports required

are submitted in a timely manner. However, some Native projects with good leadership and a clear vision simply lack the human or financial resources to generate competitive grant proposals, regular budget reports, and comprehensive evaluations. Foundations could address this issue by identifying a Native group with expertise in building organizational infrastructure and contract with that organization to work with emerging organizations that demonstrate great promise.

Similarly, the best method for improving leadership development and capacity building is to find Native experts to support the planning, development, data collection, program design and financial management for grantees. By the same token, the highly successful, professionally managed Native non-profits should develop a strategy for transferring their experience and knowledge to emerging Native organizations.

While it is important to educate foundation staff about Native Americans, it is equally valuable for leaders of Native non-profits to educate themselves about the foundation from which they are seeking a grant. Native grant seekers should try to learn everything they can about a foundation before approaching them for funding. Who is on their Board of Trustees? What type of organizations do they make grants to? What Native organizations have they funded? One of the most important questions to ask is whether the work of the grant seeker matches the funding priorities of the grant maker. Lori Pourier emphasized the importance of Native organizations remaining consistently focused on their core work and cautioned them not to shift their priorities in order to obtain funding. She said that cash-strapped non-profit organizations can sometimes lose their focus if they seek grants from foundations whose priorities are only peripherally related to their core work.

SELF DETERMINATION

Native American leadership is based on time-honored traditions, cultures, and religious beliefs including an understanding of the relationships between human beings and the larger world. Tribes have a long-term view of things.
– John Echohawk

In some respects the history of philanthropic support for Native American organizations runs parallel to the dramatic self-determination movement beginning in the 20th century.

Until the second half of the 20th century Native American organizations and communities received much of their external support from religious institutions, in particular the Methodist and Episcopal churches. However, a good deal of that support was directed to somewhat paternalistic institutions working to improve the “plight” of Native Americans. During the 1970s the Lutheran church became one of the first to employ Native people and shift support directly to Native-controlled institutions.

About the same time a few major philanthropic institutions tiptoed into Native issues and causes. The Bush Foundation made the first grant to a Native project in 1970 and began funding regional tribal colleges in 1977, eventually providing almost \$8 million to twenty-two tribal colleges for faculty development and capital.

The Ford Foundation provided early support for the Native American Rights Fund, or NARF, beginning in 1970. With foundation funding NARF led the fight for tribal treaty, land and water rights. NARF drafted the 1973 legislation to restore the Menominee tribal government after the tribe’s termination by the federal government. President Richard Nixon, who in 1970 had repudiated termination as a public policy, signed the Menominee Restoration Act and led the effort to repeal the Termination Act of 1954. The impact of the groundbreaking work of the Native

American Rights Fund is incalculable.

In 1975, Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act which enabled tribal governments to administer programs and services formerly operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service. The Act was then amended in 1988 and again in 1994 to broaden the scope of self-governance and tribal governments began to negotiate self-governance agreements that allowed even greater flexibility to allocate federal resources where most needed.

As Native people assumed more control over their own resources and governments, there was also growth in the number of non-profit organizations supported by grant-making foundations. In 1970, Comanche visionary LaDonna Harris created Americans for Indian Opportunity, or AIO, which has been responsible for many innovative initiatives in Indian Country and currently administers a highly successful indigenous leadership program. Then in 1972 six tribal colleges created the American Indian Higher Education Consortium and many other important national, regional and local Native organizations began to flourish. Native American advocacy groups like the National Congress of American Indians and the National Education Association also gained ground during this period.

A number of small foundations, as well a few individual philanthropists, provided seed grants to emerging Native American organizations at the community level. These small grants enabled some of the grassroots Native organizations to become viable regional and national organizations.

Since the mid-twentieth century, then, there has been a sea change in the relationship between Native non-profits and foundations and individual donors. There is a persistent concern, however, that donor funds continue to be directed to dubious non-Native organizations that use such ploys as heart wrenching photos of Native children to raise funds purportedly to combat poverty. There are dozens of such organizations including St.

Labre School near the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, which has raised tens of millions of dollars using compelling stories of chronic poverty from the Crow and Cheyenne people. When a 2005 lawsuit was filed against St. Labre by the Northern Cheyenne Tribal government, Joe Little Coyote said, “St. Labre has been marketing our tribe as the Race of Sorrows. The future is one where the Northern Cheyenne no longer stand silently by as St. Labre reaps profits from the tribe’s misfortunes.” While St. Labre School provides educational and other services to Crow and Cheyenne people, according to a recent Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Report, more than fifty-two percent of the \$31,808,828 it raised was spent on more fundraising. The school campus has a private airplane landing strip – an odd image for the nearby Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

Jerry Reynolds of the First Nation Development project describes another questionable charity - the American Indian Relief Council. This Rapid City-based organization has raised money ostensibly for Native people living on South Dakota Reservations. After the relief council’s employees formally complained that the funds raised were not being sent to reservations, the council was sued by at least two state attorneys general. The group settled the lawsuits but rather than closing down, it renamed itself the National Relief Charities. It also raises money for at least two subsidiaries, the Council of Indian Nations and Southwest Indian Relief.

