INDIGENOUS VOICES & PRACTICES

Recommendations for Grantmaking to Native-led Organizations

NB3

NOTAH BEGAY III FOUNDATION

2020

Purpose

On October 16-17, 2019, The Notah Begay III (NB3) Foundation convened twenty-three Native American executive leaders from established Native-led and Native youth serving organizations from across the country. The purpose was to develop collective recommendations on how grantmaking should be implemented to strengthen Native youth health and communities as defined and desired by Indigenous communities themselves.

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Introduction:
A Gathering of Community, A Circle of Power

Native American and Indigenous people come from places of healing, power, knowledge and spiritual connectedness since time immemorial. Indigenous worldviews are embedded in our languages, cultures, and traditions and inform how we seek to serve and care for our communities, families and future generations through holistic health approaches.

The experience of Native and Indigenous communities has been fraught with obstacles and deliberate impositions of Western ideology, which has often been more destructive than good.[1] These systemic obstacles continue to marginalize Indigenous issues and undermine the ways in which Native and Indigenous organizations support and care for their communities.

There is ample evidence that national philanthropic trends of financial support for Native and Indigenous organizations lag significantly behind their organizational counterparts on a per capita basis. Several recent reports[2,3] have identified this fact, leading to ongoing frustration among Native-led organizations and their leadership.

Further, for many organizations directly serving tribes and Native communities, foundation and philanthropic support does not entirely align with or reflect the needs, values, and desires of the community. Nor does it often go far enough to provide the full support these organizations need to counter the level of socioeconomic and health inequities that have manifested as a result of determined eradication and colonization.

> These organizations are often the anchors for their community and the only service providers that recognize, value, and are responsive to their Community's Indigeneity, Indigenous Ways of Being and Knowing, and Indigenous Ways of healing.

For two-days in 2019, the Notah Begay III (NB3) Foundation convened twenty highly-reputable and accomplished Native-led, youth serving organizations and their executive leadership. This unique gathering served as an opportunity to connect, to listen, and to give voice to constructive recommendations that funders and supporting organizations can enact in order to have deeper and more lasting impacts in Native and Indigenous communities.

This document will serve as a summary of the convening and will highlight the conversations, reflections and recommendations of successful Native and Indigenous leaders and organizations. The first section of the document outlines the Framework and organizing principles for the gathering. The framework utilized by NB3 Foundation, and the facilitation partners, is unique in that it emerges from an Indigenized theoretical and philosophical understanding. The organizers of the gathering have developed and implemented this framework in numerous convenings as a way to align the work and provide the necessary guidance to carry the work forward in a way that reflects Indigenous communities and their various value systems. The next section discusses the process and how it builds upon the established Indigenous framework. Understanding process

is key to successful implementation and reinforces the framework in order to synthesize and align reflections and recommendations that follow in subsequent sections. The third section highlights the reflections of the participants. The term reflection is used as it more fully articulates how the process and framework allowed for time to speak, think, and be in a meaningful and collaborative way. Reflections imply a more organic, fluid, and thoughtful qualitative methodology that gives space for the emotions and spirit of the community.

The last section outlines recommendations that emerged from the gathering, as follows:

1. Commit to a long-term, stated investment policy and action plan for Indigenous youth and communities.
2. Invest in the self-determined success of Indigenous communities.
3. Begin and sustain relationships built on mutual respect and community engagement.
4. Co-create processes that are mutually beneficial and meaningful with maximum benefit.
5. Value, prioritize, and respect Indigenous knowledge and practice.
6. Let the partner/community set the evaluation framework.

These recommendations bring together the framework, process, and reflections as actionable items that can be enacted by funding partners, collaborators, stakeholders, and supportive entities seeking to learn from Indigenous communities.

Framework:
From the Earth a Foundation, From the Sky a Web

Two key frameworks guided the convening and the methodology for this document. The first is the Indigenous Health Model (IHM) utilized by NB3 Foundation in its work throughout Indian Country [see graphic below]. In this model, interrelations and interconnections serve as the central point for developing programs, conducting convenings, and developing goals within Native and Indigenous communities. The second framework is T-E-R Knowledge (Traditional-Empirical-Revealed), as developed and articulated by Castellano.[4] T-E-R Knowledge speaks to the ways in which Indigenous knowledge is understood and articulated by, about, and for Indigenous communities.
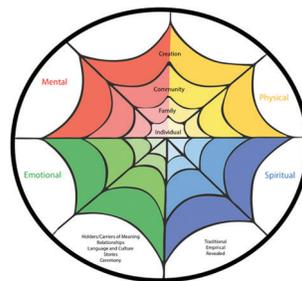
This foundational alignment is necessary to ensure an Indigenous perspective is used consistently and, unlike most Western frameworks, the IHM and T-E-R Knowledge effectively highlights and promotes the accomplishments of the work achieved and articulates results and the process itself that emerged from this convening through and an Indigenous lens.

