

**NC**

**The National Center**

# PREPARATION + DETERMINATION:

*A conversation with Congresswoman Sharice Davids*

**BACK TO  
BUSINESS:  
RES 2021**

**HONORING INDIAN  
COUNTRY'S YOUNG  
CHAMPIONS**



# NATIVE-OWNED, NATIVE LED FOR 20 YEARS

## OUR IMPACT AND REACH

- ✓ \$145.3MM in commercial lending\*
  - › 93% Native-owned projects
  - › 60% located in HubZones
  - › 50% in Rural areas
- ✓ Commercial financing available nation-wide!
- ✓ On-Rez or Off-Rez?  
We know how to finance both!

## COMMERCIAL LENDING EXPERTISE

Interested in a Guaranteed Loan or Tax Credit Program? We use them all! OIIED, SBA, USDA, HUD, NMTC and LIHTC

## INDIAN COUNTRY IS ALWAYS OUR #1 PRIORITY

Provided over \$61MM in Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans, 95% of which kept Indian Country employed, and 78% of our borrowers were new customers!



**Banking Indian Country  
is not a side project,  
it's our identity.**

\*Statistics provided have been tracked since 2016.



**20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**  
**NATIVE  
AMERICAN BANK**  
nativeamericanbank.com



# OneTribe<sup>®</sup>

## Unified Tribal Services

We provide software that helps Tribal Governments efficiently manage their Member Service programs from department to enterprise.

Trusted by over 52 Tribes and over 250,000 tribal members served.



### UNPARALLELED EXPERIENCE.

Since 1993, We have provided tribal organizations with software to unite their service departments, centralize their reporting, and better serve their members.



### DESIGNED FOR TRIBES.

OneTribe is designed to support the complexity of data sharing between Tribal Member service departments. It provides a controlled view of Tribal Member Data to each service department. It allows for each department to have their own processing features.



**INTERTRIBAL  
SOFTWARE**

For more Information or Demo Contact Us: [info@intertribalsoftware.com](mailto:info@intertribalsoftware.com)  
[www.InterTribalSoftware.com](http://www.InterTribalSoftware.com)

# Exercise Your Tribal Sovereignty, Protect Your Tribe, and Reclaim Your Sacred Path.

Sacred Path, an enterprise of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, provides consulting services to federally recognized tribes looking to facilitate safe, seamless, and secure border crossing for their tribal members. A partnership with Sacred Path enables tribes to create a unique, customs-designed, WHIT-approved Enhanced Tribal Cards (ETC) that:

- Equates to a U.S. Passport Card
- Recognizes the cultural inherited values of all tribal nations
- Provides a more secure tribal identification card for your members

The value of a Sacred Path produced ETC is in what you do not see. In today's world of cyber threats and imposters, Tribes are vulnerable to – and even targets of - security breaches. Sacred Path understands how to create a secure product that safeguards user data, prevents identity theft, and thwarts imposters claiming native heritage.

By embracing and utilizing technical advances in card production, Sacred Path lets tribes focus on what is really important: deepening connections to our ancestral homes.

The Pascua Yaqui Tribe was the first in the Nation to develop and implement a successful ETC Program. With over a decade of experience and established federal partnerships within Customs & Border Protection and the Department of Homeland Security, Sacred Path is poised to tailor services to meet the needs of your people, including:

- Creating ETC Management Software Application that meets technical specifications and security requirements of DHS
- Designing and implementing the program
- Training tribal staff
- Developing Policy
- Designing a card that prevents counterfeits and meets the latest technical standards
- Facilitating a collaborative relationship between tribes with DHS



**Use this  
QR Code to  
learn more.**



**E-mail: [Info@SacredPath.net](mailto:Info@SacredPath.net)**

**[www.Sacredpath.net](http://www.Sacredpath.net)**

**520-484-4186**

**520-879-6238**

**520-879-6231**

**520-879-6293**



# Join the Tribal Border Alliance

**A chorus of strategic, collaborative partners seeking your voice**

Immigration and border security affects all of Indian country – no matter land base nor proximity to an international border. Migration and mobility have been intrinsic aspects of our survival, our security, and our self-determination. Created in 2018, the Tribal Border Alliance is a living and breathing initiative that gives structure, purpose and direction to address the collective challenges indigenous people face at international borders.

The Tribal Border Alliance is keenly aware that, now more than ever, Indian Country needs the collective efforts and combined experience of tribal leaders from all regions of the U.S. as we emerge from a year of border closures, shutdowns, isolation and quarantines. The Coronavirus Pandemic has been the most impactful collective experience in modern history; it has fundamentally changed border security while we simultaneously grapple with historically unsolved issues. Policies should be developed in consultation with Tribal Nations, molded around human rights principles and crafted while considering our health, cultural, and religious rights. Remember, Tribes predate contemporary borders.



