# Minnesota Native American Leadership Alumni Network Project 2011-2016

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FOUNDATION

Blandin Foundation ™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

Northwest Area
Foundation
Reducing Poverty. Building Prosperity.

NATIVE AMERICANS
IN PHILANTHROPY

BUSH
FOUNDATION

HEADWATERS
FOUNDATION for JUSTICE

**RAINBOWRESEARCH**

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A special thank you to all who took the time to complete the survey (too many to list here – but thank you!)

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# Letter of Welcome

## Minnesota Native American Leadership Collaboration

Promoting leadership development is a long-time, tested strategy of philanthropy, and the concept of developing people is also not new to American Indian communities. Indian leadership is a complex matter – all at once encompassing the growth of individuals as well as those families and communities in which they live. Such other dimensions as spirituality also are involved. Indian leaders work within these multiple levels simultaneously in a dynamic process that considers individual autonomy as well as group well-being and harmony The process is all about honoring relationships; and the core work is staying committed to the process, which ultimately unleashes individuals' gifts so that they can be shared to sustain the group.

American Indian people instinctively seek to live this way, and it was no different when we, a group of Indian professionals in philanthropy, began meeting in 2011 to consider how to connect and network those grassroots alumni of various formal leadership programs in Minnesota. Our group became known as the Minnesota Native American Leadership Collaboration.

In these meetings, there was no particular hierarchy. The Collaboration utilized cultural practices – including prayer and smudging to promote both self-reflection and outward connection – as well as other protocols that promote more authentic relationship-building based on mutual respect and mutual benefit. These included making time for sharing personal (not just professional) updates, listening more deeply to one another, and laughing and joking. The protocols honored individual contributions, while building broader ownership, consensus and harmony of the group.

Over several years, what we collaboration members came to learn was that the same types of practices that nurtured our small circle are what is necessary to support a wider circle of grassroots Indian leaders across Minnesota. We confirmed that relationships are supreme. Without them, less can be achieved. Relationships trump projects; that is, issues alone generally cannot attract deep support or sustained action. While conventional wisdom says that communities organize around issues, in the American Indian context, the relationships must first be in place for significant organization to occur.

Significantly, our group learned that emerging mainstream concepts of networks align with Indian cultural perspectives on individual, and group, development. Grappling with increasing complexity and data, scientists and others are utilizing networks in order to share knowledge and unleash innovation that benefits the collective. Similarly, Indian people see the circle (as their network) as a way to unleash their gifts, energy and innovation to benefit the whole. In Both cases, the networks depend on strong, mutually beneficial relationships – to facilitate sharing rather than hoarding information and resources.

With their inherent relational worldview, Indian people crave connection. In fact, the visual mapping of grassroots Indian leaders in Minnesota – captured by the project through surveys and social network analysis software – looks just like a "smart network" of mainstream innovators who are knitted together to confront a common problem.

In each network, the self-interest by parties in relationship may be slightly different. In the mainstream network, perhaps the motivation is a sense of urgency about the problem or acknowledgement that no single individual can discover the solution. With Indian people, to share and give back is a universal teaching that springs from one's family upbringing and cultural traditions. This cultural worldview is captured most elegantly in the concept of the circle, which represents the relational situation of individuals within a continuous, unbroken collective. When relationships are honored through values-driven practice, then the circle is stronger, unleashing shared wisdom, innovation and energy, all of which power a continuous cycle of success.

Developing both individuals and the broader circle requires constant "parallel practice" of these values, traditions and beliefs. The resulting product can be innovation – as from a smart network – as well as a common spirit and inspired action that emerge when people share their full selves and passions. The following report shares the continuing journey of the Minnesota Native American Alumni Network Project; what was learned and what we aspire to continue doing and unleashing.

*–Minnesota Native American Leadership Collaboration*
*January 2016*

# Introduction

In 2011, representatives from Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) and the Tiwahe, Blandin, Bush, Northwest Area and Headwaters Foundations formed the *Native American Leadership Collaboration* to learn together about the work each was doing to support American Indian leadership development. A common thread was that each organization supports American Indian leadership development, with most operating internal programs with the explicit goal of training, developing and building the next generation of Native leaders.

However, the Collaboration learned that there was an absence of ongoing support and resources for those individuals who participated in these leadership programs. Over a two-year period, the group met regularly to discuss potential avenues of joint action to further advance a collective leadership movement in Native communities. A key point noted in their October 2013 report was the need to intentionally create a collective, generative network of Native American alumni leaders across Minnesota.

