



# FERTILE GROUND

*Planting the Seeds for Native American Nutrition and Health  
Fundors Roundtable*

## FINAL REPORT



TAKING ACTION TO PREVENT OBESITY





# CONVENING PARTNERS AND SPONSORS

The American Heart Association and the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community jointly convened “Fertile Ground” with the assistance of Echo Hawk Consulting. We would like to thank our co-sponsors: the University of Arkansas School of Law’s Indigenous Food and Agriculture Project, the Minnesota Food Funders Network, KivaSun, Lakota Foods, and Tanka Bar.

## CONVENING PARTNERS



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# FEEDING OURSELVES

“

When we were strong in our foods on this continent we were strong people – we were healthier. And for Indigenous peoples it all starts with the food. When Indian Country lost its ability to feed itself, through whatever means, we lost that part of ourselves that supports our ability to thrive. It is only by regaining our foods that will we be able to restore our health, our resilience as people and secure the stability and diversification within our communities and local economies. But the challenges to secure that future require different approaches than those used in other communities ... if for no other reason than our languages, cultural traditions, and the unique legal status of our communities.

-Janie Simms Hipp (Chickasaw),  
Indigenous Food and Agriculture Project

”





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from Fertile Ground Convening Partners .....	3
Background on Convening Partners and Goals .....	5
Opening Networking Reception .....	7
Opening Plenary: Forging Partnerships and Leveraging Collective Assets as a Catalyst for Social Change .....	8
Feeding Ourselves Discussion: .....	9
Native Expert Panel: Native Food Systems, Tribal Economies, Nutrition, Advocacy, and Health .....	10
Sharing Challenges and Recommendations for Funders: Opportunities for Partnership and Impact in Native Communities .....	11
• Mike Roberts, First Nations Development Institute	
• Zach Ducheneaux, Intertribal Agriculture Council	
• Justin Huenemann, Notah Begay III Foundation	
• Judith Le Blanc, Native Organizers Alliance	
• Janie Simms Hipp, Indigenous Food & Agriculture Initiative	
Opportunities Funders Panel: Sharing Success Stories .....	13
• Jasmine Hall Ratliff, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	
• Lori Watso, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community	
• Alison Babb, Center for Prevention, Blue Cross Blue Shield Minnesota	
• John Fetzer, Northwest Area Foundation	
• Jill Birnbaum, Voices for Healthy Kids/American Heart Association	
Funder Reflections on Fertile Ground Funders' Roundtable .....	13
• MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger	
• Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	
Overview Small Group Roundtables: Summaries of Discussions and Big Ideas .....	16
• Food Sovereignty and Community Empowerment Roundtable	
• Agriculture and Economic Development Roundtable	
• Nutrition, Healthy Weight and Diabetes Prevention Roundtable	
• Healthy Food Access and Food Security Roundtable	
• Grassroots/Tribal Policy Change: Food, Nutrition and Health Roundtable	
• Urban Native Populations: Food, Nutrition and Health Roundtable	
Closing Thoughts and Next Steps .....	27
Call To Action: What Will You Do? .....	28
Participant List .....	30



## MESSAGE FROM FERTILE GROUND CONVENING PARTNERS

The “Fertile Ground: Planting the Seeds for Native American Nutrition and Health” roundtable was held in Minneapolis on October 14-15, 2015. Organized by the American Heart Association (AHA) and the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC), it represented the first-ever effort to convene national, regional, local and Native American funders and federal and state agencies on a national scale to consider the critical needs and opportunities to improve Native American food access and nutritional health.

Participants accomplished real work in their short time together and laid the basis for developing new strategies and programs to address the food crisis in Indian Country. The goodwill, positive feedback, and momentum that has been generated as a result of this meeting is truly inspiring and has laid an important foundation to accomplish much together for Native American people and communities.

This report summarizes the key discussions and learnings at the roundtable. We hope it serves as a convenient reference in future conversations and as a roadmap for new partnerships and investments. Powerful, strategic and targeted dialogue and big ideas resulted from this meeting in a short timeframe. It provided “fertile ground” for deeper discussions, engagement, and next steps, which was the hope and goal for the roundtable. We want to thank all of the panelists and attendees for their contributions that are reflected in this summary report and for all the sponsors that made this possible.

The AHA and SMSC continue to conduct outreach to participants who attended the Fertile Ground Funders’ Roundtable and those who could not attend but who are very interested in these collective efforts to increase funder education, collaboration, engagement and investment in Native American food systems, nutrition and health. Our conversations to date have been highly positive and the feedback has been thoughtful and sheds light on the deep interests, hopes and needs that funders have with regard to supporting more work and impact in Native communities.

We want to continue to learn how work on Native nutrition and food issues may align with your and other funders’ goals and how you and your peers may want to be involved in future collaborations. These conversations will continue to help shape how the convening partners move forward after the Fertile Ground Funders’ Roundtable. It is our hope that more funders will step forward to serve as thought partners and champions alongside the SMSC and AHA because the need and opportunity for impact in Native communities requires a circle of leadership that is broader and more diverse than just our two organizations.

Finally, in terms of next steps, the AHA and SMSC plan to hold future convenings. The next convening will be tentatively held in the spring of 2016 at a location to be announced. This follow-up convening will be focused specifically on tribal, grassroots, state, inter-tribal, and national advocacy and policy change. It will seek to create a space to engage Native American advocates, practitioners, leaders and youth as well as to build bridges and opportunities for education, collaboration and partnership with non-Native advocates and peers in the field and with funders as well. We will also consider additional convenings on other topics of interest to funders that may arise.

We look forward to continued feedback and dialogue following this report. We also encourage you to:

- Continue to build on the relationships you started or renewed at the Fertile Ground Funders’ Roundtable as the first step in developing broader strategies around Indian nutrition, health, and agricultural development.
- Reach out to the Native experts and organizations featured at Fertile Ground as they are a wealth of information; a nexus for education, contacts, relationship building, and resources; and conduits for partnership and investment in Indian Country. These organizations include the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Project, First Nations Development

Institute, Intertribal Agriculture Council, Native Organizers Alliance, Echo Hawk Consulting, Pipestem Law, American Indian Cancer Foundation, Potlatch Fund, Native Americans in Philanthropy, and the Notah Begay III Foundation.

- Share this report with funders and stakeholders who were not able to attend the Fertile Ground Funders' Roundtable and invite them to join in the dialogue and next steps.
- Start conversations within your organizations about what work you are currently supporting in Indian Country and how your organization can challenge itself to do more in whatever ways are possible.

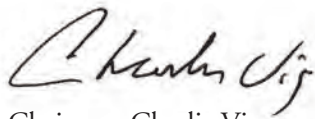
The AHA and SMSC remain committed to fostering new collaborations and welcome your involvement. If you would like to share your thoughts or questions about this report, or would like more information, please contact us:

- American Heart Association: Debbie Hornor, [debbie.hornor@heart.org](mailto:debbie.hornor@heart.org)
- Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community: Chris Georgacas, [chris@goffpublic.com](mailto:chris@goffpublic.com)
- Echo Hawk Consulting: Crystal Echo Hawk, [crystal@echohawkconsulting.com](mailto:crystal@echohawkconsulting.com)

We are reminded of the words of Janie Simms Hipp (Chickasaw), Director of the Indigenous Food and Agriculture Project, when she challenged all of us at the roundtable that: "No one entity can pull this off. We need collaboration among all relevant players who support the building of strong access to healthy food systems in Indian Country. We need funders to be bold, to be brave, and to go where others have not gone before and to invest in Indian Country."

Thank you for heeding this call and agreeing to be a part of this journey. We look forward to your continued interest and engagement.

Respectfully,



Chairman Charlie Vig  
Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community



Nancy Brown, CEO  
American Heart Association



*From left to right: Chairman Charlie Vig - Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Vice President of State Advocacy and Public Health Jill Birnbaum - Voices for Healthy Kids and the American Heart Association, Chief Medical Officer for Prevention Dr. Eduardo Sanchez - American Heart Association, Secretary/Treasurer Lori Watso - Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Vice-Chairman Keith B. Anderson - Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community*

## BACKGROUND AND GOALS

In July 2015, the American Heart Association (AHA) and the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC) joined forces to organize a national convening of funders, advocates and policymakers to discuss the critical need to address the food, nutrition and health crises facing Native American children, families, and tribal nations.

