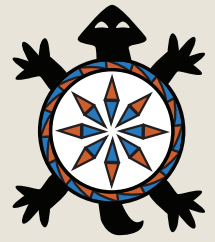




**Native Youth  
and Culture Fund**

A Program of First Nations Development Institute



# Investing in Native Youth

## Grantmaking Trends from the Native Youth and Culture Fund

*“We believe all young people have gifts and talents waiting to be discovered or uncovered, so we look to our youth as ‘at promise’ because they are our future. They will be the ones to lead us further, and take care of our community.”*

-- Zowie Banteah-Yuselew (Zuni)  
Program Coordinator, Zuni Youth Enrichment Project





# Acknowledgements

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This report was written by the following First Nations Development Institute staff members: Tawny Wilson, Program Officer; Sarah Hernandez, Program Coordinator; Kendall Tallmadge, Program Officer; Marsha Whiting, Senior Program Officer; and Raymond Foxworth, Vice President of Grantmaking, Development and Communications. They express their deepest thanks to all of the Native communities that have applied for Native Youth and Culture Fund grants over the years, as they have made this report possible.

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For more information, please call (303) 774-7836 or email [info@firstnations.org](mailto:info@firstnations.org)





## Introduction

For 35 years, First Nations Development Institute (First Nations) has worked with Native nations and organizations to restore Native American control and culturally-compatible stewardship of the assets they own – be they land, human potential, cultural heritage or natural resources – and also to establish new assets for ensuring the long-term vitality of Native communities. In particular, we believe that Native youth are an important cultural asset of Native Nations, one that must be protected and empowered to further strengthen and improve Native communities.

In 2002, with the generous support of Kalliopeia Foundation, First Nations launched the Native Youth and Culture Fund (NYCF) to invest in Native youth, the future leaders of our communities. Through the NYCF, First Nations has provided financial support, technical assistance and training to tribes and Native organizations dedicated to youth empowerment and culture and language awareness. As a result of this partnership with Kalliopeia Foundation, First Nations has become one of the largest grantmakers in Indian Country to support community-based efforts that connect Native youth with programs that promote and advance Native culture, language and spirituality.

To date, First Nations has awarded 305 grants through the NYCF, totaling more than \$5.13 million. Despite this significant investment, there is still a substantial amount of unmet funding needed for projects related to Native youth and cultural empowerment. This original report highlights major trends in the types of grant requests that First Nations has received from tribes and Native organizations working with Native youth between 2010 and 2014. First Nations focuses on grant requests during these five years to provide a snapshot of grant requests from Native communities and organizations. During this five-year period, First



Nations received 999 grant requests totaling more than \$18.4 million from Native communities. Of these proposals, First Nations was only able to fund approximately 11 percent of requests, meaning that in the past five years, approximately 89 percent of the applicants were left without funding.

The following report is an effort to share insights of Native youth-related grantmaking with the broader Native, non-Native and funder communities by presenting an analysis of disaggregated data from our grant requests and by examining trends by region, organization and program area. The significant number of requests received reiterates that Native youth are an important cultural asset that many tribes and community organizations are actively seeking to educate and empower by developing innovative programs and projects that will prepare future leaders and build stronger communities.





## Major Findings

In this report, First Nations highlights a snapshot of grant requests under our Native Youth and Culture Fund from 2010 through 2014. This data highlights the following:

- ❖ There is a strong grassroots movement in Indian Country focused on youth development and cultural retention and revitalization. This movement is largely localized but recent efforts including the White House's Generation Indigenous, My Brother's Keeper Initiative and other national Native organizations working in this space as conveners suggest that a national and coordinated movement is emerging.
- ❖ This localized movement within Native communities largely draws on asset-based and solution-oriented frameworks, including examining cultural, familial, spirituality/religion, and community connectedness as strong mechanisms to youth empowerment and development.
- ❖ Our data suggests that the localized movement is largely lead by Native nonprofit and community organizations. Tribes are also very active in finding positive pathways for Native youth and culture retention and revitalization, but activity in terms of grant requests suggests that Native nonprofits are leading the way.
- ❖ Support for Native youth development and cultural retention and revitalization is drastically underfunded. Over the four years in this analysis, First Nation was only able to meet about 11 percent of funding requests for Native youth and cultural program activities.
- ❖ Native community programmatic focus areas tend to include cultural, ceremonial and spiritual connectedness and revitalization; multi-generational learning; youth leadership; education; language acquisition and revitalization; and Native arts and regalia. These top programmatic focus areas highlight that youth development in Native communities is strongly connected to cultural traditions, empowerment and identity.





## First Nations Development Institute: Investing in Native Youth

Since the creation of the NYCF, First Nations has become one of the largest grantmakers to support community-based initiatives that connect Native children and youth to programs that promote Native culture. In 2002, Barbara Sargent, founder of Kalliopeia Foundation, reached out to First Nations to establish a unique Native youth-empowerment program that “ensure[s] bright and capable future leaders with a sense of place and tradition in their communities.” This commitment from Sargent and Kalliopeia Foundation aligned nicely with First Nations’ belief that Native youth and Native culture are two of the most important assets of Native nations and that they must be protected and strengthened to ensure the survival of Native communities.