Over the past few decades, more than 2,000 Native Americans in Minnesota have participated in at least one leadership program offered by the member organizations of the Collaborative. The first step in creating this active network was to learn how these Native American leaders were currently working together. Tiwahe Foundation, working with the Native American Leadership Collaboration, contracted with Rainbow Research, Inc. to conduct a network mapping survey. In addition, by asking future-oriented questions the mapping process also intended to identify new connections that could be developed across the leadership networks of the various programs offered by NAP and the Tiwahe, Blandin, Bush, Northwest Area and Headwaters Foundations. This work occurred in three phases:

1. ***Collect Information for Maps***: Alumni participated in an online survey that collected information that could be used to create network maps that visually presented how people were currently connected.
2. ***Share Back and Reflection:*** A two-part workshop was presented at the Native Americans in Philanthropy's 25th Anniversary Celebration and 2015 Native Philanthropy Institute held at Mystic Lake Casino Hotel at the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community in May 2015. The process and resulting maps were shared in an interactive session and people were invited to sign up for the first Network Weaving Coaching cohort.
3. ***Network Weaver Coaching Cohort***: This cohort of nine alumni met nine times over six months to learn and practice a variety of tools based on the *Network Weaver Handbook: A Guide to Transformational Networks* by June Holley. The cohort also read portions of Peter Plastrik's book, *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact.* The focus of the work was to learn about networks, and the tools and approaches that help make new connections to intentionally build a resilient, active network of Native American alumni leaders. These tools also help to provide resources and opportunities for alumni to connect in a manner that supports self-determination and sovereignty.

This report tells of this process, what was learned and promising next steps. First, we will explore is meant by a generative, smart network, why it is important and how it fits with the vision the Collaborative and others have for Native American communities.

## Networks for Social Impact and Transformation

In many different sectors—education, healthcare, equity, and business—a common observation and conversation is occurring: the issues and challenges are complex and changing more and more rapidly. What is also true is that the way we interact, work or connect is also changing. Internet, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube have radically changed we engage with each other and with information and knowledge.

Since the 1990s, a number of people have also started writing and talking about "networks" as opposed to organizations or projects as a mechanism of social change. As Plastrik observes, "In 1994, Jessica Lipnack and Jeffry Stamps, authors of *The Age of the Network*, declared that 'the network is coming of age as a mature, useful, and pervasive form of organization…Life has become too complicated for hierarchy and bureaucracy'" (p. 2).

How is a *network* different from going to a conference and *networking* with attendees? Plastrik offers the following definition of a generative network:

> Networks of individuals or organizations that aim to solve a difficult problem in the society by working together, adapting over time, and generating a sustained flow of activities and impacts. We call these generative social-impact networks – "generative" because they are designed to be a platform for generating multiple, ongoing kinds of change, not just accomplishing a single outcome; "social-impact" because they specifically focus on achieving change that results in social good (p. 5).

Ways of capturing the characteristics of networks were developing parallel to conversations about these changes in the ways we interact. Social Network Analysis (SNA)—the mapping and measuring of relationships between people, groups and organizations – created a way, through survey responses, to map the characteristics of networks. SNA provides both a visual and a mathematical analysis of human relationships. Figure 1 presents the main components of a map.

*Figure 1. Components of a Social Network Map*
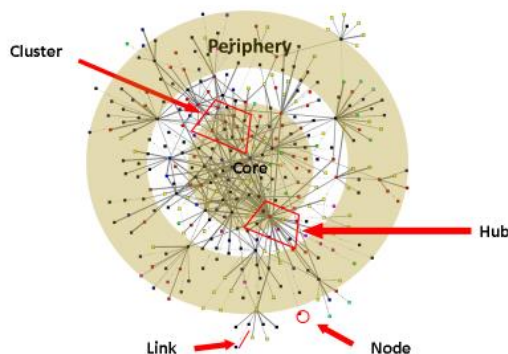
June Holley notes that *smart networks* contain "patterns of relationships [that] are more conducive to good communication flow, supporting innovation and collaboration" (p. 19). Such a network is observable in a network mapping by a dense core of overlapping clusters. The overall map of the Native American alumni based on the survey exhibited this characteristic (see Figure 2), and shows an overall rich and connected network among Native Americans in Minnesota, providing a springboard for building strong, sustained networks of collaborative action in the future.

*Figure 2. A Smart Network: Native American Leadership Alumni Survey Respondents, 2015*
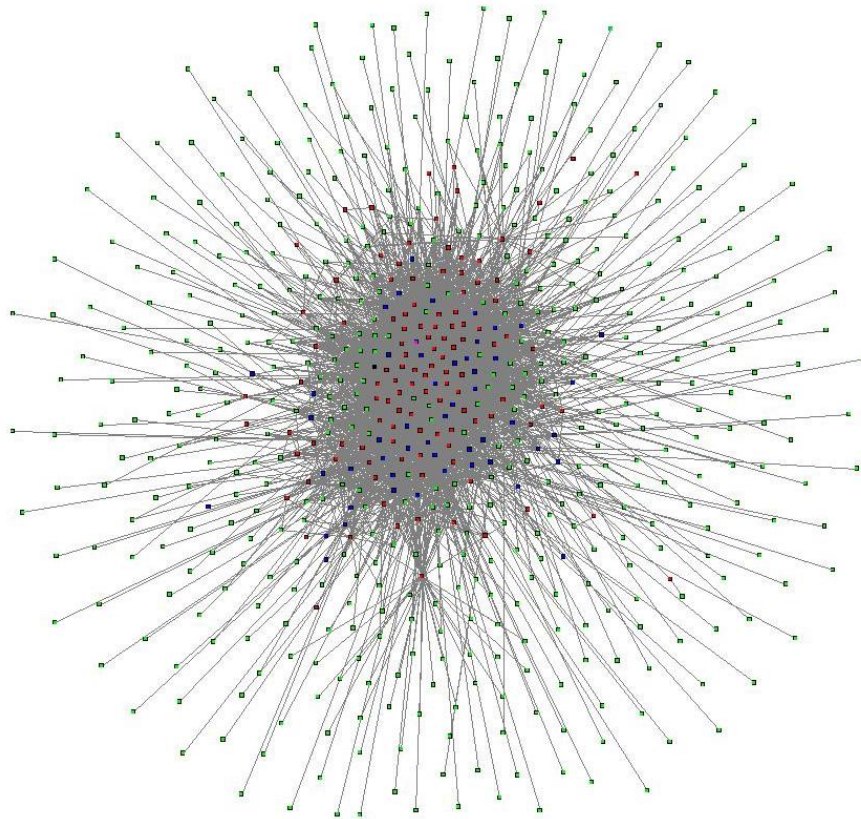