### BACKGROUND ON PARTNERS

#### Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux

**Community:** The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC) is a federally recognized, sovereign Indian tribe located southwest of Minneapolis/St. Paul. With a focus on being a good neighbor, good steward of the earth, and good employer, the SMSC is committed to charitable donations, community partnerships, a healthy environment, and a strong economy. Having donated more than \$325 million since opening its Gaming Enterprise in the 1990s, as well as providing more than \$500 million in economic development loans to other tribes, the SMSC is the largest philanthropic benefactor for Indian Country nationally and one of the largest charitable givers in Minnesota. The tribe's [Seeds of Native Health](#) campaign to improve Native American nutrition was launched in March 2015 with a \$5 million commitment for re-granting, research, education, and awareness raising.



**American Heart Association:** The American Heart Association is devoted to saving people from heart disease and stroke – the two leading causes of death in the world. AHA teams with millions of volunteers to fund innovative research, fight for stronger public health policies, and provide lifesaving tools and information to prevent and treat these diseases. In 2013, AHA launched Voices for Healthy Kids®, a joint initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and AHA. Voices for Healthy Kids works to help all young people eat healthier foods and be more active. The two organizations recently commissioned [Feeding Ourselves](#), a comprehensive report that examines the barriers to food access and the link to health disparities in Indian Country. The report found that Native Americans are twice as likely as the rest of the

U.S. population to experience nutrition-related health problems.

### GOALS OF PARTNERSHIP

At first glance, the SMSC and AHA may seem like unlikely partners. However, over the last year, each have taken significant steps to focus investment, public education, and other strategies to uplift and support critical front-line work by Native communities to increase access to healthy and affordable food and to improve the nutrition and health of Native children and peoples. Moreover, the historic launch of President Obama's "Generation Indigenous" Initiative to focus investment and strategies to improve the health, well-being and opportunities for Native American youth provided an important and timely context to collaborate.

Both the SMSC and AHA recognized that their efforts in isolation would have modest impact. However, by joining forces and leveraging their collective resources and networks, each partner realized that an incredible opportunity existed to recruit a variety of philanthropic, tribal and policy stakeholders to work together to create a model that could begin to address the very serious food, nutrition and health issues in Indian Country.

### DESIRED GOALS AND OUTCOMES OF THE PARTNERSHIP AND FERTILE GROUND FUNDERS' ROUNDTABLE

- Raise awareness about opportunities to fund innovative work to increase access to healthy and affordable food and improve nutrition and health in Indian Country.
- Promote a call to action to:
  - 1) Secure commitments for more funding and support for Native projects.
  - 2) Develop a collaborative action plan to increase investment in Native projects over time.
- Create working partnerships with "mainstream" philanthropy, tribes, Native funders, organizations, and communities to further common philanthropic goals around access to healthy and affordable food, food sovereignty, and improved health outcomes for Native children, families and communities.



## FERTILE GROUND FUNDERS' ROUNDTABLE

Forty-one national, regional, Minnesota and Native-led funders and federal and state agencies attended the Fertile Ground Funders' Roundtable. Among the primary goals of the event was to create spaces for attendees to network and learn more about the variety of philanthropic organizations, policymakers, institutions and agencies that are currently supporting efforts in Indian Country to empower Native American food systems, tribal economies, community development, nutrition, youth, and health.

Fertile Ground was also designed to promote learning for funders directly from leading Native experts and organizations in the field about not only the challenges facing Native American communities, but also about promising work and opportunities for impact. The event was also designed to promote peer-to-peer learning opportunities among funders themselves about their successes, challenges and questions related to relationship-building, collaboration, investment, and impact in Indian Country.

Finally, Fertile Ground worked to create space for funders and stakeholders to engage in focused discussion around specific topics related to food sovereignty, agriculture, economic development, food security, policy change, nutrition, health, and urban and reservation communities. These conversations helped to identify key priorities, challenges and opportunities to work together to increase funder engagement, education, collaboration and investment. The goal was to start to create a road map that could be a catalyst for the development of a larger strategic framework for engagement and impact between funders and Indian Country.

## PLANNING COMMITTEE

SMSC and AHA are grateful to the members of the Fertile Ground Planning Committee who informed the design of the event:

- Janie Simms Hipp (Chickasaw), planning committee co-chair and Director, Indigenous Food and Agriculture Project, University of Arkansas School of Law
- Michael Roberts (Tlingit), planning committee co-chair and President, First Nations Development Institute
- Judith Le Blanc (Caddo), Director, Native Organizers Alliance

- Alison Babb, Senior Health Improvement Project Manager, Center for Prevention, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota
- Chris Georgacas, President and CEO, Goff Public
- Sara Thatcher, Senior Account Manager, Goff Public
- Debbie Hornor, Mission Advancement Director, Advocacy, American Heart Association
- Justin Kii Huenemann (Navajo), Executive Director, Notah Begay III Foundation
- Jan Unstad, Independent Consultant, Unstad Project
- Lynne Schoen, Corporate and Foundation Relations, University of Minnesota
- Ime Salazar (Taos Pueblo), Event Coordinator, Echo Hawk Consulting
- Crystal Echo Hawk (Pawnee), President and CEO, Echo Hawk Consulting

## FERTILE GROUND MODERATOR

Wilson Pipestem (Otoe Missouri/Osage), Founder, Pipestem Law, and Co-Founder, Ietan Consulting

## EVENT ORGANIZER

Echo Hawk Consulting





## OPENING RECEPTION

The SMSC and AHA hosted an opening networking reception and dinner on the 50<sup>th</sup> Floor of the IDS Building in downtown Minneapolis. The spectacular views over Minneapolis and Saint Paul were symbolic as they are the traditional homelands and contain many sacred cultural sites of the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples, the original Indigenous peoples of Minnesota. The Twin Cities are also home to one of the largest concentrations of urban Indian populations in the United States.

During the pre-event outreach process to attendees of Fertile Ground, all participants voiced the importance of having an opportunity to network and meet other funders and organizations engaged in supporting work related to food systems, nutrition, and health in Indian Country. The networking reception and dinner afforded the first opportunity for participants to identify and meet their peers in these fields. The reception and dinner was opened with remarks from AHA Chief Medical Officer for Prevention Dr. Eduardo Sanchez; SMSC Vice Chairman Keith B. Anderson; and SMSC Secretary/Treasurer Lori K. Watso, as well as an opening prayer by Dakota Elder Dave Larsen and an Ojibwe prayer song by the Red Bird Singers.

Fertile Ground attendees were also treated to a Native cooking demonstration during dinner by Ben Jacobs (Osage), co-owner of Tocabe: An American Indian Eatery. Tocabe has been a Native American national business success story. The Denver-based Native American restaurant chain has made headlines in recent years for its innovative, modern and fresh casual dining twist on Native American foods. Tocabe has been featured on [The Food Network on Guy Fieri's "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives."](#) Earlier this year, [Zagat named Tocabe as one of "The 10 Hottest Fast-Casual Chains in Denver."](#)

During dinner, Ben conducted a cooking demonstration of the evening's bison entree and Native and locally sourced foods for guests and shared his perspectives as a passionate Native American food sovereignty activist about the importance of supporting Native American traditional foods and food systems. Ben and his business partner Matt Chandra also hosted a Q&A with attendees following dinner to share more about their perspectives on the need to invest in empowering local Native American food systems and to connect these strategies to also support economic development, nutrition, and health.



# OPENING PLENARY

## FORGING PARTNERSHIPS AND LEVERAGING COLLECTIVE ASSETS AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The opening plenary was kicked off by an opening prayer by Leonard Wabasha (Dakota), Cultural Resource Director at the SMSC, followed by opening remarks by SMSC Chairman Charlie Vig and AHA Chief Medical Officer for Prevention Dr. Eduardo Sanchez. Both leaders framed the importance of building partnerships across diverse constituencies and encouraged attendees to think outside of the box in terms of working together

and in partnership with Indian Country to mobilize and support both short- and long-term strategies to address the nutrition and health crises, and the underlying root causes of poverty, underdevelopment, inequities, and historical trauma.

In a symbolic gesture of their commitment to their partnership and their commitment to enlist more partners from a variety of sectors outside and within Indian Country, AHA and SMSC exchanged gifts to memorialize their partnership and commitment to this broader call to action.