## SAVE THE DATE:

**2021 Tribal Border Summit**

**December 15-17, 2021**

**Casino Del Sol, Pascua Yaqui Tribe  
Tucson, AZ**

Drawing on the successful outcomes of the 2018 TBA Summit, this year's program purposes to update and redraft the TBA Proposal for the Biden Administration including updated positions on:

- Amend Section 289
- Indigenous Visa Category
- Annual consultation with DHS and Tribal Governments
- Funding for Tribal driven border Security and Homeland Security
- Required Local Training for CBP, ICE and CIS personnel



## TBA MEMBERS



**Kickapoo of Kansas**

**Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas**

**Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria**

**Ewiiapaayp Band of Kumeyaay Indians**

**Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians**

**Fond Du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**

**Pascua Yaqui Tribe**

**Sovereign Nation of the Chiricahua Apache**

**Kootenai Tribe of Idaho**

**Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska**



**Joining TBA could not be easier. And it is free. Use this QR Code to learn more and sign up today.**

**[www.tribalborderalliance.org](http://www.tribalborderalliance.org)  
(520) 879-6293  
(520) 879-6238**





**Mission** Focused. **Legacy** Inspired. **Community** Driven.

Since 2004, DDC has been committed to providing government agencies and commercial organizations with high-quality IT, professional, and environmental services.

Wholly owned by the Navajo Nation, we push the boundaries of growth to continually improve upon our record of extraordinary service while generating sustainable prosperity for the Navajo Nation and advancing communities across the world.

[www.ddc-dine.com](http://www.ddc-dine.com)



## 22

### **An Interview with U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids**

From the octagon ring to the Halls of Congress, former MMA fighter and current U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids has learned how to mix it up — and what matters most in determining the outcome of the contest.

## 12

### **Legislative Update**

A brief overview of the new laws and newly introduced small-business legislation that should have a positive impact on the tribal economy.

## 14

### **RES 2021 Promises to Deliver a Sense of Normalcy**

After a long year of postponed and canceled conferences due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, Indian Country is ready to return to a sense of normalcy. That sentiment has fueled enormous enthusiasm for this year's Reservation Economic Summit — the 35th annual RES — in Las Vegas.

## 19

### **Sharpening the Native Edge**

The National Center's Native Edge Institutes program has evolved over the past few years by tailoring each event to the region, including its tribes, and other local business resources.

## 28

### **Breaking Through Barriers**

It's a journey for Native-owned businesses that want to sell products and services to Federal, state, local and tribal governments. The National Center's American Indian Procurement Technical Assistance Center (AIPTAC) helps those businesses identify opportunities and navigate the process.

## 33

### **Honoring Indian Country's Young Champions**

The National Center's annual "40 Under 40" awards have become more than an endorsement and resume builder for recipients. It's one of those nights when you can't help but be proud that our ancestors' prayers are being answered, says the program's founder.

## 40

### **Spotlights**

**Pascua Yaqui Development Corp.** As a relative newcomer to non-gaming economic development, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe has high hopes for building tribal enterprises and spurring Indigenous entrepreneurial activity among its members.

**Craft Beverages.** Entrepreneurs across Indian Country have begun to embrace the craft beverage space, bringing their creativity, culture and ingenuity to an ever-growing industry.

**Sun Singer Consulting.** How Dawn Houle's unconventional career path — and a bit of "Indigenuity" — prepared her to help tribal enterprises and Indigenous entrepreneurs.

**Diné Development Corp.** Some executives talk about taking a "30,000-foot view" when they look at business opportunities, but Austin Tsosie's vision is stratospheric — literally.

## 50

### **Q&A**

A conversation with Casey Lozar (Salish and Kootenai Tribes), vice president and director of Center for Indian Country Development at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.



### **On the Cover:**

Rep. Sharice Davids (D-Kansas) / Photo courtesy of Sharice Davids.



**The National Center**

A publication of the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development

**Publisher**

Chris James

**Associate Publisher**

Chad Marchand

**Sales Director**

Linzee LeJeune

Editorial, Production and Circulation Management provided under contract by Indian Country Media, LLC.