For First Nations, the opportunity that the funding and partnership with Kalliopeia Foundation has provided has been invaluable. But its value comes more so from shared philosophical underpinnings and less about money. Indian and Indigenous peoples have a unique worldview – one that values the bounty of nature more than mere assets that are there for consumption. First Nations has long held that this unique view allows Indian peoples, when steeped in culture and tradition, to be better stewards of their assets. And for First Nations – whose long-term mission is to put control of Indian assets into Indian hands and under Indian management – it means that when we get to the end game and have achieved control, that victory only comes when we have arrived at control with our worldview and culture still intact. This will allow Indian people to operate not “in a moral voice of pity, helplessness and rescue,” but from an Indian value-based voice of strength, assuredness and accomplishment. The Native Youth and Culture Fund allows First Nations to invest in the reclamation, restoration and continuation of culture and tradition – building future leaders who will allow Indian peoples to be the sound stewards of their assets that we know them to be.





Since 2002, First Nations has awarded approximately \$5.13 million through the Native Youth and Culture Fund to support a wide-range of programs and projects, from culture camps and language nests to business classes and financial education workshops to agriculture and other food-based activities. On an annual basis, First Nations releases a competitive, national call for proposals for grants under the NYCF. Priority areas include the following:

- ❁ Preserving, strengthening or renewing cultural and/or spiritual practices, beliefs and values;
- ❁ Engaging both youth and elders in activities that demonstrate methods for documenting traditional knowledge, practices and/or beliefs, where culturally appropriate;
- ❁ Increasing youth leadership and their capacity to lead through integrated educational or mentoring programs; and
- ❁ Increasing access to and sharing of cultural customs and beliefs through the use of appropriate technologies (traditional and/or modern), as a means of reviving or preserving tribal language, arts, history or other culturally relevant topics.

Over the past 13 years, through the NYCF, First Nations has trained more than 500 community-based practitioners in areas of organizational capacity building, including evaluation, grantwriting, and program and financial management. This investment has served more than 5,000 youth in more than 200 Native communities across the United States. The impact of the NYCF in dollars equates to roughly \$5.13 million in direct support to Indian Country through Native youth and cultural programming.

## Highlighting Success

### Dakota/Lakota Youth Camps Keep Traditions Alive

First Nations Development Institute awarded the Dakota Indian Foundation (DIF) a \$20,000 grant in 2013 through First Nations' Native Youth and Culture Fund to support DIF's program called "Preserving Dakota Pathways." Over the past 40 years, DIF has funded numerous cultural preservation and social enhancement projects. DIF, a nonprofit organization in Chamberlain, South Dakota, began in 1971. It supports individuals, groups and organizations dedicated to preserving Dakota culture and language.

DIF used its First Nations grant to purchase supplies and materials for several different "culture camps" across South Dakota. More than 100 Dakota and Lakota youth participated in the camps, which focused on various cultural practices, traditions and values such as archery, agriculture, equine skills, leadership and a female rite-of-passage ceremony. In many cases, tribal elders and youth interact significantly, which builds strong inter-generational bridges.

"Traditionally, elders were always recognized as the seat of wisdom. Our ancestors always turned to the headmen of the tiospaye for sage advice or direction for the tribe," said John Beheler, DIF executive director. "Unfortunately, our priorities today have shifted and we see too many youth who will forget to shake an elder's hand. Our grant allowed us to empower elders who found a voice in the 16-minute video "Preserving Dakota Pathways," which can be viewed on our website at [www.dakotaindianfoundation.org](http://www.dakotaindianfoundation.org)."

DIF purchased seeds for high school students on the Lower Brule Indian Reservation. At camp, these students learned traditional harvesting and planting techniques. The fruits and vegetables





harvested were later used to cook traditional meals that were served at the annual Lower Brule Powwow and Fair. The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe also received funding through DIF's grantmaking program to support a summer equine camp. The purpose of this camp was to help youth understand the important role horses play in Lakota culture. At camp, Lakota youth learned equine life skills and safety.

Further, DIF helped purchase supplies and materials for a summer camp for Dakota girls on the Yankton Indian Reservation. Specifically, these items were used to help revive the Isnati "Coming-of-Age" Ceremony. During the ceremony, female elders imparted traditional teachings to female youth.

In addition to supporting these summer camps for tribal youth, DIF also used a portion of its First Nations grant to fund several powwows, including a special powwow for high school graduates and Sundance ceremonies in Fort Thompson and Martin, South Dakota. Also, a portion of these funds were donated to Dakota 38+2 Wokiksuye Ride to support its annual horseback trek to honor the 38 men hanged in Minnesota in 1862. The horseback ride, which included youth from several different South Dakota tribes, is a reflection of traditional Dakota healing practices. The group traveled by horseback more than 300 miles from Crow Creek, S.D., to Mankato, Minnesota, in December 2013.

Preserving Dakota Pathways is an innovative program that allows DIF to reach a number of different Lakota and Dakota tribes across South Dakota. This grantmaking program is unique because it allows each tribe to tailor their summer camp to the specific needs of their youth and their communities.

Existing data and research on Native youth and communities have largely focused on vulnerabilities and problems rather than focusing on assets, resilience and strengths.