Process:
Our Actions Are Intentional

The convening was built upon the Indigenous Health Model to guide the proceedings of the gathering and to provide a process framework by which participants would engage. The Indigenous Health Model addresses how all the aspects of organizational work (including the planning, implementation and evaluation) within Indigenous communities are bound together in a web- where all efforts and movements reverberate and are felt throughout the web system.

Three process strands emerged from the convening. These strands were formed into exploratory questions that can help contribute to deeper understandings of the process and the frameworks of the participants: Indigeneity, Community, and Expertise.

These questions form a basis for understanding the explorations of participants and the framings for the ultimate recommendations derived from the conversations and facilitation. Thinking about these questions grounds the work of the convening and the approaches of each organization and participant in serving and supporting their home communities.

Each aspect of the model speaks to a key concept of Indigenous ways of knowing and being and illustrates how Indigenous-centric projects are interconnected and interrelated with clusters around key aspects and elements of Indigenous philosophy, ontology, and epistemology.

Our Selves (Indigeneity)

- Who are we?
- How do we identify ourselves and our communities?
- How does culture, language, and tradition shape our values and assumptions?
- How do we operate as Native and Indigenous people both within and outside a colonial framework?
- How do we assert our identity and sovereignty through our actions inside and outside of our communities?
- How do we advance indigenous determination and support tribal sovereignty and ways of knowing?

Our Relatives (Community)

- How do we sustain our communities?
- How do we lead in a way that honors and celebrates the strengths of our community?
- How do we promote the value of our communities?
- How are we intentional in representing our communities in a positive way?
- How do we challenge systems of structural oppression in ways that align with the core values of our cultures and communities?

Our Knowledge (Expertise)

- Who is an expert?
- How do we value Indigenous expertise?
- How do we assert Tribalography (Indigenous-centric thinking and understanding)?
- How do we draw upon the wisdom of our elders, ancestors, and communities?
- How do we recognize the expertise of Indigenous people?
- How do institutional experts value indigenous knowledge and expertise?

Reflections:
We Bring Good Thoughts Into the World

Over the course of two days, participants expressed a number of stories and a range of emotions as they shared stories of frustration but also resilience and determination. As each of the organizations represented have built successful tribal and urban Indian youth programs, their understandings come from a unique position of capacity and ability that parallels the need to exercise self-determination and community sovereignty in moving their organizational missions and objectives forward.

Feelings of Frustration and Fatigue
Participants spoke of and shared stories regarding their frustration with current funding models and systems that do not emphasize the value of Indigenous knowledge and forms of practice. Many discussed the fatigue that comes from funding cycles and the overwhelming reporting requirements, particularly from small awards. As one participant put it, "in some ways the amount of work required for small grants does more damage than good to our organization . . . ."

> The frustration also stems from a feeling of dismissal from funders and organizations not recognizing the value of Indigenous knowledge and localized best practices, and from a lack of funder alignment that dismisses Indigenous values and process.

For example, inter-generational connectedness (e.g. youth working with elders) is highly valued in many Indigenous cultures and is a positive outcome, but it might not be reflected in the value system of external evaluators or within established "evidence-based" practices.

Rural versus urban and the mythology of Native identity
Participants reflected on how the mythology of Native identity, i.e. one monolithic group of Native people, undermines their specific work. Native communities have very different identities that range from urban to rural to reservation and throughout various regional differences.

> Funding for Native organizations is often a "one size fits all model" that is predicated on faulty understanding of Native history and identity.

For example: urban Native communities often have different structural needs and obstacles as compared to rural Native communities (reservation-based), yet funders tend to focus on the pop culture representations of "The Great West" and the "Tragic Native" narrative that pervades Western understandings of Indigenous identity. This approach is detrimental to the work as it creates a "fetishization" on the tragedy of Native history rather than promoting the strengths, resilience and determination of a Community and a People.

