



NATIVE AMERICAN AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES RECOVERY PROGRAM:

REPORT ON PILOT PROGRAM 2020 & 2021

**Center for Disaster Philanthropy
Midwest Early Recovery Fund**

January 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is intended to provide a review of the first two years of the Native American and Tribal Communities Recovery Program. It is intended for use by this program's funder, Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP) funders, disaster funders and other organizations working with Native communities. It also provides a snapshot of accomplishments, learnings and areas that need more work.

The Native Program just completed its second year of focused disaster recovery work in Native communities. Eight grants were awarded to Native-led organizations totalling \$750,000. Also, technical assistance was provided with the goal of increasing local disaster recovery capacity.

Recommendations from major learnings include:

- Build relationships and trust.
- Work in relation with partners.
- Invest in local, Native-led organizations and individuals.
- Use varied and preferred ways of communicating with grantee partners.
- Understand pre-disaster and layered community challenges.
- Be aware of complexity of Native governance and tribal relations.
- Acknowledge challenges and risks for white institutions working in Native spaces.
- Recognize challenges when considering investment in capital projects and engage with critical partners.

Topics needing more exploration are rapid rehousing and housing following disasters. Also, increasing and improving resources and sharing knowledge.

CDP is currently fundraising to continue these services and subgrants beyond the initial two-year pilot, and is financially secure through 2022.

BACKGROUND

Since 2015, the [Midwest Early Recovery Fund](#) (ERF) of [CDP](#) invested 30-40% of grant funding to Indian Country in South Dakota, primarily on Pine Ridge, Lower Brule and Crow Creek reservations. Working with Native American communities requires building trust and relationships, which takes time and patience. CDP realized disaster recovery in Native communities involves multiple partners, collaboration and a large investment of time, technical assistance and capacity building.

To that end, CDP applied for and was awarded a two-year pilot grant from the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies in September 2019 to focus on disaster recovery work on reservations and Native communities in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

The Native Program is utilized for early recovery needs after low-attention weather disaster events. Like ERF, the Native Program funds and builds capacity focused on early recovery services, education and outreach, and specialized services for prioritized populations.

In 2020 and 2021, CDP awarded \$750,000 to Native-led organizations working toward disaster recovery in Native American communities.

NATIVE AMERICAN AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES RECOVERY PROGRAM

The Native Program's goals were to hire a program manager to focus on building relationships and assist with disaster recovery in Native communities through grantmaking and providing technical assistance. Initial work included partnerships with tribes, reservations and Native communities in South Dakota and one in Minnesota.

Pre-Disaster Community Conditions

Certain conditions on Native reservations in the Great Plains are dire before disasters strike. Statistics about Native Americans reveal harsh

conditions and large disparities when compared to other Americans. These disparities are a product of long-term disinvestment in Indigenous communities. In times of disaster, tribes and Native communities are left on their own to figure out how to recover, with minimal public attention and little or no investment from federal and state government, relief organizations and philanthropy.

CDP worked to understand the pre-disaster conditions of the partnering Native communities. We found it impossible to focus solely on the recovery from a weather-related disaster in marginalized areas, which face [poverty](#), [food insecurity](#), and [inadequate and substandard housing](#).

By understanding the challenges communities are already facing, CDP, funders, agencies and communities can better mitigate local issues during recovery, working to improve and change systems.

Meeting Community Need During Pandemic

The program manager for the Native Program began January 2020. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The U.S. began to shut down schools, restaurants and bars. New terms like “essential workers” and “social distancing” became part of our everyday parlance.

Many tribes and reservations took more intense steps than the federal government and states to protect their people: closing borders to outsiders or enacting checkpoints. The inability to travel to meet individuals in Native communities impacted the program manager’s ability to create and build relationships, essential to this work. Building a personal relationship and trust is difficult via phone and Zoom, which are not the preferred or best ways of communicating, especially with Native individuals. This communication challenge led to delays in launching projects and in program delivery.

The impact of COVID-19 forced Native communities that were working on recovery from a weather-related disaster to focus on additional or exacerbated needs caused by shutdowns and supply chain/distribution challenges during the pandemic. Existing CDP grantee partners put recovery on hold, and switched to response mode, getting food and supplies to Elders and others in need.