In the limited research highlighting the strengths of Native youth, personal attributes, positive/supportive relationships, and Native culture were found to be significant mechanisms of strength and resilience (Filbert and Flynn 2010; Montgomery et al. 2000; Stiffman et al. 2007). But there is a growing body of research that acknowledges and recognizes that asset-based perspectives, including understanding community assets and mechanisms of resilience, are arguably as important, if not more important, than identifying shortcomings and perceived deficiencies (McMahon, Kenyon and Carter 2013; LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver and Whitbeck 2006; Burnette 2014; Filbert and Flynn 2010; Montgomery et al. 2000; Stiffman et al. 2007). In the context of youth development, this literature has found that asset-based frameworks, including examining cultural, familial, spirituality/religion and community connectedness, are strong mechanisms to youth empowerment, identity, self-esteem and overall well-being (Cheshire 2001; Heavy Runner and Morris 1997; Johnson et al. 2010; Lalonde 2006; Stiffman et al. 2007; Goodluck and Willeto 2009). In general, this research aligns with the significant focus on youth development in Native communities. Rather than focusing on the encompassing and widespread deficit model when it comes to engaging Native youth, the sheer number of proposals suggests that Native communities are examining solutions to Native youth development, identity and well-being from a space of strength to mobilize community resources for the development of future generations in Native communities.





## The Data and Trends 2010-2014

Each year, First Nations released a national, competitive call for grant proposals to Native tribes, nonprofits and community organizations that are committed to youth empowerment and cultural retention and revitalization. In the call for proposals First Nations also had the following requirements and guidelines:

- ❁ Grant activities should not last longer than one year.
- ❁ Grant proposal budgets should not exceed \$25,000.
- ❁ Annually, First Nations was able to award roughly 20 awards, totaling about \$400,000 in grant support.
- ❁ First Nations only funds Native tribes, community and nonprofit organizations that are Native controlled, which is defined as having a majority of Native Americans on their board of directors or leadership team.

For every successfully submitted application, applicants are required to provide information about their organization and self-select the programmatic area or areas that best describe their proposal. It is through this process that First Nations has become home to the one of the largest databases of Native youth and culture programs in the United States.

From 2010 to 2014, First Nations received a total of 999 proposals averaging roughly \$3.7 million annually in funding requests from Native communities working to empower Native youth and retain Native culture. In 2010, First Nations received 147 proposals; 190 in 2011; 211 in 2012; 280 in 2013 and 171 in 2014. In 2010, First Nations received \$2,647,566 in grant requests, \$3,431,930 in 2011, \$3,630,987 in 2012,

\$5,098,731 in 2013, and \$3,683,242 in 2014. In total, First Nations received \$18,492,456 in NYCF grant requests in the five funding cycles from 2010 to 2014.

As noted in Figures 1 and 2, each year First Nations was unable to meet the full funding demands. In 2010, First Nations met just 15% of total requested funding, just near 12% in 2011, 11% in 2012, about 8% in 2013, and near 11% in 2014. On average from 2010-2014, First Nations has only been able to meet about 11% of total funding requests from tribal communities for Native youth and culture. These numbers indicate that many tribes and community-based organizations are deeply committed to empowering Native youth through programs and projects firmly grounded in Native culture and language. Unfortunately, they do not always have access to the resources needed to make their vision a reality.

**Figure 1: Total Requests 2010-2014**



# of Grant Requests	999
\$ Amount Requested	\$18,492,456
Total Grants Provided	\$2,000,000
Unmet Need	\$16,492,456







**Figure 2: Grant Requests by Year (Requests and Unmet Need)**

# of Grant Requests	<b>147</b>
\$ Amount Requested	<b>\$2,647,566</b>
Total Grants Provided	<b>\$400,000</b>
Unmet Need	<b>\$2,247,566</b>



■ Need Met - 15.11%  
 ■ Need Unmet - 84.89%

# of Grant Requests	<b>190</b>
\$ Amount Requested	<b>\$3,431,930</b>
Total Grants Provided	<b>\$400,000</b>
Unmet Need	<b>\$3,031,930</b>



■ Need Met - 11.66%  
 ■ Need Unmet - 88.34%

# of Grant Requests	<b>211</b>
\$ Amount Requested	<b>\$3,630,987</b>
Total Grants Provided	<b>\$400,000</b>
Unmet Need	<b>\$3,230,987</b>



■ Need Met - 11.02%  
 ■ Need Unmet - 88.98%

# of Grant Requests	<b>280</b>
\$ Amount Requested	<b>\$5,098,731</b>
Total Grants Provided	<b>\$400,000</b>
Unmet Need	<b>\$4,698,731</b>



■ Need Met - 7.85%  
 ■ Need Unmet - 92.15%

# of Grant Requests	<b>171</b>
\$ Amount Requested	<b>\$3,683,242</b>
Total Grants Provided	<b>\$400,000</b>
Unmet Need	<b>\$3,283,242</b>