While mainstream researchers and social impact developers have begun to think about generative networks, have identified characteristics of individuals in a network as well as the function of the network as a whole, Native communities have a long tradition of these very same characteristics. Peter Plastrik notes that "the foundation of a generative social-impact network is the connectivity of its members to each other" (p. 10) or, in other words, the importance of mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationships. He also notes, ""in a network, two social forces are set into motion: the generosity with which members treat each other and the shared sense of identity they develop" (p. 37). Table 1 presents a beginning comparison between generative networks and Native American values.

*Table 1. Comparison of Generative Networks and Native American Values*

| Generative Networks | Native American Traditions and Beliefs |
|---|---|
| Self-Determination | Sovereignty |
| Decentralized | Shared, participatory leadership |
| Generosity among members | Gift economy |
| The whole is greater than the parts | Emphasis on community over individual benefit |

# Network Mapping Process

For this network mapping project, the Rainbow Research team was joined by Ken Vance-Borland, executive director of The Conservation Planning Institute in Oregon. Vance-Borland has been doing social network analysis and "network weaving" since 2007. In 2011, he began collaborating with the Leadership Learning Community and has done four leadership network mapping projects with them, providing a wealth of experience for this project. Beginning in September 2014 and throughout the project, the Rainbow team met regularly with Tiwahe staff and an advisory group of the Collaboration. As a result, all phases of the work were conducted collaboratively; the purpose and intent remained focused on what best served the developing Native American Leadership Network.

## Survey Development

The Collaboration identified questions they were interested in asking Native leadership alumni. These, along with suggestions from the Rainbow team, formed the basis of a first draft of the survey questions. Through an iterative process, these questions were revised and pilot-tested in October and November 2014. The final version (see Appendix A for the full survey) asked respondents to provide information about themselves (i.e., gender, age, and geographic location) and to identify two areas about which they were most passionate, from the following list:

- Education and Lifelong Learning
- Economic Development/Entrepreneurship
- Tribal Government
- State and Local Government
- Youth Development and Engagement
- Health and Wellbeing
- Culture (such as art, ceremony, and language revitalization)

Alumni were asked to identify areas of leadership skills that they wished to develop as well as those skills they were strong in and would be willing to share. Thinking of the future, they were then asked which of the following opportunities they would be interested in collaborating with others:

- Opportunity 1: Network to foster strategic partnering to tackle broad transformative initiatives.
- Opportunity 2: Design and sustain a robust database/website of resources and tools that users can build and access.
- Opportunity 3: Network dedicated to cultural access and revitalization.
- Opportunity 4: Network to explore historical trauma resolution and current strategies and practices.

The survey also included questions about social media skills and level of experience in organizing or leading change. If each person became a point on the network map, these questions provided the characteristics of that person, which could be sorted and displayed in various combinations with the other point on the map.

The final two questions of the survey collected information that would result in the connecting lines (relationships) between points (people). Alumni were asked to scroll through a list of names (those who had agreed to participate in the survey) and indicate:

1. Which people have you formally or informally collaborated with in the past few years, including mentors, colleagues, and fellow coalition or workgroup members?
2. Which people haven't you worked with before, but you are familiar with their work and see potential for future collaboration on a project that would make a positive different for Minnesota Native Americans?

Participants also had the option to add names to the list, and through that process, 307 additional names were included.

## Survey Participants and Response Rates

Each member of the *Native American Leadership Collaboration* sent out a letter of invitation to their program's Native American alumni to participate in the network mapping project. Table 2 shows the number of alumni from each organization who indicated they were interested in participating.

*Table 2. Participants by Organization*

| Organization | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| Blandin | 40 |
| Bush | 64 |
| Headwaters | 16 |
| NAP | 13 |
| Tiwahe | 238 |
| Advisory Group* | 3 |

*Participated in the Collaborative, but were not program alumni*

Beginning in December 2015, the Rainbow team sent email invitations with a link to an on-line survey to each of these alumni. Organizational Network Analysis Survey or ONASurveys was the online platform used because it was specifically developed to collect information for social network analysis (see https://www.s2.onasurveys.com/). Each participant was uniquely identified so that the Rainbow team could monitor responses and send reminders.

In addition to email reminders, participants were also called by members of the Collaborative from the organization where they received their leadership training, to answer any questions and provide a friendly reminder.

In total, 374 eligible individuals were invited to participate in the survey, accounting for duplicates that participated in multiple training programs. People were excluded from participation if 1) they did not have an email address listed, or 2) their originally listed physical address was outside of Minnesota.

