

JUST DO IT

Pathways to Get Started Right Now

For philanthropists who seek ideas for immediate engagement and investment, our research and conversations surfaced several ready opportunities, which we outline below.

▶▶ Partner with effective intermediaries.

Find and fund the national, regional, and inter-Tribal intermediaries already providing resources and services to Native communities. “Acknowledge that you don’t have the existing capacity or knowledge to do it yourself,” says Dr. Dana Arviso (Diné), director of Indigenous programs at the [Decolonizing Wealth Project](#). “Instead, move resources through someone that does have those relationships, that knowledge, that ability.”

▶▶ Invest in cultural cultivation and preservation.

Resource the organizations and individuals working to preserve Native culture, including language, for future generations. The cultural creation and preservation happening in Native communities is inextricably tied to sovereignty and Nations building. “We diminish the identity of culture bearers when we attempt to categorize them within the philanthropy space,” says Lori Pourier (Oglala Lakota), founder and senior fellow of [First Peoples Fund](#), noting that there is no word for art in Native languages. For these culture bearers, she explains: “There’s no line between field builder, change maker, nor in areas of health, language, community development, or education. It is those creatives who are deeply connected to the ecosystems of Native cultures.”

►► Invest in economic prosperity.

Fund Native-led community development financial institutions (CDFIs), rooted in local communities, that provide access to capital and other financial services to Native businesses, organizations, and households. In December 2024, MacKenzie Scott's Yield Giving awarded more than \$103 million in unrestricted funding to Native CDFIs across the country—one of the largest single investments in Native financial institutions.¹

"There's a wealth building of possibilities, a wealth building of courage," says Chrystel Cornelius (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians), CEO and president of [Oweesta Corporation](#). "For any individual to walk into a CDFI and have the bravery to ask for help, to want something more, when their whole life, they've been told no, you're taking this chance of vulnerability. That's the impact that we're looking for. That's community change."

Fund Tribal-affiliated institutions. Funding Tribal colleges, Tribal universities, and other Tribal institutions is similar to funding non-Tribally affiliated counterparts. "Native CDFIs and Tribal colleges would be the two low-hanging fruit that I always lead with," says Kevin Walker (non-Native), president and CEO of the [Northwest Area Foundation](#). "Those are entities that any funder can understand, a hurdle that should be clearable for anybody who wants to find a place to start."

►► Fund urban Indian organizations.

The nonprofits providing health and social services—including traditional healing practices—to Native families outside of Tribal lands are critical players in both service and cultural provision for urban Native people. "There are over 450 urban Native nonprofits serving urban Native communities," says Janeen Comenote (Quinault, Hesquiaht, Oglala), founding executive director of the [National Urban Indian Family Coalition](#). "On average, only about 3 to 5 percent of their budgets comes from philanthropy. Most of these culturally based human services orgs get their money from what we call 'civic funding'—city, county, state, and federal service contracts. Our organizations often feel overlooked by philanthropy."

►► Invest in Native rights and power-building organizations that support Native people and Tribal Nations through legal services, advocacy, and movement building.

Ska-xjeing-ga Vicky Stott (Ho-Chunk Nation), a senior program officer with the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#), described the range of power-building investment it makes in Native communities, including civic engagement and voter education work. "There's an important responsibility with investing in the infrastructure of Native movement building, the organizing work on the ground that has not always been invested in by other funders," she says. "It's connected back to Tribal sovereignty and Native people being able to define for ourselves what we hope for our communities."

¹ Brian Edwards, "[MacKenzie Scott awards more than \\$100M to Native CDFIs](#)," *Tribal Business News*, December 18, 2024.