■ Need Met - 10.86%  
 ■ Need Unmet - 89.14%

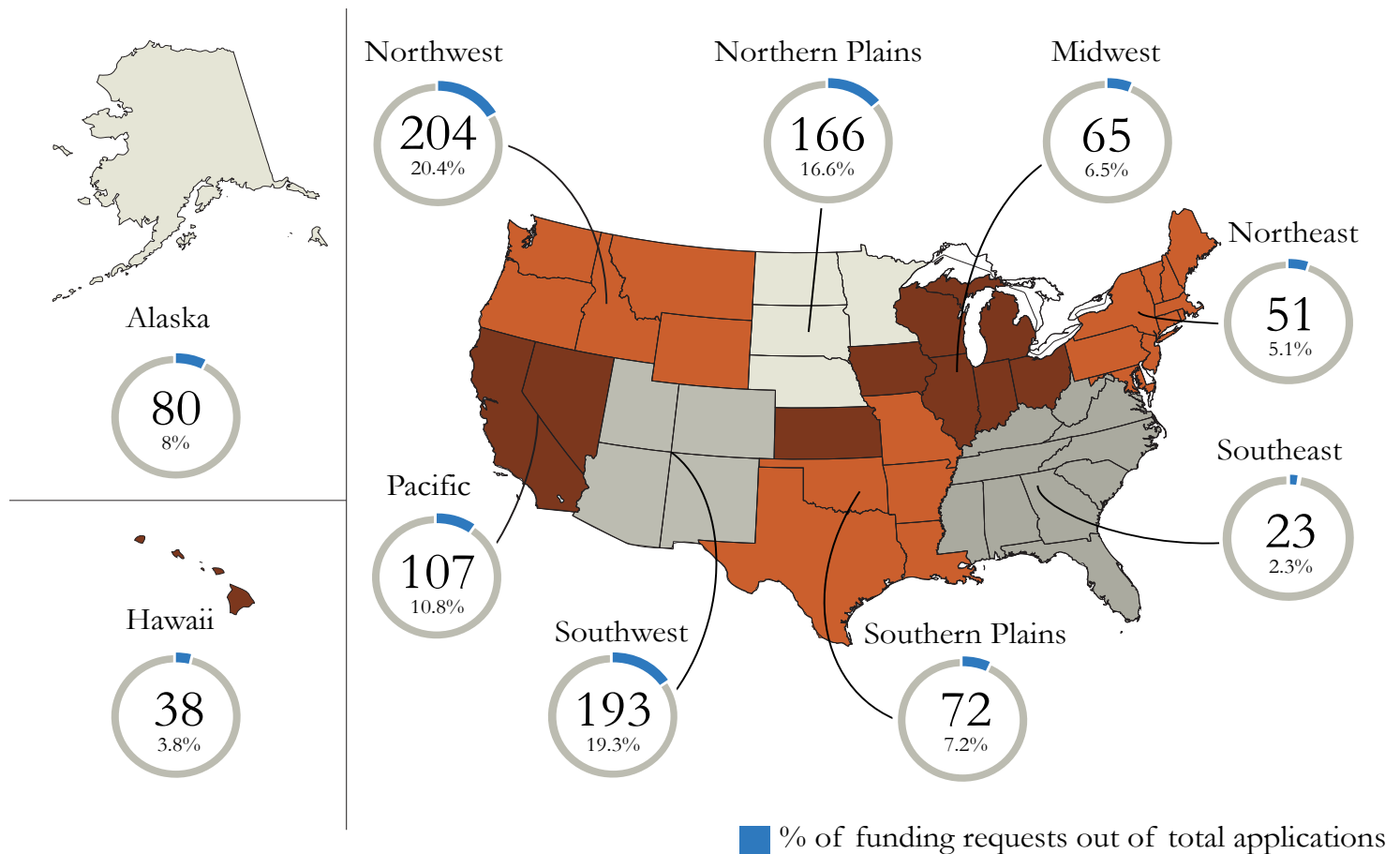




# Geographic Concentration of Funding Requests<sup>1</sup>

As Figure 3 notes, the majority of funding requests from 2010 through 2014 under the NYCF have come from the Northwest region with a 197 proposals submitted. The Southwest and Northern Plains are other high-applicant regions, not surprisingly since these areas have high Native youth populations. The Pacific area, encompassing only Nevada and California, submitted a total of 107 proposals within this time frame. Our funding request numbers note that the Southeast, Hawaii and the Northeast submitted the least amount of funding requests through NYCF. Generally, the geographic trends of the applicant pool also match tribal community concentrations. Given the general correlation between applications and Native community concentration, we are confident of the reach and response from Native communities to the NYCF request for proposals.

**Figure 3: Funding Requests by Region**



<sup>1</sup> The geographic regions for this report are divided as follows: Northwest (WA, OR, ID, MT, WY); Southwest (AZ, UT, CO, NM); Northern Plains (ND, SD, NE, MN); Pacific (CA, NV); Southern Plains (TX, OK, AR, LA, MO); Midwest (IA, IL, KS, WI, MI, OH, IN); Northeast (MD, DE, PA, NY, VT, NH, ME, NJ, CT, MA); Southeast (WV, VA, KY, MS, AL, TN, GA, FL, NC, SC).





## Cocopah Tribe Engages & Empowers Boys & Young Men

First Nations Development Institute has had a positive and lasting impact on Native youth for decades and, in 2002, it launched the Native Youth and Culture Fund to enhance culture and language awareness and promote youth empowerment, leadership and community building.

Recently, First Nations unveiled a new youth initiative: Advancing Positive Paths for Native American Boys and Young Men (Positive Paths). Created in partnership with NEO Philanthropy and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, it seeks to reduce social and economic disparities for Native American males.

Studies suggest that Native American males are more likely to be absent from school, suspended, expelled or repeat a grade. However, research indicates that suspensions and expulsions are not always the most effective means of reaching and disciplining these students. Often, these punitive measures deprive students of the opportunity to develop the skills and strategies they need to succeed. Positive Paths supports innovative programs that emphasize alternative approaches to punitive measures.

For years, the Cocopah Tribe of Arizona relied upon the public school system for enforcing truancy laws for its students. This yielded little to no results, especially among males. Educators decided to take a new approach that emphasized engaging and empowering them.