New CDP grantee partners either focused on COVID-19 or planned a hybrid project of COVID-19 response and recovery plus weather-related disasters.

Understanding the new COVID-19 and recovery-related federal and state resources was challenging for tribal leaders. CDP and partners helped by introducing federal partners to local Native leaders and facilitating meetings and conversations. In addition, CDP regularly emailed lists of funding opportunities to grantee partners and other partners.

PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENTS

Funders tend to have colonialized values and operations, focusing on numbers and quantitative results. This program works to decolonize the grantmaking process and the funder-grantee power dynamic and work in partnership. This first section of achievements takes a colonized approach and look at the achievements of this program in its first two years, followed by pre-colonial qualitative achievements.

Colonial/ Quantitative Needs Assessment

ERF created and tested an Individual and Household Needs Assessment tool and Impact Study. Impact studies were completed for all of the tribes/reservations/counties of impact. The studies advised CDP where to focus funds and provided important initial data, demographics and information on impacted areas.

The Needs Assessment has been utilized in two communities and will soon be utilized in a third. This initial assessment helps the grantee partner to have data to inform its work and have a focused group of households to work with to begin case management/recovery navigation.

Grants Awarded

Eight grants totaling \$750,000 have been awarded over 24 months. CDP facilitated additional contributions and in-kind donations. Perhaps more important than brokering the donations, grantee partners voiced appreciation for the introductions and for getting “a seat at the table” with organizations, representatives of government agencies and funders.

Sharing, learning together and communicating

CDP hosted monthly brown bags for grantee partners (informal, drop-in meetings for those who could attend) with time for all to share, ask questions and commiserate. Meetings had predetermined topics, but we often strayed to current events or common challenges.

Current and past grantee partners participated in a focus group to help CDP learn how and how well long-term recovery groups function in Native communities. It also helped them understand if and how CDP funding helped or is helping their community during and after recovery.

CDP offered two webinars (links in Appendix A) focused on Native issues: “Working with Indigenous Communities After a Disaster: Focus on South Dakota” and “Disaster Philanthropy and Native Americans: Practical Tips for Funding On and Off Reservations” sharing Native voices and experiences.

CDP co-hosted a full day virtual Recovery & Healing Conference with Great Plains Tribal Leaders Health Board and We Are Warriors Emergency Operations Center in November 2021. CDP offered the

morning presentations and discussion focused on disaster recovery, and We are Warriors and Great Plains offered healing information and exercises in the afternoon.

CDP facilitated Mental Health First Aid trainings for grantee partners at no cost, and shepherded participants for two trainings. A third is funded and will be offered in early 2022. In addition, Native American-focused articles were created including seven blogs and four impact stories.

PRE-COLONIAL/QUALITATIVE & RELATIONSHIP-RELATED

Mitakuye oyasin-all my relations

We are all relatives – the Native belief that we (all Natives, all humans and Mother Earth are all related) is often spoken in prayers and meeting openings. In this spirit and to culturally match with tribes and Native organizations, all work with Native communities should be based on relationships and mutual trust. This was never more evident than during COVID-19 and the limitations on meeting people and talking in person. However, CDP and especially the program manager of the Native Program worked diligently to build relationships with tribes, Native individuals and Native-serving organizations. We also focused on meeting and “bringing people to the table” from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and agencies that could (or should) work on Native disaster recovery and other disaster-related issues.

Tribal & Native Relationship

Native families are less nuclear than western family units, encompassing multiple generations, aunts and uncles, and cousins, often living under one roof. Chosen (non-blood) family are also included in the family. When one builds a close, personal relationship with someone who is Native, they may be referred to and treated as family. CDP staff have become grandmas, aunties and sisters to some grantee partners.

In addition to the grantee partners in which we are in relation, we also worked to build relationships with individuals from: Standing Rock Sioux Tribe; Lower Sioux Indian Community; Red Lake Band; Rosebud Sioux Tribe; Meskwaki Tribe; Chickasaw Nation and Four Affiliated Tribes.