The following are the completion and response rates:
- 153 Complete Surveys (41%)
- 35 Incomplete Surveys (9%)
- 144 Did Not Start Survey (39%)
- 42 Email Bounced (11%)

While many social network survey and analysis projects indicate the need for high response rates (80% or more) in order to fully map the social network of interest, since the purpose of the mapping was provide a beginning point for building new connections and networks among Native American leaders in Minnesota, the Collaboration, in conversation with the Rainbow team, determined that a 40% response rate was sufficient for going forward. Tables 3 through 5 present the demographics of individuals who completed the survey.

*Table 3. Gender of Survey Respondents*

| Gender | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Female | 69% |
| Male | 30% |
| Gender non-conforming | 1% |
| Prefer not to respond | 1% |

*Table 4. Age of Survey Respondents*

| Age | Percentage |
|---|---|
| 18-25 | 5% |
| 26-35 | 22% |
| 36-50 | 38% |
| 51-65 | 32% |
| Over 65 | 2% |
| Prefer not to respond | 1% |

*Table 5. Geographic Location of Survey Respondents' Leadership Work*

| Area | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Twin Cities Metro Area | 47% |
| Both reservations and cities/towns | 19% |
| Reservation | 16% |
| Nationally | 9% |
| The entire state | 5% |
| Mid-size City | 1% |
| Rural Town | 1% |
| Internationally | 1% |

# Network Mapping Results

Network maps offer a visual tool so that people can become aware of and expand relationships in the network, identify areas for increasing communication, identify ways to self-organize and mobilize leadership, and take action that can lead to systemic change. In other words, this visual tool is a *map* that shows groups of individuals where they are and where they could go (in terms of connecting and networking). Figure 3 (as also presented in Figure 2), shows the connections of the 374 people who completed the survey plus the 307 additional people who were named for a total of 681 potential people to involve.

*Figure 3. Native American Leadership Network, 2015 (374 respondents, 307 additional names)*
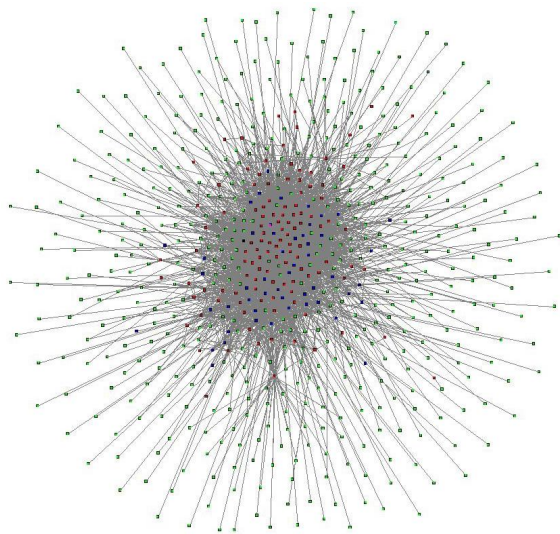
To understand and see more clearly the nuances of the connections, the overall network was sorted in to sub-networks based on the questions about interests and characteristics. Figure 4 shows the primary area people indicated for which they were most passionate about using their leadership skills.

*Figure 4. Areas of Passion for Leadership*
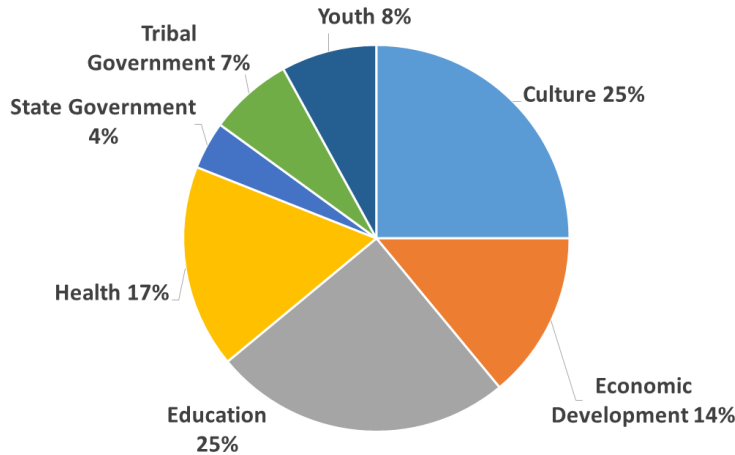


Over 24 different maps were generated by the combination of primary passions, opportunities for future collaboration and skill areas. Four were selected for this report to illustrate the different sub-networks. All maps are included in Appendix B. The key for the color of the node for all of the maps is presented in Figure 5.