In 2014, First Nations awarded the tribe \$50,000 through Positive Paths to restructure its truancy program. The tribe's new program has reduced truancy



rates among Native American males by nearly 75 percent. As a result, student grades and graduation rates have increased significantly, as much as 25 to 50 percent. The Credit Recovery and Career Exploration (CRACE) program links at-risk male youth to the people and resources they need to recover academic credits, to pursue future career opportunities and develop leadership skills. Students enroll in online classes and work with tutors to successfully complete their courses and graduate. Additionally, the program introduces students to various careers that have the potential to strengthen and empower the community.

Education department staff members noted that many students at first seemed unsure about their futures and goals. Over the past year, many students have narrowed down their focus, applying to college or preparing to enter the workforce. Additionally, staff members have noted that this program helps instill students with a sense of pride in themselves and their community. One staffer noted, "This year we have had a dozen participating students make a 180-degree turnaround in regard to their grades, school attendance and personal attitudes."

CRACE has received support from the tribe and the community. Tribal council members often act as mentors, and the tribe recently passed a resolution that makes it mandatory for every tribal member to receive a high school diploma or GED to be eligible for benefits. This resolution sends a strong message: education is the key to strengthening and empowering the community.

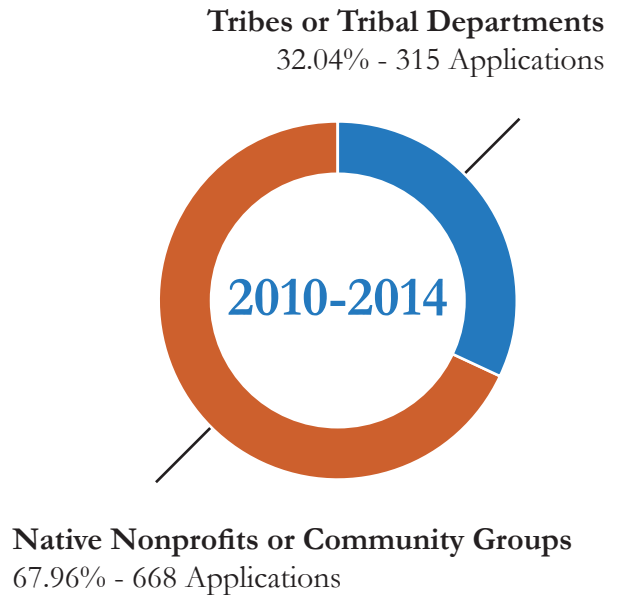




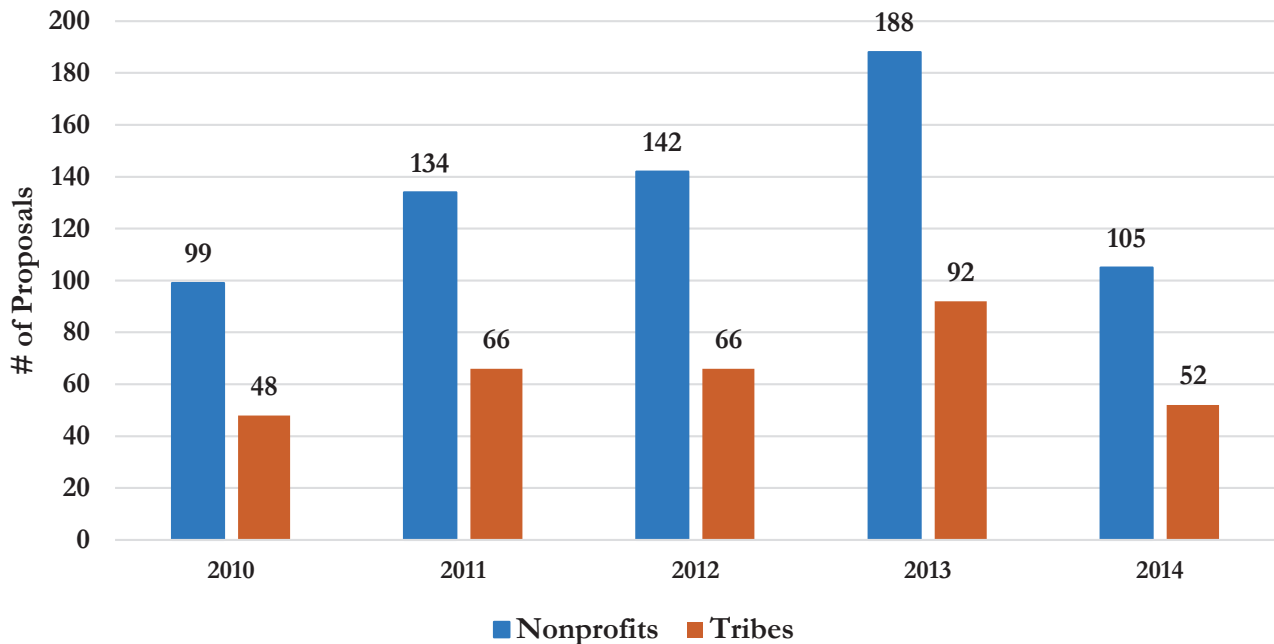
## Who Applies?

One compelling trend that our grantmaking data emphasizes is that the nonprofit sector in Native communities is a substantial institutional anchor for pursuing Native youth and culture issues. As Figure 4 notes, from 2010 through 2014 First Nations received more than double the grant requests from Native nonprofits or community groups (668) than tribes or tribal departments (315). In terms of volume, the sheer number of proposals over the five-year snapshot provided in this analysis highlights that community-based organizations and tribes are leading the way for Native youth empowerment, developing innovative programs and projects that match the communities' individual needs and interests. The NYCF is dedicated to nurturing and supporting tribal leaders in their efforts to use Native culture and language to empower Native youth and grow future leaders.