Federal

The CDP team has worked to establish relationships with federal partners such as: the FEMA tribal liaisons, COVID-19 liaisons and Voluntary Agency Liaisons (VALS) across two regions and beyond; Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regional representatives; Department of Commerce, Economic Development Association (EDA); Enterprise Community Partners; Native American Intermediaries (CDFI's and other organizations); Information Technology Disaster Resource Center (ITDRC); American Red Cross; Rural LISC; St. Vincent de Paul Disaster Services; Mennonite Disaster Services; the Federal Reserve Bank; Sustainable Agriculture and Food System Funders (SAFSF) and Feeding America.

We also facilitated introductions and meetings of grantee partners with EDA, HUD and Feeding America. Relationships established during recovery will also help tribal communities begin disaster recovery when future disasters strike.

Regional and State

Regional and state relationships were built with the Volunteer Organizations Assisting in Disasters (VOADS) of SD, ND, and MN; LSS of SD, MN, and ND: Native Elders Project (Southwest Tribes); state, tribe and county emergency managers; community foundations; tribal housing authorities; and other government agencies and not-for-profit organizations.

Food Distribution

CDP along with partners Great Plains Tribal Leaders Health Board and Partnership with Native Americans communicated with and met with

Feeding America on issues of food distribution on reservations in South Dakota. Feeding America invited our three organizations to a high-level organization meeting followed by the opportunity to provide some education on Native American history and culture to the Feeding America affiliates. We are pleased to report that Feeding America has hired a Tribal Liaison and is working on a short-term and long-term strategy to improve food distribution and partnerships with Native communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM LESSONS LEARNED

An often-asked question to CDP's Native Program and other funders and NGOs is, "How can we work with (or better work with) tribes and Native communities?" Following are some general and specific things we've learned and practiced over the last two years.

Work in Community with Native-led Organizations and Native Communities

- **Build solid and deep relationships with tribal grantees and their communities.** Transactional relationships do not work in tribal communities, mainly because of the history of colonialism and systemic discrimination.

Relationship and reciprocity are not things that happen immediately. It requires intentional, not transactional, interactions -- work moves at the speed of relationship.

-Jesalyn Keziah (Lumbee Tribe)

- **Funders and organizations must try to loosen their internal timeframes and be flexible** to the Native community or organization's timeframe, which may be fluid. Concepts and rituals of time were imposed on Indigenous cultures during colonization. To learn more, please read the

book, The Colonisation of Time by Giordan Nanni.

Invest in Native-led organizations and Native people.

- **Work with local community leaders, hire community members and build local capacity and leadership** so that your funding will support sovereignty and tribal work toward self-determination. Tribes don't need, nor do they want, groups to come in and "save them" or "fix them." They know their own assets, needs, and if and how they would like assistance.
- **Build local capacity.** Providing technical assistance, building up local leadership and investing to build the local capacity while rebuilding communities during recovery can also work towards addressing systemic issues.
- **Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) should do outreach to Native communities to include them in their typical planning.** Preparedness planning should be undertaken with reservation communities in mind and in conjunction with tribal emergency managers and other Native leaders.
- **Provide "patient capital." Reconsider funding timing.** For instance, Native communities may start recovery several to 18 months following a disaster. Adjust grant periods and timelines to fit the community's needs, leadership and organizational structure. Instead of 12-month grant project periods, consider 24 months. When possible, provide unrestricted or flexible funding.

Use Patient and Varied Ways of Communicating

- **Listen to the community's needs and their solutions.** Listening is the most important activity in communicating. Vicar Jonathan Old Horse (Oglala Sioux Lakota) of Woyatan

Lutheran Church, remarked during a Wambli Ska Society project planning meeting that someone should be writing this down for history, as no one had ever asked them what they wanted, what they needed and how they would serve and meet their own community's needs if they were awarded funding.

- **Get Native voices heard.** While we can and do advocate for grantee partners and Native partners, what need to ensure they get a place at the table. Native leaders must be involved in the meetings and communication about how to best meet their communities' needs.
- **Utilize multiple ways of communicating, learn how each person likes to communicate and be patient when awaiting a response** (or try another method). Some of our grantee partners utilize email but use their personal account more than their organizational account; some individuals prefer texting; some like a quick phone call; some groups like everyone to receive communications while others like one leader to get the information and then share it out with others.