**Chairman**

Derrick Watchman

**Vice Chairman**

Burton Warrington

**Treasurer**

Lillian Sparks Robinson

**Secretary**

Charlie Galbraith

**President & CEO**

Chris James

**Vice President**

Chad Marchand

**Executive Assistant**

Erin Abrahamson

**Director of Finance**

Susanne Groshong

**Business Offices**

953 E. Juanita Ave., Mesa, AZ 85204;  
(480) 545-1298

NC Magazine is published bi-annually by the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development at 935 E. Juanita, Mesa, AZ 85204. Telephone (480) 545-1298. Email: info@ncaied.org.

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Indian Country Media, LLC, at P.O. Box 1629, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.

# To Our New National Center Readers:

Welcome to the first edition of our new publication – *NC Magazine*! We are excited to share the work The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development is doing to advance American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian businesses and entrepreneurs, as well as bring to you the latest news from across Indian Country.

In each edition of *NC Magazine*, you will find original reporting on the subjects that matter to you. I am particularly excited about the person featured in the cover story of our inaugural edition, Congresswoman Sharice Davids of Kansas. Congresswoman Davids, who is also a past winner of the Native American “40 Under 40 Award”, has quickly become a leader in Congress and a prime example of why representation matters. I hope you enjoy our feature on Congresswoman Davids.

It is not only members of Congress who will grace the pages of *NC Magazine*. From contracting, to gaming, the culinary field, agriculture, energy, consulting, and more, we aim to feature the individuals and companies shaping the future of the economy inside and outside of Indian Country. In our first edition, you’ll find stories about an award-winning distillery’s connection to Indian Country, how one of the country’s leading tribe’s economic development arms is serving its community, and a feature on one of the tribes in our backyard here in Southern Arizona.

There is a good chance you are reading this in Las Vegas at the 35<sup>th</sup> Reservation Economic Summit, or as most people know it, RES. We are starting RES about four months later than usual due to COVID-19, but the most important thing is that we made it. Despite pandemic-related challenges and obstacles, we are proud to bring you Indian Country’s premier business event. Some things may look different this year due to COVID-19, but I know you will enjoy our first-rate programming, networking opportunities, and everything that Las Vegas has to offer. I hope to see you while we are here.

As I often do, I want to remind you that The National Center – both the organization and now *NC Magazine* – is more than RES. We offer incredible programming throughout the year, including our one-day training sessions, the Native Edge Institute. Our Procurement Technical Assistance Centers help businesses and entrepreneurs take their plans to the next level. Our PTAC clients have won more than \$4 billion in contracts over the last two decades. The National Center’s work with allied organizations has led to real victories for Indian Country in Congress and the Administration.

This work is made possible through the financial support and guidance of our partners, as well as the leadership of our Board and our dedicated – and growing – staff. I am guilty of not spending enough time highlighting their work and accomplishments. *NC Magazine* will give us plenty of opportunities to do just that.

*NC Magazine* will print twice a year. I hope you will become a regular reader. And, if it makes sense for you or your tribe, business, or organization, support the magazine by purchasing an ad or becoming a sponsor. However, what we really want is for you to enjoy the magazine and learn something about Native businesses, or perhaps find a new partnership opportunity or two.

I look forward to communicating with you through this new venue. Happy reading!



Chris James  
President and CEO  
The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development



# Business Workshops created for Native Entrepreneurs

Curriculum  
**Culturally** customized

Created by  
**Native American Entrepreneurs**

Delivered by  
**Native American Trainers**

Successfully trained  
**436 Entrepreneurs**  
from **102 tribes**

Available  
**Onsite and Virtual**

Host a workshop  
in your community  
completely **FREE!**



U.S. Small Business  
Administration



Under contract with the Office of Native American Affairs of the U.S. Small Business Administration. Sister Sky, Inc., is a 100% Native American-owned business.

[www.sisterskyinc.com](http://www.sisterskyinc.com)

Reserve an  
**Onsite Business  
Workshop at  
Booth #113**



# The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development



## What We Do

### **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

We pride ourselves on helping Native American and tribally-owned businesses obtain financing and gain critical access to federal business development programs and contracts.

### **ADVOCACY**

We serve as the voice for Native business in the Halls of Congress and with federal agencies.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

We understand access to capital is one of the biggest challenges Indian Country faces. We help businesses get the financing they need to reach their business dreams by developing networks and training as well as a robust lender referral service.

### **RESERVATION ECONOMIC SUMMIT**

Reservation Economic Summit (RES) is the conference to attend for those looking for high caliber networking, matchmaking opportunities, business development sessions, and one-on-one consulting, all centered around American Indian Enterprise.

The event features tribal leaders, members of Congress, federal agency representatives, state and local officials and top CEO's on a national platform. It's just one more example of how the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development is building bridges of opportunity for today's American Indian entrepreneurs.