Continuity of Our People

Participants spoke of the enduring legacy of Indigenous communities and Indigenous knowledge that has persevered even in the face of genocide and ethnocide. Moreover, their reflections centered on how the work that they have accomplished is about the continuity of their respective communities and how they have overcome significant barriers to support the People, even in the face of ongoing systemic and cultural oppression. This speaks to the need for broader and ongoing approaches to funding. Should funders and philanthropic institutions be truly committed to long term sustainability and vibrancy of Indigenous communities.

Role of Youth and Community Led Practices

Youth are driving much of the solutions in their communities. In reflecting on this, participants wanted to be sure that young people were not simply recipients of services but drivers of community progress and decision-making. Further, the organizations and participants expressed how they found ways to channel the positive youth energy toward connecting with culture, heritage, language, elders, and positive leadership development.

Evaluation Systems

Participants returned often to discuss the need for authentic evaluations and modes for storytelling that would better reflect and align with the work being undertaken. They noted that too often the positive work being accomplished was discounted or not fully recognized because of the constraints of evaluation models not based in Indigenous philosophy or constructive frameworks. Funders should consider adopting an Indigenous model of evaluation that might provide better alignment of values, such as the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) Indigenous Evaluation Framework.[5]

Indigenous Knowledge and Expertise

Participants lamented the fact that the expertise of the community was rarely taken into consideration when providing funds for projects. Several times participants expressed their desire for funders and philanthropists to realize that the community "already has the answers" and could provide the necessary expertise in developing and promoting positive programmatic outcomes. This tension undermines the work in community and places Native and Indigenous organizational leaders in a precarious position of having to value and validate community knowledge to outside entities who have little interest in understanding or valuing that knowledge.

Code Shifting

Participants spoke of the consistent need to "code-shift," that is, the effort to articulate concepts or approaches one way to a non-Native audience/funder to ensure fit and fundability, and to articulate and implement original intent differently to the Indigenous communities they serve. This can add to confusion, communication fatigue and varying results.

Organizations will respond to grant proposals or present strategies to funders in ways that are markedly different than how they would present to the community. Although this is common in non-profit work, it is often extreme in Native communities as it requires not only language shifting/code shifting but value shifting as well.

Holistic

Many participants spoke of holistic funding solutions that would address not just youth but the whole community (elders, parents, grandparents, service providers, etc.). Participants have a keen understanding of the needs of their communities, and holistic approaches serve to support the health and wellbeing of all, creating a stronger network and allowing for high success in implementation of youth-focused programming.

Practice of Healing

Participants spoke of how their work is grounded in healing. While there has been some movement by funders to understand the effects of generational trauma, there is still much work to do in gaining the recognition necessary to fully understand and reconcile the traumatic effects of colonization and long-term systemic oppression.[6] Most participants drew a connection from their work in cultural and spiritual healing to healthier youth and communities.

Recommendations:
Our Stories Are Powerful, Listen Well

The knowledge from traditional stories provides the wisdom and guidance to lead a positive life; a life that values and respects the community. These traditional stories are the contained knowledge of generations of community practitioners who were able to survive and thrive across millennia. The participant-leaders who gave their wisdom, knowledge and energy to the gathering were following in this long tradition of sustainable and deliberate community organizing. From their stories, reflections, and interactions, emerged six recommendations for supporting partners and entities. They further articulated the ways in which these recommendations could be enacted in order to support and sustain the culture and the communities they serve.

The six guiding recommendations developed to assist funders in their efforts to create meaningful and lasting relationships with Indigenous communities and the organizations that serve them. They are as follows:

1. Commit to a long-term, stated investment policy and action plan for Indigenous youth and communities.
2. Invest in the self-determined success of Indigenous communities.
3. Begin and sustain relationships built on mutual respect and community engagement.
4. Co-create processes that are mutually beneficial and meaningful with maximum benefit.
5. Value, prioritize, and respect Indigenous knowledge and practice.
6. Let the partner/community set the evaluation framework.

From these recommendation, the following process steps were highlighted by the group:

FIRST STEPS

Do the Homework

Continuous education of funders and other stakeholders is exhausting, as was stated on multiple occasions by participants. Coupled with this, educating non-Native people about Native identity and struggles is not yielding

significant increase in funding. Funders should educate themselves about the community before engaging the community in projects or funding opportunities. Just as the organizations must educate themselves about their funding partners, so too would it make sense for funders to do the same in regard to Native and Indigenous communities. This would save considerable time and allow for deeper more fulfilling conversations and strategies to emerge in supporting Native youth.