My grandfather taught me we have two ears and one mouth for a reason.

-Dawn Knickerbocker
(Anishinaabe, White Earth Nation)

- **Have at least two points of contact locally.** An individual's interest and ability in leading disaster recovery efforts may change. Situations with family, health or work can change so always have at least two people involved in planning and communications. This was especially important during the pandemic, as different individuals were exposed, in quarantine or in isolation at different times.

- **Be humble and gracious. Be honest and forthcoming with your own and your organization’s colonial ways.** Walking the line between Indigenous values and colonial funder values can be challenging. Lead your organization, and teach them to respect Native ways and about the importance of patience and building solid relationships.

It’s not on ‘my’ time or the funder’s timeframe. We have to get rid of the white/colonial construct of time so that we can better serve our Native partners and communities.

-Webinar attendee

Understand Pre-Disaster and Layered Community Challenges

- Take time with non-profit organizations, state and federal agencies and tribal partners to understand the systems before working in a community.
- Learn about and understand each community’s pre-disaster conditions, including poverty, food insecurity and inadequate housing, which are heightened during and following a disaster. By understanding the challenges communities are already facing, CDP, funders, agencies and communities can better mitigate local issues during recovery and when additional funding is available.
- Don’t assume you are working on a single disaster. Disasters and recovery are layered in Native communities. For example, an

You can’t separate disasters.
- Pine Ridge disaster training participant

We are always in a disaster.
-Steve Wilson (Oglala Lakota Sioux), Pine Ridge Emergency Manager

Elder caring for several grandchildren experienced flooding following heavy spring snow due to roof damage from previous storms. She also had more grandkids to care for because of layoffs due to COVID. For her, all of this is layered, and the underlying challenge is providing a safe place for her grandchildren (not the three disasters she’s recently experienced: a hail and windstorm in 2018, snowstorm and flooding in 2019 and COVID in 2020).

Be Aware of Complexity of Native Governance and Tribal Relations

Native governance and the relationship of the tribe to the state and federal government are complex. Often, relations within the tribe – between tribal council, other tribal leaders and communities – are complicated. Relationships between tribes are complex. If you are not sure how to work amongst the complexity, ask others for help and remember every tribe and community are different – don’t lump tribes together or make global assumptions based on experiences with individual tribes.

- Get to know the timing of tribal council elections. Tribes are sovereign nations with the ability and right to self-govern. Turnover of leadership can be challenging, so it is important to have multiple points of contact and relationships.
- Realize relationships between tribes and states are varied. Some tribes and states work well together, and others have stressed or antagonistic relationships. Often, requests for disaster declarations are from a county or state. Thus, tribes are sometimes consulted and included in the request, while others are not.
- Recognize the variability of emergency management of different tribes. Some tribes have emergency management departments or an emergency manager. The knowledge and experience of each emergency manager is varied. Some tribal

emergency managers wear multiple hats, overseeing several programs, including firefighting, police and other emergency services, like search and rescue, and ambulance services. Disaster services on reservations have many complexities and often focus only on response and relief.

Acknowledge Challenges and Risks for White Institutions Working in Native Spaces

- **We must face history and have open-spirited discussions with Native partners.** Building relationships may need to include reconciliation because much of the wealth in this country was built from Indigenous land.
- **We should have conversations about the history of the boarding schools** and the part the churches played in destroying Native culture, abolishing tribal languages and tearing families apart. This conversation needs to be happening with each community for each project. Many organizations that assist with disaster services are faith-based. Some Native communities will welcome assistance and others may choose not to work with certain churches and organizations. You must learn and respect that.

Recognize Challenges when Considering Investment in Capital Projects

Investing in capital on reservations brings challenges and risk. Work with partners to mitigate risks before and throughout the process by planning for and working through potential issues. For example, issues for constructing a building may include:

- Land ownership (typically the tribe) and tribal agreement for use of the land.
- Responsibility for construction oversight.
- Responsibility for all expenses. What if there are additional expenses not planned for or funded?