*Figure 5. Color Key for Individual Strengths in Sub-Network Maps*
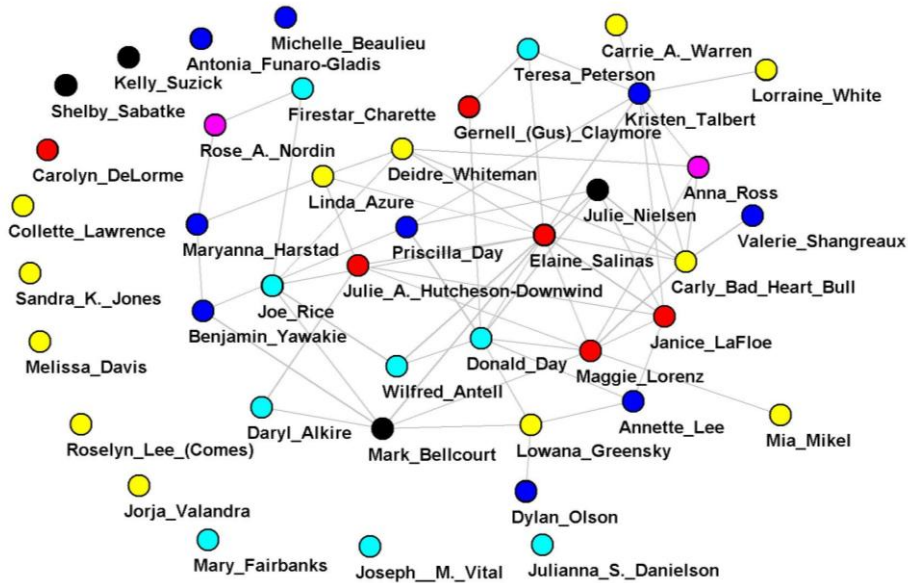
## Figure 6. Education and Lifelong Learning Sub-Network



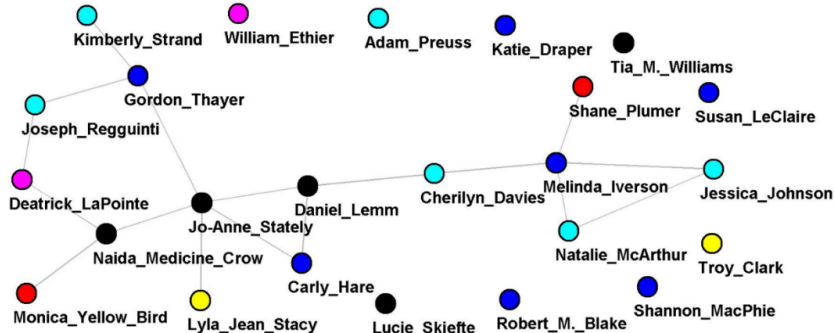## Figure 7. Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Sub-Network



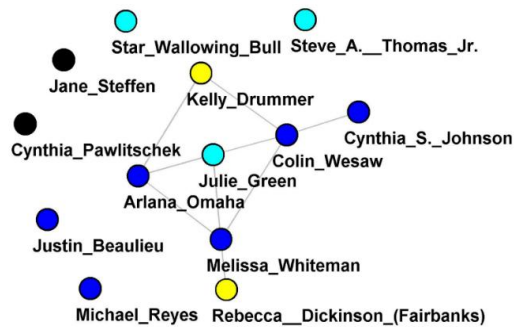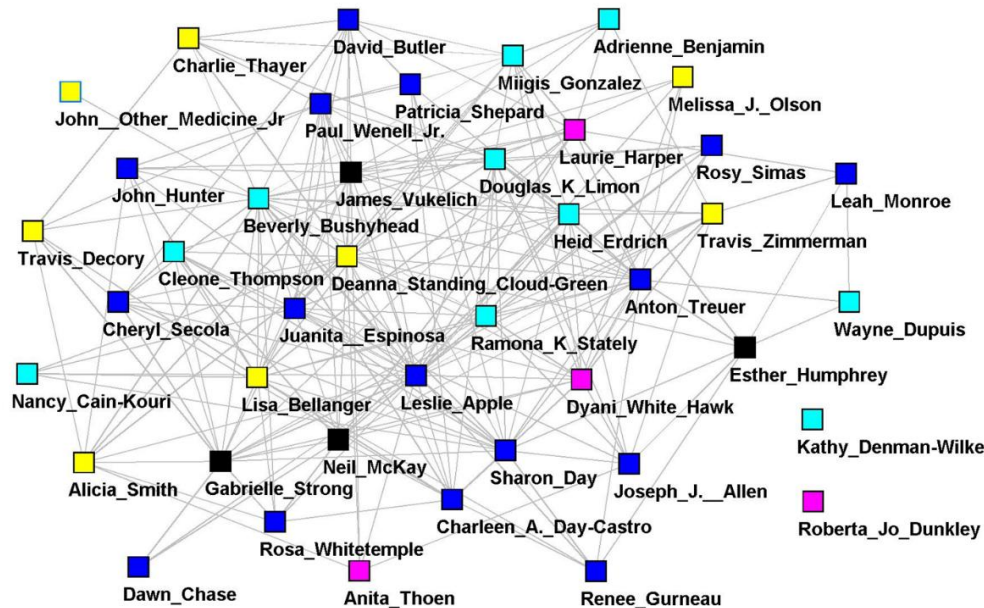## Figure 8. Youth Development and Engagement

*Figure 9. Culture*



These sub-network maps show the differing number of alumni and connects for these topic areas. The maps were presented to the key members of the Advisory Group and the Collaboration. These early reflections and discussions helped to shape the presentations at the Native Americans in Philanthropy Institute, which are described in the next section.