### **NATIVE EDGE INSTITUTE**

Native Edge Institutes (NEI) are one-day, in-person events that provide both established and aspiring business owners with critical business training. NEIs also connect participants to resources available in their region, along with one-on-one business counseling, coaching, and matchmaking services.

### **PROCUREMENT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER**

The National Center's Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) provides professional business consulting services and technical assistance to Native American-owned businesses interested in marketing and selling their products and services to Federal, state, local, and tribal governments. The National Center's PTAC assists business owners in marketing and networking, identifying bid opportunities, Small Business Administration connections, 8(a), HUBZone and other certifications, determining suitability for contract, and more.

## “We Mean Business”

For **over 50 years**, the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development has been helping Indian tribes and businesses gain access to economic opportunity and growth.

**Thanks to your support**, NCAIED is now the largest national Indian specific business organization in the nation, and we're continuing to work towards improving the lives of all American Indian people both now and for generations to come.



### **The National Center Headquarters**

953 E. Juanita Avenue  
Mesa, AZ 85204

### **Contact Information**

480-545-1298  
info@ncaied.org

# The National Center

## Board Members



**Derrick Watchman**  
Chairman  
(Navajo)



**Burton Warrington**  
Vice Chairman  
(Prairie Band Potawatomi)



**Lillian Sparks  
Robinson**  
Treasurer  
(Rosebud Sioux)



**Charlie Gailbrath**  
Secretary  
(Navajo)



**John Echohawk**  
Director  
(Pawnee)



**Joel Frank Sr.**  
Director  
(Seminole)



**Urban Giff**  
Director  
(Pima)



**Margo Gray**  
Director  
(Osage)



**William D. Lowe**  
Director  
(Muscogee Creek)



**Lynn Dee Rapp**  
Director  
(Oglala Sioux)



**Kip Ritchie**  
Director  
(Forest County Potawatomi)



**Helvi Sandvik**  
Director  
(Kiana)



**Ernest Stevens, Jr.**  
Director  
(Oneida)



**Ronald J. Solimon**  
Director  
(Laguna Pueblo)



**Joan Timeche**  
Director  
(Hopi)



**Jana Turvey**  
Director  
(Sun'aq)





# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

*A roundup of recent and current legislation related to economic development in Indian Country*

WASHINGTON — While 2020 was disastrous for most tribal enterprises and other Native American businesses and entrepreneurs, last year's fourth quarter saw a bright spot with the passage of two new laws that should have a significant, positive effect on the tribal economy over the next several years.

The Native American Business Incubators Program Act and the Indian Country Economic Enhancement Act both passed with bipartisan support in 2020 and were signed into law in the waning months of the 116th Congress. The National Center helped spearhead the passage of the two new laws,

which represent significant progress for economic development in Indian Country, according to Kate Boyce, president of KRBR Consulting LLC.

It's a welcome change after years of slow, incremental policy changes in Indian Country, said Boyce, who has worked with the National Center for three decades on legislation and appropriations to help advance business and economic development programs, expand procurement opportunities and increase access to capital for tribes and Native businesses.

"Indian Country has had a really hard time breaking through over the last 20 years. Tribal and

other native voices have grown stronger and stronger in terms of getting their policy initiatives accepted, but mostly minor measures have passed," she said. "But I would say that the COVID-19 pandemic and economic fallout changed legislators' minds over the last two years. And Indian Country leaders coalesced and demanded well-deserved attention. We've really seen a lot more progress made. No question that the COVID relief measures allocated substantial funds to tribal governments and healthcare systems. And the other two statutes will unleash key benefits for Indian Country businesses."

**CAESARS ENTERTAINMENT**

HARRAH'S CHEROKEE CASINO RESORT    HARRAH'S CHEROKEE VALLEY RIVER    HARRAH'S SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA    HARRAH'S NORTHERN CALIFORNIA    HARRAH'S AK-CHIN

## TOGETHER WE WIN

Proud supporters of the economic development and viability of Native Americans. Honored to be a new partner of The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development.

©2021, Caesars License Company, LLC.

Boyce also points to a new Senate Bill introduced in May as another potential positive for tribal economic development. What follows is a brief overview of the new laws and legislation:

**Public Law 116-174  
Native American Business  
Incubators Program Act**

Enacted in October 2020, the new law established a business incubators program within the Department of the Interior (DOI) to promote economic development and Native entrepreneurship. The law authorized \$5 million annually through fiscal 2024 for Interior to award three-year grants to tribes, non-profits, tribal colleges and institutions of higher education to establish and operate business incubators for Native American communities. Grant applicants must submit a three-year business plan to operate incubators that serve Native communities, assist Native entrepreneurs and help other tribal enterprises. Applicants are required to serve one or more tribal reservation communities.