- Ownership and responsibility of building maintenance.
- Sustainability for programs and organizations utilizing the building.
- Ongoing budgeting, management and sustainability of the building.
- Partnership agreements and memorandum of understandings with all involved partners.

Engage with Critical Partners

- Tribal Council. Generally, all organizations working on disaster should ask to go before the council to be introduced, share information and seek their support in your organization working there to show respect and honor the leaders. While CDP seeks to address each council, we follow the lead of local disaster recovery leaders, as every tribe is different, and some do not want the council involved for various reasons.
- Housing Authority. Most rental programs on reservations are through the housing authority so disaster recovery efforts will need to work with them. Relationships between tribal councils and housing authorities vary from great teamwork to adversarial.
- Tribal Emergency Management. Whether it is one individual or a department, and regardless of their interest in disaster recovery, it is vital to have a relationship with the local tribal emergency management personnel.
- FEMA Tribal Liaisons, Regional Voluntary Agency Liaison (VALS) and NGO's providing disaster recovery services.

FUTURE PROGRAM PLANS

This program is fundraising to continue these services and subgrants beyond the initial two-year pilot. The program is financially secure through 2022. The focus will remain on partnering on

disaster recovery with Native communities in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, with the addition of Montana. As needed and as funding allows, this work will expand to the additional six states of ERF's geographic focus. As CDP funding partners donate and designate funds for disaster recovery in Native communities in specific regions or for specific disasters, this program could, at times, work with Native communities throughout the nation.

We will continue to learn, work to improve and share what we learn. CDP is creating a Disaster Playbook Strategy "Funding for Disaster Recovery in Native Communities" and an Issue Insight on Indigenous Peoples. In addition to doing the disaster recovery work, we plan to work on issues uncovered in these first two years.

TOPICS WE CONTINUE TO EXPLORE

Perhaps one of our greatest learnings was the immense amount we don't know. Over the last two years, we began thinking through and need to continue to explore, learn and work with partners on the following issues and questions.

Rapid Rehousing and Housing following Disasters

Reservations have a shortage of housing with 40% of on-reservation housing considered substandard and 1/3 of homes overcrowded. Temporary housing and hotels are not available. Following a disaster, FEMA-placed trailers (when provided) often do not make it through their first winter blizzards or summer severe storms in the Midwest.

How can we develop a consistent and replicable strategy to use private and public disaster funds to rebuild and repair tribal housing to create more resilient and sustainable tribal housing?

CDP is working with Enterprise Community Partners, the Federal Reserve Bank, Rural LISC and Native CDFI's and Intermediaries to work towards

creation of a process and model to replace damaged homes on reservations rather than current, insufficient models such as FEMA trailers. Discussions and planning were interrupted during the pandemic, but interest remains high.

Increasing/Improving Resources and Sharing Knowledge

As noted earlier, tribes have varying types of emergency management, from an individual running multiple programs including emergency management, to a full department. The training and experience of these individuals or departments are as varied as the tribes.

How can we help tribes to share knowledge, experience and resources with each other? Could regional emergency operations center take the lead in training, collaborating and building a shared library of equipment and needed supplies?

We have some long-term recovery groups interested in helping other tribes, regions or long-term recovery groups.

What would a Native Long-Term Recovery Network look like?

Current and past grantee partners have voiced desire for more training and more work on disaster preparation and mitigation.

How can CDP help provide or find those services and help community leaders to rally their tribal council to invest in and focus on disaster preparedness, mitigation and recovery?

Expanding disaster and long-term recovery knowledge beyond emergency management in tribes is critical. Long-term recovery groups (LTRG) are a start, but communities don't build them until struck by disaster.

Could we create and share interest in disaster recovery knowledge in communities, perhaps starting with Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training? Could we then build local disaster champions through the CERT program and supplement them with capacity building for recovery?

PROVIDING HOPE AND GRACE

A common theme across the individuals and organizations CDP partnered with was a loss of hope that anyone would help their community

You are bringing hope. We waited and waited. We gave up. Now we have hope.

