

The Five Rs

RESPECT

RECIPROCITY

RESPONSIBILITY

RELATIONSHIPS

REDISTRIBUTION

Values of Indigenous Philanthropy

Scholars such as LaDonna Harris (Comanche Nation), founder and president of [Americans for Indian Opportunity](#), have identified and documented [hallmarks of the Indigenous worldview](#) that are common across Indigenous communities around the world. These characteristics of “indigeneity”—taken individually or collectively—frame values and approaches distinctive from Western cultures. [Native Americans in Philanthropy](#), building on the work of [International Funders for Indigenous Peoples](#), has adapted these hallmarks into a framework of Five Rs¹ for philanthropy to embrace Indigenous ways that could lead to greater impact across all grantee relationships. The Five Rs are outlined below with examples of how they have been exhibited in philanthropy.



LISTEN: Dr. Dana Arviso (Diné) of the Decolonizing Wealth Project on the Five Rs [↗](#)

1 Brittany Schulman, “[Listening and the Fives Rs of Indigenous Philanthropy](#),” Fund for Shared Insight, November 21, 2024.

RESPECT Honor the cultural values and traditions of Native communities. Additionally, demonstrating an understanding of the historical and ongoing effects of colonialism and oppression is also important.

A program officer from the [Schmidt Family Foundation](#) recently joined a [NACA Inspired Schools Network](#) convening of Native education leaders to learn more about land-based learning. She showed up and she leaned in—rolling up her sleeves to help with a buffalo harvest. “She was literally cleaning the taniga, the guts of the buffalo,” says Anpao Duta Flying Earth (Lakota, Dakota, Ojibwe, and Akimel O’odham), executive director of the NACA Inspired Schools Network. “Many of us were more on the hide or trying to get the skull, but no, she was like, ‘I’ll do it. I’m down.’ That meant a lot. That kind of walking the walk matters.”

RECIPROCITY Share and receive resources and knowledge with Native Peoples in a way that embodies a balanced exchange between all parties.

Some funders have transformed their organizational values and redefined success based on what they learned from Native partners. This can involve reconsidering the fundamentals of a dominant worldview and restructuring internal frameworks to facilitate investment in Native communities. [NDN Collective](#), for example, has been influential in helping reframe for non-Native philanthropy the idea of wealth. “To many Native Peoples, wealth means something very different from our foundation’s initial definitions of it,” says John Fetzer (White Earth Ojibwe Nation), program officer at the [Northwest Area Foundation](#) (NWAf). “It was important that we moved away from concepts focusing on finances and poverty toward those that support prosperity as Native communities understand it. It means we’re strong in our culture, our languages are thriving, and generations are connected again.”

RESPONSIBILITY Make funding decisions in a way that is accountable to Native communities.

Funders most respected for their work with Native communities commit over long-term horizons. Instead of conventional short-term, restricted grantmaking, the NWAf entered 10-year-long partnerships with several communities. It has a track record of making commitments and following through. “What I’ve learned in working with Native organizations, getting into a real relationship means showing up again and again, listening before you talk, leaning into their strategy and their vision instead of imposing yours,” says Kevin Walker (non-Native), president and CEO of the NWAf. “All of these things that many of us would say, ‘Well, that’s just good philanthropy.’ It’s even more important in a Native context.”

RELATIONSHIPS Share power and decision making with Native communities.

Relationships develop when funders show up and listen with humility and gratitude. “Northwest Area Foundation really understands deep listening to what we need as communities—it was never prescribed,” says Chrystel Cornelius (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians), president and CEO of [Oweesta Corporation](#), a national Native community development financial institution intermediary predominantly serving Native communities. “Often you’ll find within philanthropy, they structure programs how they think it should be done, and we fit into those confines of thought forms and philosophies.”

REDISTRIBUTION Influence processes and structures that will direct funding to Native leaders.

The origins of great wealth in the United States that allow for philanthropy are directly or indirectly linked to the exploitation of land and natural resources as well as labor. All US land was once occupied by Native Peoples, and all national resources were stewarded by Native Americans. Many Native leaders urge funders to reckon with that reality. “Philanthropy needs to be reframed as redistributing resources to us from the economic gains made from what has been taken deliberately from us,” says Alvin Warren (Santa Clara Pueblo), vice president of policy and impact at the [Los Alamos National Laboratory \(LANL\) Foundation](#).