The funds currently being misdirected to dubious charities could instead greatly benefit the many successful projects located throughout Indian Country. These projects, some of which are described below, and others ranging from language immersion programs to health care, housing and social justice programs could use the support of the well-meaning individual donors who send millions of dollars to charities with little accountability to Native people or their communities.

While foundations are now more inclined to directly fund Native-led projects rather than non-Native organizations serving Native Americans,

this issue of funding dubious non-Native organizations remains a concern. When non-Native organizations are funded for work in Native communities, they should be required to have Native people serving on their board as well as on staff. If an organization seeking to serve Native Americans cannot make that kind of institutional commitment to Native Americans, how effective can its work be?

Why some foundation-funded projects succeed

- *Native organizations educate foundation staff on Native history and culture and clearly communicate their issues and concerns, including their ability to meet deadlines and reporting requirements.*
- *Foundation staff listen to Native concerns and incorporate Native values such as reciprocity and interdependence into their relationship with Native organizations.*
- *Organizations administering funds are either Native-controlled or include Native board and staff members.*
- *Foundations and Native organizations have cultivated their relationship based on mutual respect over a long time.*

NATIVE FOUNDATION STAFF AND BOARD

A Native person on staff is not enough. That person should have a solid track record of work in Native communities.

– Louis Delgado

An April 2008 report on Native American Leadership in Philanthropy by April Youpee-Roll found that “Native American representation in the philanthropic sector is at such low levels that further, specified research is necessary.” This is critical, the report said, because “grant making to Native American causes and concerns is not proportional even to the one percent of the total U.S. population that Native Americans represent.” The report said the number of Native Americans working in foundations as program officers remain “quite small.” Only a handful of Native Americans serve on foundation boards of trustees. Even though recruiting Native Americans is a stated priority of large foundations, the data shows that most Native Americans will be found at small foundations.

Youpee-Roll concluded that increasing the number of Native American people on foundation boards of trustees and on staff would directly translate into an increase in the number and the quality of grants to Native American organizations.

Louis Delgado said it’s not enough for foundations to hire someone because they are Native American. It would be better for foundations to hire Native Americans with a clear sense of mission and a solid track record of working for Native nonprofits and community-based organizations.

Delgado also recommends internships and specialized training, perhaps by foundations or by Native Americans in Philanthropy, to help Native people become qualified candidates for foundation positions. Others expressed the view that often Native personnel, despite their diverse background and perspectives, are too easily assimilated into the larger foundation culture

making it difficult to effect change.

Terry Cross said he felt that Native people would have the most leverage at the board of trustee level or in a foundation's senior management. The "Indian people I know in foundations at lower levels often speak about their frustration at needing to be the expert on every Indian issue or being marginalized and unable to influence foundation policies toward Native peoples," he said.

The most notable exception is Dr. Valorie Johnson whose tenure as a program director at the Kellogg Foundation has enabled her to create highly successful partnerships between the foundation and Native non-profits. Her deep knowledge of Indian Country, coupled with her unique ability to get things done has made her the gold standard for Native foundation program directors. It is impossible to accurately calculate the tremendous number of lives she has impacted with her work at the foundation. It is not just that she makes resources available to Native non-profits; it is her ability to listen to and trust the people with whom she develops partnerships. One Native leader said Dr. Johnson generates "a different kind of dynamic to have a relationship with a foundation that is going to help you be successful rather than just give you money to be successful."

The creation of American for Indian Opportunity's Ambassadors Program is an example of how Dr. Johnson and the Kellogg Foundation drew upon their extensive knowledge of Indian Country to assess the capacity of AIO to develop an innovative leadership initiative that weaves traditional tribal values into the contemporary lives of emerging Native leaders. In an extraordinary move, the foundation made a grant to AIO during the conceptual stage of the Ambassador Program. This early investment gave AIO the flexibility to develop a strategy based on the needs of each class of leaders. The program is now in its eleventh year and graduates from the Ambassador Program are in leadership roles in many sectors of society.

PROTOTYPES OF SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

The relationship between grantee and grantor is much more than an exchange of funds. It is an equal partnership based on mutual respect in which both partners benefit in many different ways.

– Patrick Lannon

What are the elements of a successful partnership between a foundation and a Native organization? And what are the best examples of these partnerships? There are dozens of inspirational and highly successful projects throughout Indian County. Out of a lengthy list of such projects, we chose the following three projects to highlight.