“

Native Americans are sovereign peoples, but we cannot solve every problem on our own. That is why Shakopee is committed to bringing together the best minds and organizations to find workable, long-term solutions ... turning back the clock on the health effects of decades of extreme poverty and loss of traditional foods will not be easy – but through the conversations we will have today, we hope you’ll encounter new ideas and possibilities and consider your capacity to contribute to collective efforts to combat the Native American nutrition crisis.

**-Chairman Charlie Vig, Shakopee Mdwakanton Sioux Community**

”

“

On behalf of the American Heart Association, our CEO, Nancy Brown, and over 30,000 volunteers, I want to express our deepest gratitude for inviting us to your ‘house’ to co-host the historic Fertile Ground gathering. AHA looks forward to building on the goodwill and sharing of ideas to move us to action that ultimately improves the health and well-being of all native people and all other Americans.

**-Dr. Eduardo Sanchez,  
Chief Medical Officer for Prevention,  
American Heart Association**

”





## FEEDING OURSELVES DISCUSSION

“[Feeding Ourselves](#),” a short video produced by the University of Arkansas School of Law’s Indigenous Food and Agriculture Project, Echo Hawk Consulting, and Buffalo Nickel Creative, was screened for participants. The video provided a summary of the “Feeding Ourselves” report commissioned by the American Heart Association that included a high-level framing of the nutritional health crisis facing Native American communities. The video also provided recommendations for pathways forward to empower Native food systems, tribal economies, nutrition, and health.

Following the video, participants broke into small groups to discuss the themes and recommendations presented. A large-group discussion followed in which attendees identified the following themes, ideas, needs, questions and strategies that resonated with them.

- Create policies around tribal housing and communities that promote the creation of community gardens.
- Include Elders in teaching cultural traditions and knowledge around traditional foods.
- Support a movement within Indian Country to promote healthy eating behaviors within families and communities.
- Recognize the impact of historical trauma and colonization on the current state of Native food systems, nutrition, and health.
- Disentangle current perceptions informed by historical trauma within Native communities about what is “traditional” Native American foods and what is and isn’t normal and healthy weight.
- Better understand the challenges of Native American families and their relationships to their local food environment.
- Support breastfeeding as a first and healthy food.
- Address the lack of access Native communities have not only to healthy and affordable food, but also to capital, land and other assets critical to supporting healthy communities, peoples, and tribal economies.
- Support Native peoples as they work to combine tradition with contemporary and new ideas to support positive community change.
- Address concerns about mass-produced corporate, genetically modified foods.
- Support traditional foods, preservation of traditional heirloom seeds, and traditional food knowledge.
- Support local food systems and healthy tribal food procurement with a priority being placed on sourcing Native foods first and local foods second in the effort to address food access, nutrition and health in Native communities.
- Empower Native youth to lead and revitalize Native food systems, health, and culture.
- Address the unique challenges and opportunities that are vastly different in reservation and urban Indian communities.
- Meet Native communities where they are at in terms of their capacities and priorities.
- Support capacity-building, sustainable, culturally appropriate, and community-driven strategies.
- Ensure that policy change efforts related to food systems, nutrition and health are truly grounded in the community and driven by Native community priorities.
- Support health as a traditional cultural value in Native communities.



# NATIVE EXPERT PANEL

## NATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS, TRIBAL ECONOMIES, NUTRITION, ADVOCACY, AND HEALTH

Fertile Ground invited several Native experts and lead organizations to share with funders about their work and the challenges regarding Native food systems, tribal economies, nutrition, and health issues in Indian Country. Panelists also spent time sharing best practices, promising models, and opportunities for funders to further engage and support impact in Native communities.

### PANELISTS

- Mike Roberts, First Nations Development Institute (Food sovereignty, economic development, and culture)
- Zach Ducheneaux, Intertribal Agriculture Council (Food production, agriculture technical assistance, and policy)
- Justin Huenemann, Notah Begay III Foundation (Obesity and diabetes prevention)
- Judith Le Blanc, Native Organizers Alliance (Grassroots food and health advocacy)
- Janie Simms Hipp, Indigenous Food & Agriculture Initiative (Governance and policy)

### CHALLENGES

Panelists covered a range of challenges that affect the development of Native agriculture, food systems, food access, nutrition, health, and grassroots advocacy to address Native nutritional issues. However, there were significant and reoccurring themes that surfaced as noted below:

- There was consensus among panelists that the lack of access to capital, credit, and philanthropic dollars has led to very serious issues of underdevelopment in Indian Country across the areas of food production, economic development, nutrition, and health.
- The [2011 Native Americans in Philanthropy study](#) highlights the continued under-investment by private philanthropy in Indian-related causes and projects. Specific to agriculture and food systems, First Nations Development Institute this past

year published a [report](#) reflecting its experience of having significantly less money available than funds requested from Indian country for food, diet and health projects. Other Native-led intermediary funders have similar statistics related to unmet needs for worthy food, nutrition and health projects.

- Currently, the majority of resources spent on food in Native communities flows outside the community and any tribally based food access points source external and often unhealthy food products from outside of the community due to a lack of local Native food sources.
- Even if there is investment in improving access to healthy food, we need to address the serious issues of poverty in Native communities before desired goals to increase access to food and improve health outcomes are achieved.
- Investment is needed in building the infrastructure and capacity of Native food producers and policies to support food production and distribution.
- Work between Native food producers and those working on food security, economic development, nutrition, and health are very siloed. Resources are needed to support building collaborations between these stakeholders in Native communities.
- The lack of investment in the leadership development of Native youth is a serious issue. We need to identify and support pipelines for engagement for youth within these issues.
- The lack of data on Native peoples is a very serious issue that must be addressed. Too often, Native peoples and tribes are discounted because of their “small population” size and are invisible in most data sets or simply counted as “other.”
- Short-term grants for one to two years are difficult to be able to support long-term change in tribal communities. Often they are very restrictive. We need funders to be willing to partner with Native communities to support long-term change efforts and to be more flexible about supporting general operating support to allow Native community advocates the flexibility to prioritize resources where they are most needed.



- The challenges in Native communities were not created overnight, and they will not be rectified through one to two year grants. We need long-term commitments and partnerships that support

community-driven priorities and solutions. These problems were not necessarily started in Indian Country but the solutions are there. We need investment.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIP AND IMPACT IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES

The Native experts on the panel spent a great deal of time outlining opportunities for funders to engage with a variety of Native partners and support promising projects and opportunities to make a real difference. Native experts' recommendations are highlighted below:

### MIKE ROBERTS, FIRST NATIONS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE:

*What are the approaches and priorities of Native-led intermediary funders like First Nations?*



“First Nations has a history of being very responsive to the problem solving and innovation of the communities with whom we partner and invest. Admittedly, First Nations has an economic development-focused bias. That is because we believe that most of what we are seeing and talking about with regard to Indian communities’ problems are, in fact, more likely symptoms of the underlying problem of poverty and lack of economic opportunity. Studies show that there is a high correlation between poor health and lack of economic opportunity and poverty. So we concentrate on working with Indian communities to address this core problem.”

*What opportunities exist for foundations to partner with Native-led funders?*

“First Nations is a national intermediary. But that does not exclude it from tailoring programs for regional focus if that is what our foundation partners require. And I am sure that Notah Begay III and the Potlatch Fund work much the same, but probably with a more regional focus. Speaking for First Nations, we are very much of the mind that imperfect action beats perfect inaction each and every time. That means that we are willing to work with funders who want to experiment with new programs and approaches.

“There are many places for philanthropy to invest. If you are looking for on-sale policy change, Indian Country is the place to try. Beyond just policy change priorities, over the past four years, First Nations has received almost \$25 million in requests from Indian Country for grants related to food, diet and health. We have only been able

to fund a little more than 7% of these requests. Are all of these requests fundable? Probably not. But a great many of the more than 600 are.

“If you are looking for projects, they are not hard to find. There are some incredible resources in this room – Indian Country intermediary funders like First Nations, the Potlatch Fund, and the Notah Begay III Foundation, who are intimately familiar with Indian Country and are actively fielding requests for funding. This should be your easy first step in finding great shovel-ready projects.”

### JANIE SIMMS HIPPI, INDIGENOUS FOOD AND AGRICULTURE PROJECT:

*What advice would you give to funders in how to best invest and support the changes needed based on what you and the other panelists have outlined?*



“No one entity can pull this off. We need collaboration among all relevant players who support the building of strong access to healthy food systems in Indian Country.