# NAP Presentations and Discussions

In May 2015, the Native American Leadership Network Project team (Kelly Drummer of Tiwahe Foundation, independent consultant David Cournoyer, Ken Vance Borland, and Mary McEathron and Cate Bosserman of Rainbow Research) presented a two- part workshop at Native Americans in Philanthropy's 25th anniversary meeting, the 2015 Native Philanthropy Institute, held at Mystic Lake Casino Hotel at Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community.



The first session described the history of the Minnesota Native American Leadership Collaboration, with background about the survey and network mapping to visually show grassroots leaders' existing and desired connections around important issues. A selection of leadership alumni maps (such as the ones presented in Figures 5-8) was shared for small-group discussion at individual tables. People were asked to consider if they saw anything surprising in the maps, how they differed and what additional new relationships could be beneficial to these networks. A general share back was facilitated at the end of the session.

Session attendees were invited to attend the second workshop session, which provided an opportunity to interact more with the maps and to learn about tools and strategies of "network weaving" in strengthening and supporting networks to move to action. Workshop participants were invited to join one of the tables of interest:

- Education and Lifelong Learning
- Economic Development/Entrepreneurship
- Tribal Government
- State and Local Government
- Youth Development and Engagement
- Health and Wellbeing
- Culture (i.e., art, ceremony, language revitalization)

Maps of the corresponding sub-networks, coded by strengths, were placed at each of the tables. Two basic strategies of network weaving include (1) seeing opportunities for additional new relationships and "closing the triangle" between people who share interests, and (2) brainstorming small projects that the network can undertake easily. At each table, people discussed these two opportunities and filled out a brief project worksheet.

*Figure 10. Network Map and Project Worksheet for Economic Development Small Group*



An invitation to join a multi-month "Network Weaver Coaching" group (described in detail in the following section) was presented at the end of the day, seeking to build on the energy and discussion of the workshop.

# Network Weaver Coaching

In inviting participants to this professional development opportunity, the Tiwahe Foundation and the Collaboration noted that the concept of network weaving builds on Native people's culturally based orientation to support a stronger collective through strong, reciprocal relationships. In July 2015, the coaching began with an in-person, half-day kick off meeting on the Mille Lacs Reservation, followed by eight, 120-minute video conference sessions that were initially scheduled bi-weekly. Using June Holley's *Network Weaver Handbook: A Guide to Transformational Networks*, participants learned about building relationships in a more intentional way that can expand interest and support for good ideas. The sessions were co-facilitated by Ken Vance-Borland, David Cournoyer and Kelly Drummer with technical support by the Rainbow team. Between sessions, participants explored materials on network weaving, identified a project of interest and began to take action in a collaborative, supportive environment. Eleven people attended the kick-off event for the first cohort of network weavers. However, due to competing demands and work schedules, nine people were able to complete the coaching sessions.



Topics covered in the coaching sessions included how to:
- Strategically connect with people who focus on and care about building networks that lead to change in the Native American community;
- Share experiences and ideas for transformative change;
- Work together in new ways, through experimentation;
- Build innovative and intentional networks that bring together diverse perspectives; and
- Generate action that leads to breakthroughs.

In addition to June Holley's work, the group read portions of Peter Plastrick's book, *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact*. Peter was able to join the November 2015 coaching session by video conference to share some of his ideas and experiences with networks. Peter noted that most people do have a networking instinct that seeks connection with others. He stressed, however, that being intentional about developing a network requires learning and practice. He focused on three main areas: (1) the importance of connecting and of building strong, mutually supportive relationships; (2) the need for infrastructure (operational, managerial and strategic)

once a network gets going; and (3) the importance of experimenting in order to generate the potential and opportunity for successful action.

One of the first steps in the coaching program was to identify a project of interest. Through a process of discussion that began during the kick-off event, five projects were identified. Some projects were undertaken by individuals and others by small groups.

## Reflections on the Network Weaver Coaching Process

Each session was opened by David Cournoyer and Kelly Drummer and included time for personal sharing as well as for the "business" of the sessions, that is, discussions shaped by both the readings and participants' own experiences in bringing people together for shared action. For connected learning across the sessions, Ken Vance-Borland contributed his knowledge and expertise; and he and Cournoyer took turns co-facilitating the discussions.

The sessions needed to be attentive to relationships, which are crucial to so many dimensions of positive development in Indian communities. Knowledge exchange, for one, depends on strong relationships. In Indian contexts, effective teachers are balanced, humble individuals who incorporate a respectful coaching/co-learning philosophy. This fits with an empowering Indian philosophy of human development that generally encourages self-directed learning and hands-on experimentation rather than one-way directives.

Ironically then, the concepts of both "network weaving" (or working in a deeper, relational manner towards a common mission) and "coaching" (or using a co-learning approach that respects and builds on existing knowledge) are intimately familiar to Indian people.

Still—perhaps for lack of a culturally-based alternative—the sessions' curriculum relied on the Holley book of mainstream network-building strategies, tips and worksheets. It was left to the facilitators to attempt to address the relational aspects of effectively exchanging knowledge among Indian participants. The Holley material that seemed to spark the most engagement/dialogue directly connected to participants' first-hand experiences of effecting change in Indian communities and to the related culturally/contextually specific dynamics and barriers.

Put another way, the planners learned that they needed to more clearly outline "the forest and the trees" for participants. For the forest, that meant identifying key overarching themes – such culturally relevant issues as overcoming historic distrust in Indian communities – that a successful Indian network weaver would have to address. With a clearer framework, then more specific details that were "in the trees" (e.g., Holley's textbook recommendations) would have something for participants to utilize in order to deepen relevance.