**Figure 4: Grant Requests by Organization Type**



**Figure 5: Grant Requests by Organization Type by Year**





Disaggregating by year also yields interesting information. As Figure 5 notes, in 2010 First Nations received 99 proposals from Native nonprofit organizations and/or community organizations, 134 in 2011, 142 in 2012, 188 in 2013 and 105 in 2014. Most nonprofit requests are from organizations and community groups looking to expand or increase services in their respective Native communities. This volume of requests demonstrates that the nonprofit sector in Indian Country is active, growing and responsive to community needs. They are active in creating and seeking funding for efforts that promote Native youth and cultural programmatic efforts.

Although nonprofits led the way in application submissions, tribes are also witnessing forward momentum in the Native youth and culture arena. In 2010, First Nations received 48 proposals from tribal governments or departments, 66 in 2011, 66 in 2012, 92 in 2013 and 52 in 2014. The general increase we document also matches observational data that suggests that Native youth and culture continue to be critical areas of tribal government focus.

## What Program Areas Do Native Communities Need Funded?

Within each submitted application, applicants must select and identify a focus area that best describes the submitted proposal provided. Since Native communities seek to maximize the power of grant dollars that flow into their communities, many Native programs are dynamic, overlapping and serve multiple objectives. Thus, within First Nations' applications, Native communities can select multiple areas that their program touches.

**Focus areas Native Youth and Culture Fund applicants can select from include the following (the application also includes an “other” category whereby applicants can type in their own descriptions):**

- Ceremonial/Spiritual/Traditional
- Community Garden
- Development of Curricula
- Ecological/Environmental
- Economic/Financial/Entrepreneurial
- Education
- Innovative Marketing & Outreach Approaches
- Introducing Youth to Agriculture & Traditional Food
- Language Acquisition/Revitalization
- Media Arts/Documentary
- Multi-Generational/Mentoring
- Peer Learning
- Recreation/Athletics
- Regalia & Cultural Arts/Crafts
- Tribal Courts/Justice
- Youth in Government
- Youth Leadership/Empowerment
- Other





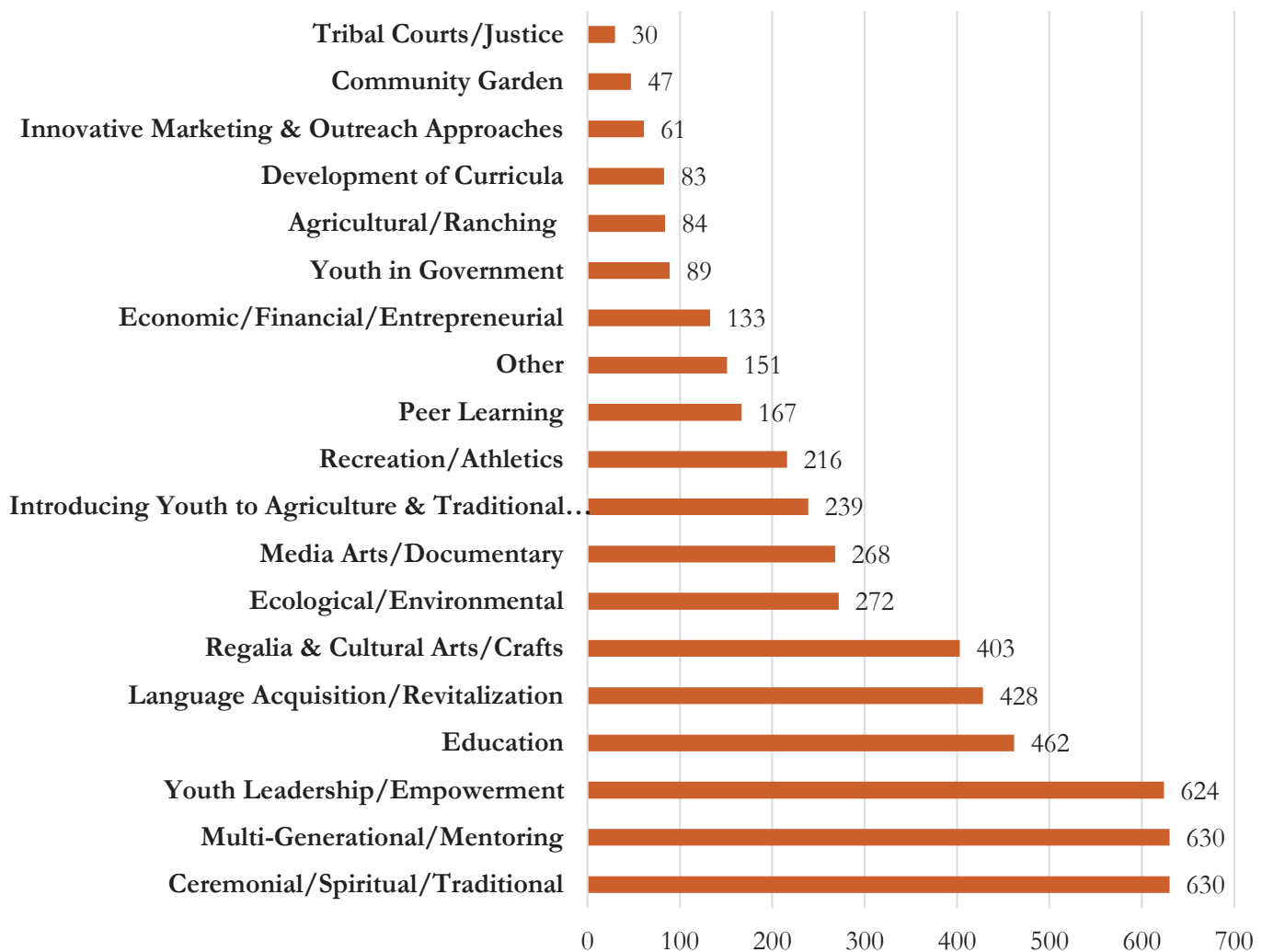
Thus, for the 999 NYCF applications, First Nations has accumulated data about what tribal communities self-select as their programmatic focus area or areas. Self-selection by grant applicants highlights some interesting trends in terms of programmatic priorities taking place in Indian Country, and fall into a number of clusters.