“Be extremely brave and go forward, be very bold, go where others have not gone. Huge strides need to be made in the interconnections of issues and the interrelationships of organizations and people. Standing alone will not work.

“Don’t be afraid to be in communities. Don’t just go where funding has been successful already – go to new places. Funders need to be where communities are in need. It is a long walk.

“Creating pools of resources will be critical because ‘one-off’ projects don’t provide the comprehensive momentum we need to take this to the next level.

“Please realize self-governance in food is critical – supporting tribal governments to build the rule of law and policy frameworks for the food system is critical and cannot be ignored.

“The farm credit system is recognized as an important lending partner to this entire effort.”

***What is the role of youth, and how can funders and advocates support them?***

“I am totally confident in the power of our youth. The annual Native Youth Agricultural Summit hosted by the Indigenous Food and Agricultural Initiative is vital to building youth engagement on the ground and supporting their ongoing health and leadership for future efforts. These kids are working inter-tribally and instinctively, and are inspiring.”

“Please look to and reach out to those Native organizations working with youth and fund their efforts to support and build the capacity of youth engagement and leadership in Native agriculture, food systems, nutrition, and health.”

**ZACH DUCHENEAUX,  
INTERTRIBAL AGRICULTURE  
COUNCIL:**

***What are the challenges in the food production area that need to be addressed to unlock the potential improvement of health and economic development?***

“In order to unlock the potential to improve Native food systems, health outcomes, and economic development, we need funders and policymakers to understand that these are squarely tied to improving access to capital and credit for Native producers, tribes and communities.”

“We need investment in the value-added agriculture sector and to rebuild it in order to support sustainable agriculture and the development of tribal economies related to food and agriculture.”



**JUSTIN HUENEMANN, NOTAH  
BEGAY III FOUNDATION:**

***Some would argue that a real obstacle to funding Native communities is their relatively small population size in relation to other populations in the U.S. when philanthropic and/or public health goals often seek to achieve impact across a larger population size. How do you address this frequently cited challenge?***

“There are 5.2 million Native peoples in the U.S. This is a small population but not a small number. State and national data collection efforts must be inclusive of Native peoples.”



**JUDITH LE BLANC, NATIVE  
ORGANIZERS ALLIANCE:**

***What does successful grassroots and tribal policy change look like?***

“It must be understood that tribes and Native communities are operating within a unique and highly complex context of federal, state, county, and tribal government policies. Native peoples are a unique population with a specific legal status that must be recognized and cannot be dealt with the way that other populations are dealt with. No other people deal with this multi-level policy entanglement. We need to support ways to come together and create policies and laws that can support sustainable change.”



“We need grassroots and grass-tops involved, and there needs to be more investment in the infrastructure, capacity building, and technical assistance needed to support grassroots and tribal policy change. Change needs to be supported and rooted in community and grassroots advocacy movements. This will have great impact on the challenges facing Native communities. Intertribal coalitions are also key in order to hold the federal government accountable.”





## FUNDERS PANEL

Fertile Ground invited several funders who are currently making investments in Indian Country to share their organizations' varying experiences in funding and working within Indian Country and key strategies that helped them to be successful in their investments.

### PANELISTS

- Jasmine Hall Ratliff, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- John Fetzer, Northwest Area Foundation
- Alison Babb, Center for Prevention, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota
- Jill Birnbaum, Voices for Healthy Kids/American Heart Association
- Secretary/Treasurer Lori Watso, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community

### KEY THEMES FOR ENGAGEMENT, PROMISING STRATEGIES, AND SUCCESS:

- A number of the funders presenting spoke about the need to identify lead Native organizations with a track record of success and their work to build intentional partnerships with these organizations. This helped build their cultural competency and assist with relationship building with Native communities and grassroots organizations in order to help them determine how to engage and invest in the most impactful ways.
- Funders noted that building relationships with Native organizations and tribes took a very intentional approach over time and a willingness to listen, learn, ask questions, and work in partnership.
- Other funders noted that investing and having trust in Native-led intermediary funders which have a direct relationship with Native communities and which have intimate knowledge of the challenges, capacity of groups, and opportunities for impact was key. These organizations also helped mitigate challenges in culturally appropriate ways when necessary.

- To varying degrees, each funder on the panel talked about their willingness to take measured risks in partnership with national Native intermediaries and Native communities, to try new things and invest in new partnerships in the efforts to support the strengthening of local, Native food systems, economic development, nutrition, and health.

### KEY INSIGHTS FROM FUNDERS:

#### JASMINE HALL RATLIFF, THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION (RWJF)



“We learned early on that we can’t be prescriptive. Communities know what they need to do. We need to listen to communities.”

Jasmine shared a short case study of how RWJF built a relationship with the Notah Begay III (NB3) Foundation, one of RWJF’s largest and most recent investments in Indian Country as part of its childhood obesity prevention portfolio. She shared that investing in the NB3 Foundation’s efforts to conduct an environmental scan of both needs and recommendations to support impact and their willingness to listen to recommendations from the NB3 Foundation’s founder and leadership team about the types of investment required to support real change helped RWJF leadership better understand how they could support change. RWJF also invested in a planning grant and supported the leadership development of the NB3 Foundation within the larger trends in the childhood obesity movement. RWJF made a large investment to empower the NB3 Foundation to re-grant resources to tribal communities to support capacity building of tribal communities, promising programs, communications, and public education strategies, research and data collection driven by Indian Country. These have proven to be successful strategies. Regular communication with the NB3 Foundation and active learning about Indian Country by RWJF have also been key strategies for success.



**LORI WATSO, SECRETARY/  
TREASURER, SHAKOPEE  
MDEWAKANTON SIOUX  
COMMUNITY**



“In our community, we’ve made a commitment to community wellness, including opening the Wozupi, our tribal garden and organic farm, and Mazopiya, a full-service natural foods store.

“Combining our commitment to charitable giving and our commitment to health and wellness, we decided to launch the Seeds of Native Health campaign, which strives to build on the great work being done locally to improve Native American nutrition.

“Frankly, this campaign represents an experiment by our tribe. Most of our charitable giving has been based on considering the merits of individual projects. But with Seeds of Native Health, we decided that we are going to devote a large chunk of money to solving problems in one particular area. Given our other work around food and nutrition, we felt we had the passion and community experience to select nutrition as the focal point of a philanthropic campaign.

“In Seeds of Native Health, we hoped to create the impetus to develop a comprehensive effort to address the acute problems relating to food, nutrition and health in our communities.

“We know that our \$5 million over two years is just a drop in the bucket when we consider all of the needs. But we wanted the amount we donate to be large enough for two things: First, so that others take notice that we are serious about this topic and might consider joining us in this campaign. And second, so that we can provide strategic funding for large or important projects, which can make consequential differences.

“I will tell you that we hoped our campaign would encourage others to partner with us or contribute in this area on their own. But never in our wildest dreams did we expect to get so much interest.

“Our new partnerships with First Nations Development Institute, Notah Begay III Foundation, the University of Minnesota, the University of Arkansas, MAZON, and the American Heart Association are deeply gratifying and represent very strategic efforts to invest in existing knowledge, expertise, assets, and well-proven track records of success to help guide the investments of Seeds of Native Health.

“We hope they are just the beginning of a much larger ‘coalition of the willing’ to partner on developing solutions to address the Native American food and nutrition crisis.”

**ALISON BABB, CENTER FOR  
PREVENTION, BLUE CROSS  
AND BLUE SHIELD OF  
MINNESOTA**



Alison shared that Blue Cross Blue Shield is relatively new in its investments in Native communities, but they have spent focused time learning and building relationships directly with Native communities and organizations to better understand the needs, priorities, and effective strategies being led by communities in order to determine how to make investments that align with the goals of their grantmaking portfolio. She stressed that it is an active and ongoing process.

**JOHN FETZER, NORTHWEST  
AREA FOUNDATION**



John shared with funders that the Northwest Area Foundation has, over time and through intentional learning and relationship building, realized that the wealth within its geographic region of focus is rooted in Native lands and communities. As a result, the Northwest Area Foundation is committed to ensuring that its funding both acknowledges and honors that history. That’s why the foundation has committed 40% of new grant dollars to Native-led organizations working to advance economic, social, and cultural prosperity in the urban, suburban and reservation communities that anchor its region. It has learned a great deal from the investments it has made to date, and it is willing to actively share the success stories and lessons learned in working with Native communities to support success with other funders. It actively is seeking other partners to work with to leverage successful investments it is making in the region.