As noted in the Collaboration's introductory letter, relationships were central to the work of the planners and of the network-weaving cohort. By extension, relationships also were seen to be critical to the network weavers' work of bringing people together in Indian communities.

Ultimately, the process of nurturing these relationships is about the way that Indian people practice their core cultural value and traditions. Core values guide behavior and honor the relationships that are essential to successfully bringing people's minds together. Such values as listening and providing mutual support emphasize others before oneself. The traditions include ceremonies and cultural practices that allow for a shared expression of the values and corresponding beliefs. Burning sage, for example, uses not only smoke to cleanse people but also aromatherapy to center them, while renewing their ties to the land and plant medicines. The values and traditions spring from beliefs that emphasize relationships and interrelationships – to each other and to all living things – that depend (to the ultimate degree) on respect. To the extent possible, these practices and traditions were part of the in-person gatherings.

While attention was given to planning the sessions with ample time for sharing and exchange, there were aspects in the structure of the coaching sessions that sometimes created barriers to nurturing these connections. For example, most of the sessions were held via video conference, with Vance-Borland joining from Oregon, others joining from northern Minnesota, and some meeting together as a small group in a conference room in Minneapolis. Many people noted that the two meetings that were held in-person were much more grounded, and that in general it was easier to connect face-to-face. The in-person meetings also included more of cultural traditions and practices such as prayer and smudging

Also, in the beginning, there was a challenge in balancing the need for participants to decide on a project with their practical understanding of how the network weaving tools and strategies would actually help their project. In reality, it took multiple gatherings for participants to have time to engage in both identifying their project and walking through the Holley tool book in a hands-on way that made more sense to them.

Even with these challenges, and the opportunities to learn, progress was made on the projects. Table 5 lists the self-determined projects and the sub-network maps that they used in beginning to approach network weaving. After the table is a section that provides a fuller description of a selection of those.

*Table 6. Sub-Network Maps for Network Weaver Group Projects*

| Sub-Network | Civic Engagement | Youth & Trauma | Adoptees | Capital Campaign | Artist Cooperative |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Passion:** Which of the following is the primary area you are most passionate about using your leadership skills in? | • Tribal Government | • Youth Development and Engagement<br>• Education and Lifelong Learning | • Youth Development and Engagement | • Culture (i.e., art, ceremony, language revitalization) | • Culture (i.e., art, ceremony, language revitalization) |
| **Strength:** Which one of the following do you consider to be strength of yours in the area of Native American leadership? | • Community engagement in civic issues and creating opportunities for change | • Finding the right people to network and increase the impact of your work | • Finding the right people to network and increase the impact of your work | • Securing funding to do the work | |
| **Opportunities for Engagement:** Which one of the following might you be most interested in collaborating on in the next year? | • Opportunity 1: Network to foster strategic partnering to tackle broad transformative initiatives. | • Opportunity 4: Network to explore historical trauma resolution and current strategies and practices. | • Opportunity 4: Network to explore historical trauma resolution and current strategies and practices. | • Opportunity 3: Network dedicated to cultural access and revitalization. | • Opportunity 3: Network dedicated to cultural access and revitalization. |

# Description of Network Weaver Projects

Each small group created a brief description of their project that began or continued during the Network Weaving Coaching sessions. The following is a sample of those descriptions. Since there are plans to continue to develop the networks and these projects, these descriptions (in the voice of the project leaders) are a snapshot of what is currently underway.

## Civic Engagement

The lack of civic engagement of the American Indian community and its lack of inclusion and involvement in Minnesota's civic life was the focus of one project group. We spent time deciding how we could tackle this complex problem so that American Indian leaders were represented on commissions, boards, city councils, county boards, tribal elections, school boards, etc. What we learned through this process is that we NEED an AMERICAN INDIAN ALUMNI NETWORK to mobilize civic engagement. The project is aimed at building this Alumni Network across urban, tribal and rural American Indian leaders. The project will utilize the maps and lists of Alumni to engage a core group that will help to build a larger network and look at developing a platform that will enable individuals to connect with groups and projects around civic engagement. This Alumni Network will not be exclusive to Civic engagement but the approach to building an Alumni Network will be to civically engage Alumni across passions, sectors, geography, economies, cultural knowledge. This Network will provide a platform for organizing and engagement opportunities for American Indian Leaders and emerging leaders in the community.

## Youth & Trauma

Several participants resonated with the need to address "historical trauma" as well as the daily impacts of trauma - such as abuse, negativity and addiction - in a more intentional way. People initially framed the issue based on their own context. One was a tribal prosecutor, another came from a family that has dealt with adoption, and a third was leading a new project for his tribe on suicide prevention. After multiple discussions, the group began moving to focus on the specific impact of "adverse childhood experiences" – or ACEs, the abuse, neglect and toxic stress experienced during childhood. Studies are showing that the prevalence of one's exposure to ACEs early in life directly correlates with later rates of abuse and addiction, as well as higher rates of some chronic disease. The group identified the need to bring together a broad group of practitioners, healers and others who have resources and experiences to address the impact of ACEs in Native communities in practical, action-oriented ways.