Our grantmaking data shows us that Ceremonial/Spiritual/Traditional and Multi-Generational Mentoring receive the highest number of funding requests, with 630 in each category from 2011-2014. Youth Leadership Empowerment is also near the top with 624 funding requests during the same timeframe.

Further, clusters of program areas highlight that education, language acquisition/revitalization and regalia and cultural activities are high priorities, with more than 400 applicants falling into each respective category.

Finally, a last cluster highlights that in youth programing, many tribal communities are working in areas of ecological and environmental stewardship, media arts, youth and agricultural activities, and recreational activities.

**Figure 6: NYCF Requests by Funding Area**





## Cochiti Parents Follow Children's Footsteps in Speaking Keres

The Keres Children's Learning Center (KCLC) is a nonprofit educational organization that supports children and families of the Pueblo de Cochiti reservation in New Mexico in maintaining, strengthening and revitalizing their heritage language of Keres. KCLC provides a culturally and linguistically rich learning environment for children ages three to six. The center uses the Cochiti Keres language for daily instruction across all areas of learning. In 2012, First Nations Development Institute awarded \$14,875 to KCLC to launch a two-year language program for parents. KCLC strongly believes that parents and families play a critical role in Keres language acquisition and retention. This new program is intended to help support language acquisition at home as well as school through genuine interaction.

Over the past 40 years, the Keres language has diminished significantly among the citizens of Cochiti Pueblo. According to one parent, she enrolled in the parent program because she stopped speaking Keres at age seven when she began speaking English. This weekly program has helped strengthen and improve her speaking skills so that she and her seven-year-old can now speak the Keres language on a daily basis.

Essentially, parents learn the same weekly language lessons that their children learn at school. They also learn practical language skills needed for daily routines such as playing, dressing, making tortillas, etc. The goal of this program is to encourage parents and children to use the Keres language in a natural setting.

Parents and children also learn language skills and proper etiquette that will allow them to participate in traditional Cochiti celebrations and ceremonies such as Cochiti Feast Day and All Souls Day. Parents and children practice these skills in an informal setting with KCLC teachers and mentors before attending actual events. For example, parents and children recently prepared for the buffalo dance. They learned songs, prayers and dances in class before participating in the actual dance where boys dress as buffalos and girls dress as maidens. These activities are intended to instill a sense of pride and self-knowledge that can be passed from generation to generation.

This grant has also been used to make CD recordings of traditional stories such as "Grandmother Spider Brings the Sun," so that families can listen and practice these stories at home. Additionally, these funds have been used to host picnics, hikes and other field trips. Most recently, parents and children have started to plant a community garden to learn words associated with food and agriculture.

Many Native American languages are rapidly becoming extinct. This innovative project demonstrates that both parent and youth language-immersion programs have the potential to reverse this trend by revitalizing these languages and increasing cultural pride.





## Why is it so Crucial to Invest in Native Youth and Culture?

First Nations firmly believes that culture is the foundation of the success of Native communities. It is important to help protect and preserve this knowledge and wisdom for future generations. The NYCF has empowered tribes and community-based organizations to protect and preserve this knowledge and wisdom, while also using it to educate and guide our future leaders.

The Native youth population is growing rapidly. Today, more than 1.1 million Native people are under the age of 24.<sup>2</sup> Research indicates that Native youth have higher high school dropout rates, more than double the national average. They have higher levels of suicide as well as a variety of high-risk behaviors (e.g., mental disorders, alcohol use disorders and gang involvement to name a few) than their non-Native counterparts.<sup>3</sup> Now more than ever, it is crucial for Native youth to learn about the traditions of our ancestors in order to reverse these negative trends and begin to thrive.

In many Native communities, cultural beliefs, customs, traditions, languages and ceremonies have been passed down generation after generation to help heal and care for our people. The knowledge and wisdom inherent in these cultural traditions have the potential to heal and empower Native youth, sparking cultural pride, self-esteem and community connectedness.

Native youth represent the future of Native communities. Their health and well-being determines the future well-being of Indian Country. The NYCF invests in Native youth to ensure bright and capable future leaders with a sense of place and tradition in their communities.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/images/Fast%20Facts.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nicwa.org/children\\_families/](http://www.nicwa.org/children_families/)

## Highlighting Success

### Project Reconnects Hopi Youth, Elders, Language & Traditions

In northeastern Arizona, Mesa Media, Inc. works hard to revitalize the Hopi language by distributing Hopi language learning materials – created by Hopi people, for Hopi people, in Hopi communities.