**JILL BIRNBAUM, VOICES  
FOR HEALTHY KIDS AND  
THE AMERICAN HEART  
ASSOCIATION**



“Our focus is on the role that public policy plays in either hindering or supporting health. Our particular focus has been on policy at the state and community levels, and we are now committed to



learning how our resources could be brought to bear on public policies that could help improve health in Indian Country.

“We are a national initiative focused on developing best practices for public policy issue advocacy. There are three main areas in which we fund: 1) Campaign research and development (policy research, message research and development of effective communication and organizing strategies); 2) Technical assistance and training – providing opportunities for advocates to understand how to build power for policy change; and 3) Funding directly to campaigns. Going into our third year of the initiative, we have provided more than \$10 million in grants to state and community advocates. And we now turn our attention to how we might support similar opportunities for issue advocacy organizing in Indian Country.

“We have commissioned some early work in Indian Country. The Feeding Ourselves report is one example, but we are also investing in addition policy analyses to further our knowledge of the needs, priorities and strategies that Indian Country advocates are employing so we can better understand how we can invest to support these efforts and be good partners.

“The next event we will support is to work with Native American leaders and advocates, interested funders, and other national stakeholders to quickly convene a follow-up event designed around tribal advocates and advocacy possibilities. This event would go beyond food access issues and potentially also include advocacy discussions related to physical activity, schools, tribal food procurement, and other policy areas of shared interest and concern.

“Target outcomes would include cultivating specific new Indian Country advocacy efforts, increased consensus on priorities and approaches, as well as improved relationships and connections between advocates, funders, potential technical assistance providers, and other stakeholders.

“AHA and Voices for Healthy Kids will also seize opportunities to support issue advocacy campaigns that arise, much like AHA’s investment in the Navajo Nation junk food tax campaign. So please find me today or after this event if you have opportunities that we should seize around Indian Country public policy now while we work with all of you to build national funding support.”

## FUNDER REFLECTIONS ON FERTILE GROUND

“

I was deeply inspired by the expertise, enthusiasm, and sense of empowerment represented by those in attendance. It’s a testament to the growing national movement for strong and vibrant Indian Country food systems. Fertile Ground offered various entry points for us to engage, while challenging participants to envision new ideas and embrace an urgent call to action for healthier and more food secure tribal communities. MAZON stands ready – propelled by the momentum generated from this groundbreaking gathering – to embolden our thinking and strategies as we contribute to this collective effort to create lasting policy change that will improve access to healthy, traditional and affordable food for Native families.

-Mia Hubbard, MAZON:  
A Jewish Response to Hunger

”

“

Fertile Ground was both educational and inspiring. It was an education of the needs, realities and concerns that are faced in Indian Country related to accessing healthy, affordable food. It was also inspiring to see the level of interest among those in the room, hear the stories of what is currently happening in Native American communities and see the promise of what can happen as more funders and advocates get involved. I am excited at the future of this work and the change that can occur in Indian Country.

-Jasmine Hall Ratliff, Program Officer,  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

”

## SMALL GROUP ROUNDTABLES

After a half-day spent on promoting learning from Native experts and fostering networking and peer-learning among funders, the remainder of the Fertile Ground Funders' Roundtable was spent on creating spaces for funders and various Native and non-Native stakeholders to engage in focused discussions on key topics that attendees were currently engaged in and/or were interested in learning more about. Fertile Ground organized small group roundtables around the following topics with a goal to foster dialogue, networking, and discussion of key issues, priorities, questions and strategies:

- Food sovereignty, community development, and empowerment
- Agriculture and economic development
- Nutrition, healthy weight, and diabetes prevention
- Healthy food access/food security
- Grassroots/tribal policy change to improve food systems, nutrition and health
- Urban native populations and food, nutrition and health

Each small group roundtable was assigned a lead facilitator to help each group discuss several key points in a standardized process. Each group was asked to identify one to two “big ideas” to help further the dialogue, engagement, education, collaboration and opportunities for increased investment in Native communities to help empower Native agriculture, food systems, tribal economies, nutrition, and health within both reservation and urban Native communities.

The goal for these small group roundtables was to create a starting point in how a larger and more focused strategic framework for engagement, partnership and investment could eventually be created. Enclosed are bulleted transcriptions of funder and stakeholder brainstorming, ideas, questions, issues and recommendations. Each bullet documented within is worthy of more attention and potential investment based on each specific topic area. Hopefully, the insights and brainstorming shared by roundtable participants can serve at the very least as critical starting points for further conversation and the eventual development of a more concise strategic framework between funders, stakeholders, policymakers, and Indian Country.





# FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ROUNDTABLE

## DISCUSSION AND BIG IDEAS

**GROUP:** Christensen Fund, NoVo Foundation, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Minneapolis Foundation, First Nations Development Institute, Minnesota Department of Health, Potlatch Fund, and United States Department of Agriculture

## BIG IDEAS

1. Focus on systemic problems and not individuals
2. Create multi-track concurrent solutions

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS, STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO WORK TOWARDS

- Culturally appropriate messaging and tribal sovereignty must be a priority and messaging needs to differ between on-reservation and urban Native populations.
- One size doesn't fit all: Urban areas in Indian Country are very different from reservation communities. We need to build awareness of the differences and work with these communities to understand the types of strategies and messaging that can support change in these respective communities.
- We need to consider and understand the different ways that access needs to be incorporated to support food sovereignty (e.g., water and land for fisheries, agriculture, and cultural resources, but also for credit, technical assistance, and grants). Transportation—whether it's to travel to grocery store, or to travel to the health center, wherever it may be—is one of the these key points of consideration. That's an access piece that's really important and a barrier for people.
- We have a very deliberate view about the problem and it's not health, it's not food access, it's poverty and the underinvestment in Indian Country. Whether it's physical infrastructure or education or through nonprofits, or whatever else, there's a deliberate disenfranchisement in investing in Indian Country, and until you chip away at that through enterprise development and wealth creation, these problems we're talking about won't change dramatically. These are all symptoms of poverty, not problems on their own.
- We can't talk solutions without addressing the poverty, underinvestment at the core.
- On reservations food dollars leave. There's no retail infrastructure to capture food dollars.
- We need to help create infrastructure, stores and supermarkets that are led by Native entrepreneurs and tribal entities. These initiatives create not only temporary jobs for the people to build, it provides long-term jobs and maybe careers. Such initiatives also help to keep money within tribal communities.
- People need food and housing. They want education and to buy other products if they have the income.
- We get caught up in the “buy groceries at the store” and not alternatives, like co-ops or other mechanisms by which we can access food. That takes entrepreneurial training or financing for working capital. A lot needs to happen to get people who have never had opportunities to engage in business or commerce ready to do so and to believe that it's possible.
- How can we be intentional and strategic as funders and work with tribal communities to support them in how they piece these things together and map these things out in Native communities?
- Before colonization, we had healthy relationships to food. How can we get back to that? We must work with Native communities to understand how we can support their efforts to heal from trauma.
- We can't change the needle in population health unless you can change conditions in the population. You can change individual health to a limited extent. However, if we want broad change, we need to look at housing and transportation as functions of public health and being healthier. If you graduate from high school, you're likely to be healthier because your income goes up.
- We've heard a lot that this is a multifaceted problem, and we're approaching it with single-sector intervention solutions. It's not poverty; it's not historical trauma; it's all of the above.
- We're holding individuals accountable, asking them to create superhuman behaviors to overcome large

societal issues and that's really unfair. Until we find ways to address those issues, no one strategy will work.

- We need to better understand and address the role of structural racism.
- When communities are healthy, they make healthy choices.
- Food sovereignty is an aspiration - it's food independence, access to not only enough food but healthy food. This is a process of incremental pieces. We need to work better with Native communities to understand the building blocks to get there, both as a tactic and an aspiration.
- We need to partner with Native communities and support them in balancing immediate needs with short- and long-term holistic solutions.





# AGRICULTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ROUNDTABLE

## DISCUSSION AND BIG IDEAS

**GROUP:** Northwest Area Foundation, Intertribal Agricultural Council, AgriBank, Laura Jane Musser Foundation, Native Americans in Philanthropy, University of Minnesota School of Public Health, and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota

## BIG IDEAS

### 1. Product and Infrastructure Development

- Improve lending structures
- Develop raw product into the food system
- Engage commercial, private investors
- Address trust land and investment barriers
- Develop language/messaging into community benefit and capacity

### 2. Engagement of Youth

- Culture, agriculture, Elders, teachings
- Land transition
- Prepare next generation of activists

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS, STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO WORK TOWARDS

- We need to promulgate success stories about how to get to scale.
- Failure is a part of success. Evaluating grants and assessments need changes so that those who are not experienced grant writers have a fighting chance. Funders also need to learn and take those lessons learned into the next round of grant making.
- Readiness/capacity is important. Communities can make strides in small steps and funders need to support that. Building that trust between funders and Indian Country can build into future bigger grants.
- Janie Simms Hipp's model food and agriculture code project and legal framework is really important work.
- Funders who help with supporting raw product into salable food can get a great return on investment (ROI) and that needs to be promoted.
- Improved loan structures are critical. Too many Native agricultural producers and ranchers still get red lined in their loan process.
- We need a product development infrastructure that accommodates food systems in Indian Country. Commercial lenders need to become involved. Can private investors get incentives to support this kind of investment?



# NUTRITION, HEALTHY WEIGHT, AND DIABETES PREVENTION ROUNDTABLE

## DISCUSSION AND BIG IDEAS

**GROUP:** Duke University “Healthy Eating Research,” Minnesota State Office for the Corporation for National and Community Service, Wholesome Wave, Indian Health Service, University of Minnesota, American Indian Cancer Foundation, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Heart Association, and the Notah Begay III Foundation

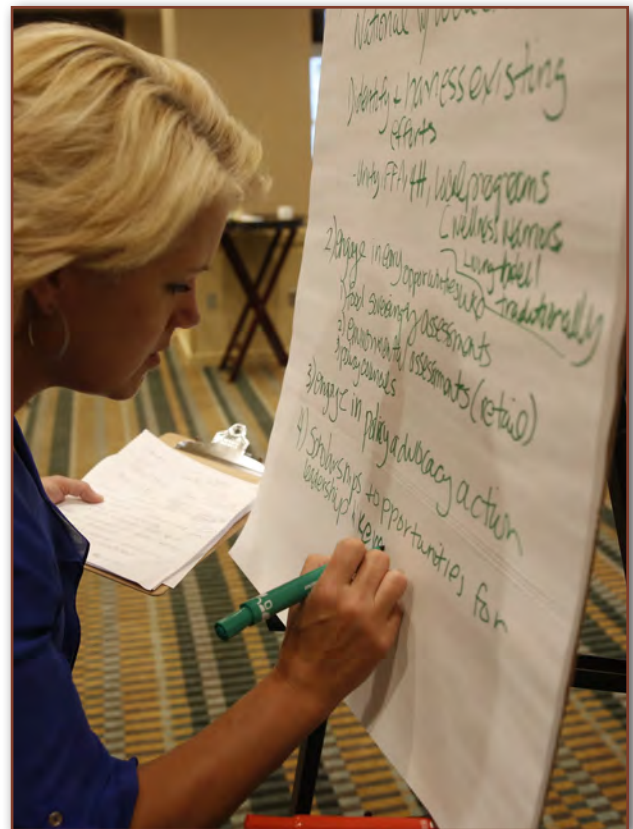
## BIG IDEAS

1. Culture is prevention
2. Data: self-administered community health surveys

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS, STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO WORK TOWARDS

- Culture is prevention.
- Resiliency is a representation of culture.
- It is important to support story-telling and talking about and sharing cultural traditions.
- Indian Country knows the solutions, but we need to draw them out.
- There is a relationship between food insecurities and obesity – how can you be both hungry and obese?
- We need to reconsider the tenets of what we do. Are there other ways of establishing validity?
- There is an interplay between health and wealth. Economic development is one way to build capacity for health and wealth.
- Native people, funding, advocacy, collaboration, evidence are all factors.
- We need a record of tactics that are working or will likely work.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a \$35 million portfolio in Indian Country – nutrition screening, tobacco control, healthy food access.
- The CDC is moving past the need for evidence-based tactics. They are increasingly interested in the notion that culture is prevention. There is a lot we can invest in that is far upstream in terms of building, reinforcing and strengthening resiliency. Language is prevention – supporting the strengthening of communities and families so people can be healthy.
- Evidence-based strategies are not necessarily effective in Native communities.
- Biggest issue is improving food access. Communities need grocery stores and places where you can find healthy food.
- Physical activity is so important. There aren't enough places where kids can play/ride bikes on reservations. We need to look at this in parallel to food access.
- Food insecurity issues on reservations need to be a priority.
- We need to restructure the notion of valid evidence. Who determines that? The academic process of validation is difficult, but perhaps community approaches are valid.
- Self-determination is the ability of one to thrive on his/her own terms.
- A big piece of tribal sovereignty is food sovereignty. Native communities need to be able to feed their own community.
- We need to engage the business, entrepreneurial sector in this conversation.
  - This is a workforce and economic development issue, not simply a public health issue.
  - We need other allies from diverse sectors within and outside of Indian Country, and we need to identify and implement ways to bring these diverse people to the table.
  - We need to support Native communities to the break cycle. We need to support increased economic development as a health promotion strategy.
- Cultural activities are hard to fund because they don't necessarily produce “outcomes.” Funders need to have a different set of expectations and understanding of outcomes.

- Change can come from young people (e.g., “MomsRising” advocacy group for African Americans). We need to do this with Native Youth. We need to find and support ways to get them engaged across reservations. Youth are connected via social media. We can harness the energy and upscale it so that it’s more of a Native Youth movement.
  - We could use Generation Indigenus.
  - The problems facing youth today didn’t happen yesterday. They have been problems for generations. They won’t be solved tomorrow. It will take generations.
- One issue is that we are not having the conversation on the investment side – where are we putting our dollars?
  - According to Kevin Walker, President of Northwest Area Foundation – “In philanthropy, Indian Country is one of the best places to invest. They have creative solutions and organizations.”
    - How can we direct money to organizations on the ground – community development institutions?
    - Funders struggle to know where to invest their grant dollars.
    - Is there a framework for investment or a coordinated approach? Is there value in asking what are the things that make sense? (A handful of strategies, a framework that a coordinated body could develop consensus on could make it easier for organizations like CDC and foundations to fund in Indian Country.)
- There is a lack of data in American Indian communities on issues that we’re measuring success on.
  - We can’t know the extent of the issue or what progress we have made without better data from Native communities.
  - Health and Human Services (HHS) has asked the same question – Five federal agencies working together trying to figure out how do we understand high need in tribes, how do we track progress, how do we have information so people can apply for HHS grants, do we even need people to document their need when they apply for grants?
    - University of Minnesota is working on a database of promising data, best practices, and information about what’s happening in the community. (The database will include both published and unpublished information.)
- Unless you get better data, it’ll be hard.
  - Communities can collect data for themselves. Native communities don’t need large epidemiology centers.
- There are issues with data collection and sharing with the Indian Health Service.
- If programs don’t come out of the culture and Native communities, they won’t be successful.
  - Can you take science and the notion of “culture is prevention” and create interventions or develop pilot projects?
  - Typically, federal agencies fund tribes. If you’re looking for your resources to go into creative community programs, these are typically not being done by tribal community health departments. Native-led organizations are not on the radar of funders, but they are devising and leading creative solutions.





# HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS AND FOOD SECURITY ROUNDTABLE

## DISCUSSION AND BIG IDEAS

**GROUP:** American Heart Association, Blue Cross Blue Shield-Minnesota, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, Clinton Foundation, Voices for Healthy Kids, JR Albert Foundation, Food Corps, United States Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Department of Health, and the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation

## BIG IDEAS

1. Culture is at the core of ALL progress
  - Cultural reclamation is itself a healthy eating intervention
  - Children and youth are critical to food culture change
2. Tribal control over contents of commodity boxes (federal feeding programs like FDPIR)
3. Research and strategies are needed on retention and consumption of food produced on tribal land
  - Food sovereignty assessments
  - Build power and capacity
  - Land use policy research and expertise needed
  - Food access as an economic development machine

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS, STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO WORK TOWARDS

- The definition of food sovereignty – a say in where food comes from; the ability to decide on a community’s food system; being able to grow ones’ own food for his/her family or community; and being able to access that food within tribal land boundaries. Grocery stores on tribal lands versus nearby/off reservation where money is leaving the tribal lands.
- Sovereignty is a deeper layer than food access: ticking off if certain foods are available doesn’t get to whether they are culturally appropriate, how they were grown, and self-determination “taking care of ourselves” in the Native language.