-Native Elder (Yankton Sioux Tribe)

recover. Government agencies had come and gone and the tribe had moved onto other issues – no one was working on disaster recovery. A Grandma (Elder) from White Swan Community on the Yankton Sioux reservation told us at an early LTRG planning meeting, “You are bringing hope. We waited and waited. We gave up. Now we have hope.”

The Native Program works to provide hope for recovery from disaster. We work with grace for ourselves while trying to work across two cultures and doing this challenging work. We work with grace for the grantee partners and Native people that need some help – help getting organized, some technical assistance and education, and funding to build local capacity and to provide Native-led disaster recovery in their own communities.

APPENDIX A

Program Created Resources

Webinars

[Working with Indigenous Communities after a Disaster: Focus on South Dakota](#)

[Disaster Philanthropy and Native Americans: Practical Tips for Funding on-and off-Reservation](#)

Impact Stories

[Persistence and Resilience for Community Recovery](#)

[Helping Our Relatives – Native-led Response: Recovery in an Urban Setting](#)

[Great Plains Tribal Leaders Health Board Takes on Emergency Operations](#)

[White Swan Update: Tackling Flood Impacts and COVID-19 Hardships](#)

Blogs

[Native American Communities and COVID-19: How Foundations Can Help](#)

[We are all Native funders](#)

[What our Native partners are telling us](#)

[The “15” Days of Christmas](#)

[Wanderings of a Wacicu in Foreign Nations](#)

[Lessons for supporting Native-led disaster recovery](#)

[Recovery and Healing – The right thing in the right way](#)

APPENDIX B

Grants Awarded

The Program awarded eight grants totaling \$750,000 allocated over 24 months:

1. Tree of Life Ministries (Fiscal Agent) for White Swan Community LTRG, Yankton Sioux Tribe (South Dakota): \$140,448 to create a Long-Term Recovery Committee, hire local leadership, hire a case manager, provide training and supplies for mold remediation, and set up needed for office.
2. Lakota Nation Disaster Resiliency, Pine Ridge, Oglala Sioux Tribe (South Dakota): \$77,926 for capacity building for the LTRG and their local leader including grant writing and non-profit leadership training.
3. Mennonite Disaster Service: \$50,000 to support their paid and volunteer work, plus materials to complete the Pine Ridge Volunteer Center (to create space for teams of volunteers to stay when volunteering or working following disasters).
4. Four Bands Community Fund, Inc. (Fiscal Agent) for Cheyenne River Long Term Recovery group, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe (South Dakota): \$122,200 for coordination and establishment of LTRG, needs assessment and case management following winter storm and flooding of 2019.

COVID-19 Focus

5. Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Health Board (serving great plains tribes, located in Rapid City, South Dakota), combined project COVID-19 and weather disasters: \$120,000 for support of newly developed Emergency Operations Center for COVID-19 and other disasters, support with supply chains for needed items and food.
6. Partnership with Native Americans: \$25,000 for emergency food and supply distribution for Elders of Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate (South Dakota) at the onset of COVID-19
7. Wambli Ska Society (Urban Natives of Rapid City, South Dakota): \$129,100 for recovery from COVID-19 including creation of a food pantry, food and supply distribution, youth support and case management.
8. Boys and Girls Club of Leech Lake Area, Leech Lake Band (Minnesota): \$95,326 for recovery from COVID-19 focusing on resilience, wellness and improved mental health of youth.

Leveraging Funds. In addition, CDP serves as a bridging organization making introductions and facilitating conversations to help grantee partners to raise additional funds to meet unmet needs. CDP assisted in raising more than \$129,000 for grantee partners including grants from the South Dakota Community Foundation, LSS of SD, the Midwest Disaster Consortium, UPS Foundation and others.

Facilitating In-Kind Donations. CDP requested and helped with logistics of in-kind donations from several organizations including wireless internet connections on the Yankton Sioux Tribe

reservation from Information Technology Disaster Resource Center, relief and recovery items from Good 360, COVID-19 related supplies from National VOAD and FEMA, truckloads of food, Mental Health First Aid training and more.

Perhaps more important than brokering the donations, grantee partners voiced appreciation for the introductions and for getting “a seat at the table” with organizations, representatives of government agencies and funders.