With a \$20,000 grant from First Nations Development Institute's 2012-2013 Native Youth and Culture Fund application cycle, as well as with funds leveraged from other sources, Mesa Media held several youth-based trainings and workshops and worked to create a set of conversational Hopi audio CDs and workbooks based on first-hand agricultural knowledge from Hopi elders.

From July 2012 through March 2013, Mesa Media held three language classes for more than 100 community members (mostly youth) from all 13 Hopi communities and three surrounding towns. During the classes, instructors used hands-on activities to introduce the youth to a variety of subjects, from improving vocabulary to aspects of Hopi foods and agriculture. In addition, each participant received a complete set of Mesa Media's Hopi language CDs, DVDs and books to use at home and to share with their families.

During the course of the grant, Mesa Media also offered a series of five hands-on workshops for Hopi girls to learn about traditional food preparation. The workshops were primarily held in the Hopi language and taught many traditional skills, including how to make piki (a thin bread made of corn). With the aid of instructors, the girls







made the piki batter, built the fire and prepared piki using the ancient technology of spreading batter to just the right thickness on hot piki stones.

As a result of the workshops, Mesa Media has recorded a Hopi language CD that teaches about piki making. On the CD, one of the youth participants uses her new Hopi language and food-preparation skills to escort the audience through many of the steps in the process to make piki.

“In order for our youth to establish a sense of place in the world, they must first know who they are and where they come from. They must have a sense of their history and why their ancestors chose to live the way they did. Sometimes these things take a lifetime to explore and the elders are instrumental for passing on this knowledge,” Mesa Media noted in a report to First Nations. “With the introduction of modern schools and wage labor, Hopi youth no longer spend extended periods with their elders. Projects like this one help to re-establish the connection between youth and elders by engaging them in cultural activities and encouraging them to speak their language. From here, Hopi youth will gain the confidence to build their skills, seek an education and share with the world the teachings of their ancestors.”



## Conclusions

This report is just a snapshot of five years of funding requests submitted to First Nations. Generally, these data reveal that over the past few years, tribes and community-based organizations have taken a greater interest in Native youth empowerment. Even more importantly, they have developed innovative strategies that use the cultural traditions and languages of our ancestors to strengthen and empower our youth.

Unfortunately, there is significant unmet need in Indian Country to launch and/or sustain these efforts to empower and strengthen Native youth. Our research indicates:

- 1.) **Native youth remain a vulnerable population.** They often grow up in communities that face high rates of poverty and unemployment, health problems, alcohol and substance abuse, and crime. Many of the programs and projects launched through the NYCF provide Native youth with the guidance and support they need to avoid the pitfalls associated with these risks. Often, this guidance and support is offered through lessons and activities inherent in Native culture, language and spirituality.
- 2.) **Native culture, language and spirituality are powerful tools** that have the potential to reverse the negative outcomes associated with poverty and other high-risk factors in early childhood. Many of the programs and projects funded through the NYCF focus on using Native culture, language and spirituality to promote Native youth empowerment and leadership. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these types of





projects and programs have had a powerful effect on both Native youth and their communities. For example, many Native youth have indicated that culture-based lessons and activities have instilled within them a greater sense of cultural pride, self-esteem and confidence; ultimately, empowering them and preparing them for future challenges. The NYCF has also had a positive impact on the rest of the community as well by funding programs and projects that will help create future leaders who will strengthen and improve their tribal communities on many different levels. Furthermore, these types of projects and programs also have the potential to help preserve and revitalize Native culture, language and spirituality for future generations.

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3.) **It is important to nurture intergenerational engagement.** Native culture, language and spirituality is often passed down from our ancestors from one generation to the next. Many NYCF programs and projects emphasize intergenerational engagement, with Native elders often mentoring Native youth on topics related to their culture, language and spirituality. The knowledge and wisdom inherent in these traditional practices have had a profound impact on both Native elders and youth. These types of programs and projects allow Native elders to share their knowledge and wisdom with the next generation. Additionally, it teaches Native youth respect for their elders and their cultural traditions – a valuable lesson that many Native youth carry with them for the rest of their lives and can impart to future generations.

Visionary foundations and other funders have a prime opportunity to become ground-floor investors in the betterment and strengthening of Indian Country by supporting Native youth-empowerment programs. The wide variety of opportunities, options and approaches within the Native youth sector should be attractive. These projects reach into the heart and soul – the core – of Native American well-being and identity. Funding entities can get a ringside seat to see how a grassroots project can bring immediate results as well as long-term cultural benefits.

As the data reveal, there are 10 areas that dominate funding requests. They are:

- Ceremonial/Spiritual/Traditional
- Multi-Generational/Mentoring
- Youth Leadership/Empowerment
- Education
- Language Acquisition/Revitalization
- Regalia & Cultural Arts/Crafts
- Ecological/Environmental
- Media Arts/Documentary
- Introducing Youth to Agriculture & Traditional Foods
- Recreation/Athletics

Thus funding should be aimed at the “Top 10” areas identified in the grantmaking analysis as critical areas of need for Native communities.

Native youth are the future of Native Nations. It is important to nurture and encourage proper growth of these future leaders as they have the potential to strengthen and empower our communities, and ensure that our culture and language survives.





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