- Places and spaces – where is food available in a community, not just where you buy it, but where does it show up? (Schools, at gatherings, at markets.)
- This issue is connected to poverty, inequality, systemic racism, and other disparities.
- Crossover between food security as tied to calories and wanting more/sufficient calories versus what are healthy calories.
- Hunger relief system – the food available at food shelves is not always healthy food.
- Perceived cost is a barrier. (The truth is that scratch cooking can be cheaper and attract even more donors.) Policy barriers for food banks accepting or not accepting unhealthy food.
- Big idea – helping food banks evaluate/document that healthy food is cheaper/feasible, helping them confront the big food companies to not accept/ receive full sugar soda, etc.
- Urban tribal members rely on food banks, while reservation communities rely on the community system.
- How to change federal policy that box contents from canned meat and powdered eggs. USDA is trying to offer healthier options, but the idea to change that to be controlled by tribes is so important.
- Need to facilitate tribal members to pursue agricultural enterprises. That is a whole area of opportunity. What can be done to make sure that healthy food stays on the reservation to get to the people who need it?
- Food hubs to help aggregate and distribute local production requires skill/capacity that most small-scale farmers/fishermen don’t have. The regulatory requirements are overwhelming. Takes staffing and resources for tribes to be able to manage land-use regulation, design viable policies/practices, etc.
- Indian land issues are so complex! Expertise needed, funders can support to pay for personnel who can navigate the web of complexities.



- Food sovereignty assessment tool (tool developed by First Nations Development Institute) helps determine who are the key actors. Not much experience yet with it, provides funds for tribes to use the tool themselves. Community asset mapping tool. Building on local assets.
- Capacity building of funders needed to get up to speed on structures and tools. Funders should look for organizations that already have community access and relationships.
- Funders can't come in and force a program on a community. They can give ideas but can't be prescriptive. Find community organizers, health workers, and people who are already in the groups that relate to this and support and invest in these community assets.
- Supply vs. demand – what can external (non-community, non-Native) funders do to change culture/demand? Networking/network weaving, messaging/promotion about healthy food. Promotion of traditional culture (even if not explicitly about food and healthy nutrition) has a positive impact on what people are eating. Connect with traditional language/arts. It has a ripple effect on what people eat.
- Can't do healthy food access without weaving it with culture.
- Weave demand into other projects like school gardens, cooking demonstrations in schools, use those people/trainers as cultural representatives and role models, importance of having that credibility/trust of people raising interest and awareness.
- Transportation barriers, lots of innovative ideas out there about bringing food to people but not really getting to the most vulnerable, Indian country populations. How do we ensure we are increasing access to healthy and affordable food for the most vulnerable Native populations?
- Stronger linkages need to be built and supported between communities and health clinics. Keep strengthening links with healthcare providers and institutions.
- Technology – we need to leverage youth to brainstorm solutions.
- Empower youth and youth-serving organizations to make change.
- Interrelationship of arts/culture, environment, health. First Nations Development Institute can be key partner in this space, in research, in identifying bright spots.
- Building power. Changing environments and systems is sometimes not so complicated. Example: Simply bringing a salad bar to one school was only \$3,500 and had a dramatic impact on what the kids ate. Building power and capacity go hand-in-hand among individuals to even seek out help, funds and projects.



# GRASSROOTS/TRIBAL POLICY CHANGE: FOOD, NUTRITION AND HEALTH ROUNDTABLE

## DISCUSSION AND BIG IDEAS

**GROUP:** University of Minnesota/Healthy Lives, Public Health Law Center, Minnesota Department of Health, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Tanka Fund, Native Organizers Alliance, Indigenous Food and Agriculture Project, and American Heart Association

## BIG IDEAS

1. Youth advocacy initiative
  - National with local execution
2. Resourcing tribal governments to stand up and implement policy
3. Engage in early opportunities
  - Food sovereignty assessments
  - Environmental impact assessments on food systems
  - Policy councils
4. Engage in policy advocacy action
5. Scholarship opportunities to support mentorship and leadership ladders-agriculture and health

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS, STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO WORK TOWARDS

- We need to harness the energy of youth, understand their priorities, engage them, and enlist and empower them to do food sovereignty assessments.
- How can you support the infrastructure for grassroots and tribal policy change?
- Do you need a national capacity to build infrastructure? And a local to build it? Does that model work?
- Support young people to engage in social media advocacy. Empower youth with a sense of ownership.
- “Fundable asset”: Native-led funding opportunities directed at youth – national and local execution – with mentors for technical assistance and training (e.g., how to approach legislators), and also best practices and education by mentors to lead to policy work.
- Tool/idea: fund to support youth activities (e.g., individual youth involved in FFA apply for \$5,000 to get a community garden going; a student used it as a way to gain a scholarship to study agriculture and went on to successful career). Youth/young adults can see the power.
- Create food-related/health-related scholarships for young people. (The Gates Millennium Scholarship is ending.)
- When funding disappears in Native communities for Native initiatives, it is devastating.
- ELDERS: The role of Elders as mentors and leadership ladders is key. How do we transfer that knowledge to youth? Youth organizing needs to have a multigenerational approach so the continuity of knowledge and experience is retained.
- Fundable asset – PhotoVoice: ask the community to tell us what policies are needed to support change by supporting Youth Photo Voice projects to identify priorities, needs and strategies.
- Health as a tradition of Native communities is powerful. Removing tax on food is important to cultural traditions. Emphasizing culture and its relationship to healthy food is important.
- SOVEREIGNTY: Developing a model food and agriculture code is vital, as is securing tribal governments’ involvement.
- Through inter-tribal collaboration, tribes can advocate for sovereignty together. How can funders support that?
- What comes after an expression of sovereignty? Implementation and sustainability are two of the most pressing challenges. How do we support implementation and sustainability of any “policy wins?”
- How do we leverage a pool of funders to support grassroots and tribal policy change?
- “You can’t win a fight if you don’t pick a fight.”



# URBAN NATIVE POPULATION: FOOD, NUTRITION AND HEALTH ROUNDTABLE

## DISCUSSION AND BIG IDEAS

**GROUP:** San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, Minnesota Council on Foundations, Tiawhe Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, American Heart Association, and U.S. Department of Agriculture

### BIG IDEAS

1. Host first statewide indigenous community meal
  - Native foods
  - Native growers
  - Native chefs
2. Engage philanthropic and affinity groups
3. Infuse urban agriculture funding into urban Indian groups
  - Economic development
  - Financial support
  - Project training

### KEY CONSIDERATIONS, STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO WORK TOWARDS

- A lot of Native people feel disconnected to their culture, history and food.
- A huge population of Native people are in urban areas. It's not always the case that culture lives only in the reservation areas.
- Funding and resources are skewed toward the reservation areas often. Work is around funding people and not necessarily programs in urban areas.
- There is a lack of access in our urban communities to healthy, nutritious foods and that needs to improve. The most powerful Native programs are those that incorporate traditional practices and ceremony into health and healing.
- There are a lot of interesting things being done in urban areas with community gardens and not enough Native people are being included in those initiatives.
- Model of growing and selling foods in urban Native communities would work well (teaching people to create a business model, comprehensive model).
- Farmer's markets dedicated to types of Indigenous foods people are looking for, capitalizing on Native knowledge possessed by Native people to support financial health and economic growth (family and community) is a key strategy.
- The invisibility of Native American people is a major issue. Often you hear from funders that there are so many tribes they don't know where to start working with American Indian people. How do we overcome that – racism that exists, that stems from a lack of general knowledge of tribes and Native peoples?
- When we see images about Native peoples, it's always something on the reservation or something unrealistic and not a picture of Native people living in the city, which is the reality today for the majority of the Native population. We need to incorporate urban areas in our thinking and messaging around the health needs of Natives. Lots of cities are undergoing development efforts and revitalization efforts. What is happening in our cities around this that includes Native Americans? How do we ensure that these current efforts are inclusive of Native peoples?
- Native urban populations are often transient peoples because of disenfranchisement of various types.
- There is often a division, social construct differentiating urban and reservation Indian people. We need to open up the transmission of cultural information and remove stereotypes.
- IDEA: Statewide Minnesota feast, tribal representatives from all Minnesota tribes to talk about food. Not tribal specific, creates new ceremony. All local Native foods. Fund this idea. There is always food at ceremony and this is an opportunity. Helpful to bring forward a common thread to create positive change.
- Create a community meal. Minority chefs from different communities, blessing, dance, culture. Be thoughtful about who to invite – food producers, health clinics, leadership, community members.
- That could be the hub and initial culmination of, what are the best steps for food advocacy? Learnings

from that can educate people at that dinner. There could be a huge impact with how best to improve nutrition for urban Native communities.