The Native American Higher Education Initiative (1995-2003) is a partnership involving the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, tribal colleges, Native-serving institutions of higher education, and four national Native education organizations. When the Kellogg Foundation initially proposed a competitive funding process to only a few select institutions, the tribal colleges – which operate under the culturally based principle of collective relationships – objected, essentially saying “It’s all of us, or none of us.” To its credit the foundation acquiesced to the tribal colleges and opened access to the initiative, which had the effect of increasing its collective impact. By 2003 when the initiative ended, the Kellogg Foundation’s \$30 million investment had leveraged more than \$400 million in other funding. Had Dr. Johnson and the Kellogg Foundation not listened to and honored the tribal colleges’ demands, all partners agree it would have turned out to be an entirely different, more narrowly focused and less successful endeavor. When the initiative was over, the tribal colleges did not ask for a large, closeout grant as is common in such situations. They simply asked to maintain their relationship with the Kellogg Foundation.

The American Indian College Fund is another example of a well-managed project that provides exemplary services and has developed solid

long-term relationships with the philanthropic community. The College Fund has revolutionized Indian education by providing scholarships to Native students and direct support to more than 30 tribal colleges. The American Indian College Fund launched one of the most successful fundraising campaigns in Indian Country – the Lilly Endowment Construction Campaign. That grant enabled many tribal colleges to move out of dilapidated facilities into new buildings.

The Native American Rights Fund (NARF), a Native non-profit law firm founded in 1970 is often cited as a good example of a highly successful, professionally managed Native American organization. The philanthropic community, particularly the Ford Foundation, made an early commitment to the Native American Rights Fund and their long-term support served as a catalyst for other support. NARF continues to rely on foundation grants and individual donors but increasingly seeks support from tribal governments.

Our original intent was to also highlight projects that were less successful than anticipated; we decided it would be more fruitful to discuss some reasons why projects fail.

The most common reason projects were less successful than anticipated is they were conceptualized in a vacuum by foundation staff, consultants or donors with little or no discussion with Native people. In other cases projects were developed without even being vetted with the constituents the project wished to serve. In some instances, the scale of the project was not commensurate the human and financial resources of the organization. And in several others, the funder had a narrow, singular focus on one issue while the Native organization dealt with multiple issues simultaneously. There are a number of stories of significant grants being made to organizations with little or no connection to tribal people. When a dubious initiative receives a large grant, you can almost hear a collective “What could they possibly be thinking?” throughout Indian Country.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our forces have been dissipated by external forces; perhaps it has been just training, but we must now get together as a race and render our contributions to mankind.

– Redbird Smith

ISSUE: Pervasive stereotypes and misperceptions about Native people create a significant barrier to the establishment of meaningful relationships between grantors and grantees. Educating the general public and foundation staffs about Native history, culture, and contemporary issues is a daunting but necessary task. An educational campaign must be conducted at many levels including, foundation trade publications, educational institutions, film, literature, museums and popular culture.

RECOMMENDATION: Encourage and support organizations like Native Americans in Philanthropy, National Congress of American Indians, First Nations Development Institute and the National Indian Education Association to conduct a comprehensive educational campaign about Native people and their issues.

Local, regional and national foundation associations should host regular forums on the history and contemporary issues faced by Native people.

Native organizations should host more site visits so that those making an investment can gain a better understanding of the community. During site visits Native people can provide a basic course on treaty rights, tribal sovereignty, as well as on cultural and contemporary issues.

Develop regular webinars to provide education about Native people and their issues. Explore the feasibility of including Native issues in the regular webinars currently provided by the Council on Foundations.

Tribal governments should partner with Native non-profits and educators to document the unmet needs in Indian Country and help dispel the notion that casino enterprises alone can address all the social and economic problems in their communities.

ISSUE: What are the elements of a successful project? What works in Indian Country?

RECOMMENDATION: Native non-profit leaders frequently face a formidable set of challenges and have little time for educational efforts. However, a dialogue with funders about how success is defined in Indian Country and how to work more effectively would benefit everyone over the long term. There is a need to share stories about successful projects and more clearly describe the cultural and other assets in tribal communities. Make funders aware that tribal, clan and family relationships play an important role in social change efforts and that cultural values like reciprocity and interdependence remain strong in tradition-oriented communities.

Help funders understand that interdisciplinary and multi-year funding are more consistent with the whole, integrated way issues are addressed in many Native communities. Encourage foundation staffs to seek more partners in other units of their foundations to explore possible joint funding opportunities within the foundation and as well as with tribal funds.

Encourage Native journalists, writers and film makers to document and highlight the assets and strengths of Native people and their communities rather than focusing only on the deficits in the communities. This effort will also enable funders to understand what works in Native communities.

ISSUE: Leadership development and capacity building for emerging Native American organizations.