Intentions and Deliberate Engagement

Intentions of funders need to align with the practice of deliberate engagement. This goes beyond site visits and telephone calls; it is about creating relationships and repairing damage from years of colonization and systemic oppression. This can be challenging for funding agencies who wish to support Native communities and organizations but who, themselves, are already stretched and/or lacking capacity. However, deliberate engagement is a necessary step in developing positive and dynamic relationships that can yield effective and incredible results for health-based programming. Rather than an additional strain on capacity, funders should view this as an opportunity to honor their values and missions by allowing themselves to move from transactional to relational engagements with Native and Indigenous communities.

NEXT STEPS

Indigenous Evaluation Systems

Supporting Indigenous evaluation systems allows for project outcomes to be aligned with the community values and systems. Rather than continuing to reiterate the same model that has not proven to be successful, funders should opt for seeking to align their models with rigorous Indigenous evaluation models and metrics, of which there are plenty. When these aspects are aligned, there is a higher probability of better data and more accurate results which can help support more efficient and effective funding.

Organizational Sustainability

The goal is to think about the organization over the long-term, rather than just focusing on projects and short-term outcomes. This means that funders need to take a step back and recognize that oftentimes the organization they are funding is an anchor organization that is the only one providing the kinds of support and programming that targets the specific Native population. In essence, funders need to look at supporting the infrastructure of an organization and, with the help of the community, reimagine how to support sustainable growth, organizational integrity, and high capacity functioning.

DEEP CUTS

Streamline Requirements/Unify Funding Sources

One of the major points of burnout for participants was the development, juggling, and reporting required to manage the multiple small and large grants that keep the organization operating. This is an inefficient approach to organizational development, and thought and attention should be invested in to solving this process. One solution would be to streamline the reporting requirements (as well as incorporating Indigenous evaluation systems) and allowing organizations to unify funding in meeting organizational goals, rather than independent projects. Many funders operate independently, but establishing central hubs with a sole function of passing

through resources for Indigenous projects and communities would be a great strategy in building a more efficient funding system.

Cooperative Process

Engaging in a Native-led cooperative process is perhaps the most difficult recommendation as it means that funders must let go of some amount of control in order to allow Indigenous organizations to lead as they know best in their communities. Given that each of the organizations gathered for the convening has shown success and sustainability, funders should spend time listening to and observing tribal communities and their programs, then build funding mechanisms that reflect these needs and recommendations. The cooperative process must go deeper and focus on how to support stakeholders in the community in ways that build relationships and fully embrace a shared-power and shared-decision-making.

Determining Success and Outcomes

There exists shared interest in achieving and measuring success. Both funders and on-the-ground practitioners want to have ROI (return on investment) and show positive measurable outcomes. However, there also exists tension in who determines the definition of success, what outcomes will determine success, and how outcomes will be measured. It is important that outcomes and the process that determines community success be driven by and reflect the values and interest of the community. And while funders will often agree with this approach or say that communities are in charge, the experience of the participants counter this assumption. Funding and power remain the primary driver of determining what success looks like for a community.

Closing:
Unto the Seventh Generation

It is important to remember and to recognize that community health practices have been a part of our traditions from the beginning. These practices guide our actions as Native and Indigenous people. However, we are often constrained by the dominant culture's methods in which misaligned values between the funder and the community can be detrimental to building and sustaining our populations. The result is less than desired outcomes and the ongoing effort of Native-led organizations toeing the line between funder expectations and community responsibility, incongruent practices and interventions, and practitioner burnout. As such, outcomes from the convening and our recommendations are a way to bring practices and support into alignment so that all can share in the success of developing and promoting vibrant and healthy Native youth and communities.

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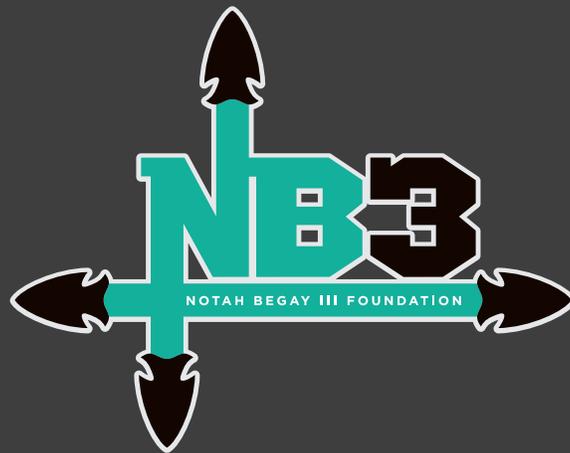
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