- IDEA: State and federal policy is giving money to enterprises. Advocacy campaign, healthy food financing is out there. Bring focus to urban Indians that have an interest in urban agriculture and urban farming. Grants to do these start-up Native agriculture programs and support Native food and agriculture businesses in urban areas.
- Native peoples don't have the support they need for entrepreneurs, or specifically for nonprofits where leaders do not have financial skills or fundraising expertise.
- How can urban Native organizations and individuals engage funders?
- Education. There is a trust issue because there is an unknown. Funders feel like there is risk in giving a grant because they don't have basic information.
- Taking the extra time to spend with the grantee to navigate through the capacity-building issues is one way to start building relationships of understanding and trust between funders and Native communities.
- Could large funders develop rapport with potential grantees?
- IDEA: Grant writing assistance to Native communities to strengthen their opportunities to receive competitive funding. Funding organization program staff could go out and get to know the communities it seeks to do funding in.
- For national funders it could be hard to do, but they could contract out services for someone to go to get to know the potential grantee in order to support technical assistance and decision-making processes.
- Training community leaders to bring knowledge back to community, being creative is important.
- How do we develop a mechanism for groups to go to state legislatures and city councils and present on something they want to work on? How do we prepare people to successfully do that and get the attention of funders?
- Support Photovoice as a method to influence policy, based on CBPR research findings.



## CLOSING THOUGHTS AND NEXT STEPS

The Fertile Ground Funders' Roundtable covered a variety of topics relating to Native American nutrition – ranging from food access to community health assessments to tribal economic development. It was an intensive event designed to spark dialogue and networking, and hopefully serve as a catalyst for important next steps to increase relationship building, engagement, education, collaboration, and investment in Indian Country.

### BIG IDEAS AND TAKEAWAYS FROM OUR DISCUSSIONS

- The lack of access to capital and credit for American Indian food producers, communities, and tribes and the subsequent underinvestment and underdevelopment of Indian Country are serious and fundamental challenges that must be prioritized and addressed through increased investment, infrastructure development, and policy changes.
- It is imperative to recognize and respect tribal sovereignty and the unique political status, history, and cultural lifeways of tribes and their citizens.
- Culture is prevention. It is critical to recognize that American Indian cultural lifeways, traditions and languages are essential elements of successful strategies to improve the health and wellbeing of American Indian communities.
- Philanthropy and policymakers need to ensure that American Indian leadership and stakeholders are “at the table” in the development of policies, programs and solutions designed to address food access and health disparities and the root causes that underpin these issues such as poverty and systemic inequities.
- The lack of quality and consistent data regarding American Indians is a serious issue. Increased investment in data collection led by and including American Indian communities is a critical starting point to developing and implementing effective strategies to strengthen American Indian food systems, tribal economies, access to healthy food, and improved nutrition and health.
- American Indian youth must be a priority for investment to support their leadership development and engagement in creating community-driven solutions and policy change.
- It is imperative to explore the specific needs, similarities and differences in approach that are required to address food access issues and health disparities within reservation and urban American Indian communities. Each population has its own unique challenges and opportunities for impact.
- It is important to support various strategies to ensure that American Indian tribes and communities have direct control and management over key federal feeding programs in order to increase access to traditional, Native/locally sourced, and healthy foods for Native children, families, and those most in need.

## FINAL THOUGHTS: INDIAN COUNTRY IS FERTILE GROUND

- As Mike Roberts, President of First Nations Development Institute aptly stated: “Indian Country is ripe for investment.”
- There are shovel-ready projects that just need a small amount of funding to make a huge difference for Native peoples. The convening partners and experts featured at Fertile Ground can help identify those projects for you.
- We hope that funders consider the opportunities in Indian Country. We can assure you that the return on your investment will be worth it.

“Indian Country is ripe for investment.”

-Mike Roberts, President  
First Nations Development Institute

### FERTILE GROUND IS JUST THE BEGINNING

There is more work that needs to be done, and more conversations that need to be shared.



## CALL TO ACTION: WHAT WILL YOU DO?

### 1. **SHARE, EVALUATE, EDUCATE AND ENGAGE.**

Please share this report with your colleagues and networks and consider the following action steps:

- Start the conversation with your organizational leadership, colleagues, and affinity groups about not only the need for increased investment in American Indian food systems, nutrition, and health, but also the immense opportunities that exist to have a positive impact in partnership with tribes and American Indian communities.
- Evaluate your current efforts and grantmaking in Indian Country and discuss how the recommendations from the Fertile Ground small group roundtables and discussions may inform your future grantmaking and other efforts to build relationships within Indian Country.
- Encourage your organization, colleagues, and affinity groups to support and participate in ongoing funder education opportunities to increase awareness and cultural competency with regard to working with American Indian communities.
- Explore opportunities to increase your organizational engagement and commitment to American Indian communities. A great starting place is to reach out to the Native-led intermediary funders, tribal funders, Native research organizations, and technical assistance providers that were featured at the Fertile Ground Funders' Roundtable. Each can serve as a great resource for more information and ways to help identify promising Native projects and organizations to support and/or build relationships with.

### 2. **SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATE.** The upcoming Indian Country policy convening on food access and health issues will be held in the spring of 2016. Please consider supporting it through one or more of the following ways:

- Serve on the planning committee
- Provide financial and in-kind support for this event
- Plan to attend and participate
- Share information about the policy convening with your colleagues and networks to help recruit participants

### 3. **BECOME A THOUGHT PARTNER.** Join the SMSC and AHA in forming an Indian Country working group to help to continue to strategize and mobilize support from our peers in philanthropy to:

- Increase funder education
- Explore possible collaborative funding models and strategies
- Raise awareness across our sector
- Build working relationships with tribal funders, communities, and stakeholders
- Explore additional convenings focused on other topics of interest
- Increase investment in grantmaking to Native communities

### 4. **COMMIT AND SHARE.** We hope that you will consider taking one or more of the above suggested actions. The collective impact of these steps can help to further the dialogue about the importance of American Indian communities and issues within philanthropy. These are also critical first steps to identifying ways to increase investment across the philanthropic sector in promising strategies and opportunities for impact on American Indian food systems, tribal economies, food access, nutrition, and health disparities.

We encourage you to share with us any action steps that your organization is willing to take by January 31, 2016. As convening partners, the SMSC and AHA are committed to creating a broad-based coalition of funders and stakeholders that will address Native American food access and nutritional health problems. Any commitments and/or action steps that your organization is willing to take and share can help inform the design and next steps for such a broad-based coalition. We hope to make announcements in early 2016 about SMSC and AHA's next steps as they continue working together.

Finally, we will help you share information at appropriate times about any action steps that you share with us. This information will continue the momentum which emerged at Fertile Ground.

Representatives from the SMSC and AHA will be in touch to gauge your interest in any of the above suggested actions and to listen to your feedback about potential other steps that can be taken. In the meantime, should you want to share any thoughts and/or have any questions, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest and commitment to the health and wellbeing of Native peoples!



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“

The history, contemporary lives, and future of Native America are intertwined with that of surrounding communities. Tribal governments and organizations do not conduct their lives and work in a vacuum. Tribal governments collectively contribute billions to the economy and employ thousands of people. When tribal governments build roads and water systems, develop business enterprises, or provide family services, it benefits everyone in the community, not just tribal members.

- The late Cherokee Principal Chief, Wilma Mankiller

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