RECOMMENDATION: Educate foundation staff about the unique attributes of Native leadership and the extent to which collaboration, rather than unilateralism, remains important in many Native communities. This emphasis on cooperation and disdain for viewing leaders as “kings and queens” in tribal communities is sometimes misperceived as a lack of leadership rather than a different approach to leadership. While there is most certainly a critical need for major new initiatives in Native leadership, it would also be helpful to create a better understanding of existing leadership.

Identify a Native organization that can contract with foundations on a regular basis to help develop the administrative infrastructure of Native organizations over the long term. Some Native non-profits perform outstanding work but lack the technological tools or capacity to manage and grow their organizations or even generate timely accounting and activity reports.

Native administrative experts can help organizations determine the appropriate scale of funding for their organization and avoid a situation where an emerging organization seeks to undertake a very large project before it has developed the appropriate organizational capacity to make the project successful.

ISSUE: The complex legal framework in which tribal governments can establish, regulate and control their own foundations is viewed as a barrier to partnerships between foundations, donors and tribal governments. There is also a dearth of knowledge about the history of tribal governments in general which fuels the inaccurate perception that tribal governments are unstable and rife with factionalism.

RECOMMENDATION: Local, regional and national meetings between tribal leaders and foundation executives should be held to share information and, more importantly, to explore ways to collaborate on mutually beneficial projects. First Nations Development Institute has already begun efforts to demystify tribal charitable giving programs and could facilitate this work. Basic information can also be provided about the evolution of the government-to-government relationships between tribal governments and the United States.

Beyond joint grant-making there are many opportunities for partnerships between tribal governments and foundations and donors. For example, such partnerships could support projects that gather data on the unmet needs in Native communities and/or support the development of public education efforts that highlight some of the astounding success stories in Indian Country.

ISSUE: Neither the diversity among Native communities nor the differences between Native people and other persons of color are often acknowledged, a problem that is compounded by the small size of the Native population relative to other populations of color. All of these circumstances create a significant barrier to developing partnerships that result in foundation funding.

RECOMMENDATION: Develop special targeted seminars on the diversity among Native people and the differences between Native Americans and other people of color and conduct them at local, state and regional foundation meetings.

These seminars could include a discussion of the inherent power imbalance between foundations with significant resources and leaders of Native non-profits, an imbalance that is exacerbated by the relatively small population of Native people.

ISSUE: There are far too few Native people currently serving on the senior staff or boards of foundations, and far too many funds being directed to non-Native organizations that do not utilize those funding opportunities to serve Native people.

RECOMMENDATION: Foundations must assess their Native grant-making efforts to ensure they are funding Native organizations with a legitimate constituency in Indian Country. When funding for a Native community is provided to a non-Native organization, the board and staff of the organization should be composed of a significant number of Native people.

Work also needs to be done to increase the infinitesimal number of Native people currently serving on the senior staff or boards of foundations.

ISSUE: There is no central clearing house or information center for foundations seeking to provide more support to Indian Country or for Native organizations seeking funding partners. Native Americans in Philanthropy, a small non-profit based in Minneapolis, is continually asked to assume a leadership role in every issue related to Native philanthropy but they do not have the staff or resources to assume that role.

RECOMMENDATION: Native Americans in Philanthropy should have the support it needs to scale up its operations and serve as a central repository of information about Native grant making. Ideally, tribal funds and foundations can work together to provide Native Americans in Philanthropy with an endowment to ensure its sustainability over the long haul.

Native Americans in Philanthropy or another Native organization should seek support to develop an interactive web site in which both grant seekers and grant makers can share information and explore ways to collaborate.

A P P E N D I X

Special thanks to the Kellogg Foundation and the San Francisco Foundation for their support and to Mark Trahant and Eileen McWilliam for editorial guidance and assistance. Our heartfelt thanks to the following people who generously shared their thoughts:

Alison Bernstein, Vice President, Ford Foundation

Becky Richards, Program Officer, Ford Foundation

June Noronha, Strategic Planning Officer, Bush Foundation

Louis Delgado, former MacArthur Program Officer

Greg Shaw, Strategy and Policy, Gates Foundation

Lucille Echohawk, Casey Foundation

Ann Roberts, individual donor

Rick West, Board of Trustees, Ford Foundation

Lori Pourier, Executive Director, First Peoples Fund

Gail Small, Executive Director, Native Action

Terry Cross, Executive Director, National Indian Child Welfare Association

Richard Williams, President, American Indian College Fund

John Echohawk, Executive Director, Native American Rights Fund

Mike Roberts, President, First Nations Development Institute

LaDonna Harris, founder, Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, Americans for Indian Opportunity

Robert “Tim” Coulter, Executive Director, American Indian Law Resource Center

Patrick Lannan, Lannan Foundation

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