## Adoptee Small Group and the *We Are All Connected Project*

*We Are All Connected*, a digital and visual storytelling project is a collaboration of four women who share an idea to document intergenerational stories of Indigenous women who have been displaced through foster care or adopted outside of their families and Tribes. The four daughters in this project have come together around the shared experience of having mothers who were adopted into white foster homes in the United States in the 1950's and 1960's. The project transverses the experiences shared by our mothers as they share the individual stories of how they came to be adopted, and how it shaped their identities.

How the project came about is an example of the power of networks. In the fall of 2015, I (Melissa Olson) agreed to participate in the Tiwahe Foundation's Network Weaving Cohort, and hadn't realized at the time that our project was really a strong example of how networking can begin. I really identified strongly with the way that a network approach can begin with just two people who share a common interest. I thought back to several moments of our group's formative moments. These brief conversations might be considered the beginnings of what networks weavers might call "two-sies." When I met Melissa Davis and reached out to her, we had made the first two-sie. I thought back to the moment when I asked John Other Medicine for his card, without necessary thinking I would later approach him to work with us. Or how my co-worker reached out to another individual in our community and formed another two-sie. Through that process, we grew into a group of five, and as we asked our respective mothers to join us—we became a group of nine, and including our producers, a group of eleven. We had reached out to and received help from the Tiwahe alumni network, a philanthropy network, a motivational speaker, an arts advocacy group, and a public radio station. We are currently in post-production, and hope to complete our project this winter 2016. We are very much looking forward to this final chapter of our project and honoring our work with a closing dinner.

## Overall Lessons Learned and Reflections

Many lessons were learned in this first intentional networking of Native American leadership alumni in Minnesota. Part of the learning was the necessity of experimentation within networks and part of it was learning through the process of helping individuals engage in a network.

- Overall, there was strong interest from alumni in the alumni mapping and network weaving. People wanted to be a part of it.
- Currently, alumni and other Native American leaders in Minnesota do not feel well connected.
- The importance of building relationships and connecting via in-person, one-on-one, direct conversations cannot be stressed enough. It is the most important aspect of building networks, especially in Native communities. It was also the aspect that members of the Network Weaver Cohort identified as most important. A number of them noted that connecting by email was not enough; the in-person connection mattered the most and had the strongest impact.
- Along with the observation about the importance of meeting in person was an idea that it might be better to focus network-building first within a place-based community with clearer relationships and common needs, instead of networking across geographically dispersed communities.
- There are many individuals on the periphery of the networks of different areas of passion. The strength of future generative networks will depend on engaging those individuals.
- A strong network will require a strong infrastructure, including a key person to continue to support and organize the network. A generative network will not keep going on its own.
- The three most important characteristics for a generative network are:
  1. Strong, mutually reciprocal personal relationships;
  2. Members have a sense of belonging and identity greater than themselves; and
  3. An openness to conduct many experiments.

- Networks operate at the nexus of human beings and complex social problems. As such, the need for flexibility and experimentation are paramount. Linear program models, regimented reporting structures and siloed programs do not work.
- To solve today's challenges, networks of committed individuals must be strategic, intentional, and dynamic. The individuals involved must be governed equally by sovereignty and the good of the community.
- Relationships are the foundation of a generative network; however, the accomplishment of projects is the fuel, the energy that will keep the network alive.

These lessons learned coincide well with the eight insights that Peter Plastrik recommends for supporting smart networks aimed at innovation and shared action:

1. **Know the Network Difference**. Networks have unique capabilities for achieving social impacts that distinguish them from other forms of social organizing.
2. **Design Thoughtfully**. You don't have to fly blind.
3. **Connect, Connect, Connect**. The foundation of generative social-impact networks is the connectivity of its members to each other, which can be cultivated by network weavers.
4. **Anticipate a Network's Evolution**. A generative network's capabilities, complexity, and potential for impact increase as the connectivity of its members deepens and the structure of their connectivity evolves.
5. **Enable and adapt**. The growth and development of established networks depend on managing a set of inevitable challenges.
6. **Assess to Improve.** Monitoring and assessing is the basis for improving impact.
7. **Revisit design.** Making an existing network more generative, with more engaged members and impact, requires resetting of key design decisions to boost members' connectivity.
8. **Be Network-Centric.** In addition to skills and knowledge, network builders hold a distinct net-centric point of view.

# Next Steps

There is a strong need to continue to build on the momentum of interest and the current involvement of Indian leaders who have participated in the network mapping survey, the discussions at the NAP conference and other gatherings, and in the first Network Weaver Cohort.

- Refine curriculum & approach for network weavers coaching process, building it more intentionally around relationship-building and experimenting (as relevant to Native American change dynamics and to Plastrik's network theory).
- Convene future cohorts of Native network weavers, utilizing more face-to-face meetings in rural and tribal communities in Minnesota.
- Utilize platforms such as Software for Good so that network weavers can more intentionally and strategically work together for change.
- Seek support for staffing and mini-grants for alumni-led projects.
- Intentionally make connections to "outliers" and others outside the first Alumni Mapping Project.
- Utilize social network mapping and other processes to demonstrate development of stronger relationships and connections over time.
- Share lessons and strategies with other Native leadership programs in Minnesota and elsewhere.