*Status:* Interior conducted tribal consultations in May 2021 and written comments were due in mid June 2021 with expectation for the program's commencement this fiscal year.

**Public Law 116-261  
Indian Country Economic  
Enhancement Act**

Signed into law December 30, 2020, the ICEE Act amends several existing laws to improve access to capital, economic development opportunities and business assistance in Indian Country. The law has two key sections including the elevation of the Office of Native American Business Development (ONABD) within the Commerce Department, and expansion of the Buy Indian Act procurement authority. The ONABD, first authorized in 2000, will have its own operating budget and report directly to the Commerce Secretary under the new law. ONABD's expanded authority also will allow it to coordinate the Commerce Department and other federal departments and agencies on urgent economic development, trade and tourism initiatives for Indian Country. The law also broadens the Buy Indian Act's reach across the DOI and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to increase use of Native American labor and the purchase of AI/AN products and services.

*Status:* The National Center and other leading tribal advocacy groups wrote Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo in late April, urging her to "act immediately to elevate, fund and make fully operational" the ONABD with an annual budget of at least \$2 million. Both DOI and HHS are now working on revisions to their Buy Indian

regulations. The National Center also spearheaded a joint letter to Congress calling for government-wide implementation of the Buy Indian Act and Indian Incentive Program through infrastructure or other major legislation.

**S. 1735  
The ONAA Enhancement Act of 2021**

Introduced on May 20, 2021 by Senators John Hickenlooper (D-Colo.) and Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.), the bill would authorize the Office of Native American Affairs (ONAA) within the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). The bill formally authorizes the ONAA at SBA, doubles its funding, and expands its capacity to support and promote Native American entrepreneurs and businesses. ONAA would be directed by an Associate Administrator tasked with implementation of policies and programs to meet the business and entrepreneurial development needs of Indian tribes, Alaska Native corporations, Native Hawaiian Organizations, the enterprises of these entities, and Indigenous individuals who own businesses or are entrepreneurs. Senators Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) and James Inhofe (R-Okla.) also cosponsored the bill.

*Status:* Referred to the Committee on Small Business and Enterprise. The National Center and other tribal organizations sent a joint letter to Senate leaders urging prompt approval of S. 1735. ■



**Funding Dreams for Tomorrow**

At Clearinghouse CDFI, we believe in people. We are bound by the core value that individuals in low-income, distressed communities deserve access to affordable capital. The resulting economic opportunity provides both a greater quality of life and hope for future generations.

**FVLCRUM Funds**

Striving to Decrease the Racial Wealth Gap

FVLCRUM—in partnership with Clearinghouse CDFI—is a \$250 million private equity fund that creates true generational wealth in minority communities by investing equity and debt in lower middle-market minority owned businesses.

Get details about borrowing or investing:  
(844) 844-0778



www.ccdfi.com

© 2021 All Rights Reserved. Dept. of Corp. Finance Lender License #6035497 – CA Equal opportunity provider. Rates & programs subject to approval & availability.



National Center CEO Chris James. (Photo/The National Center)

# Back to Business:

## RES 2021 Promises a Sense of Normalcy

**A**fter a long year of postponed and canceled conferences due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, Indian Country — as with the rest of the country — wants to return to a sense of normalcy.

That desire to get back to business, along with a unique collaboration, is driving an enormous amount of enthusiasm for this year's 35th annual Reservation Economic Summit (RES), which takes place in late July in Las Vegas.

The largest and longest-running national American Indian business event in the nation, RES brings together thousands of tribal leaders, corporate and government officials, Indigenous entrepreneurs, business industry experts, procurement officials, and many

more. Produced by The National Center, RES has a goal of creating economic opportunities for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian businesses.

"Business gets done, connections are made, and the depth and breadth of the Indian Country economy is on display for all attendees to see," National Center CEO Chris James said. "For us at the National Center, RES is not an end, but rather the catalyst for the work we do throughout the year to advance economic development in Native American and Alaska Native communities."

This year's RES brings an added opportunity thanks to a collaborative partnership involving The National Center, the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) and American Indigenous Business Leaders (AIBL). The three busi-

ness-focused organizations in Indian Country have worked together to coordinate the timing and location of their yearly events to make it easy for people to attend all three conferences.

The week kicks off with the AIBL annual conference, which runs from July 17-19 at the Paris Hotel & Casino. RES 2021 takes place from July 19-21 at the Paris Hotel and is co-located with the 2021 Indian Gaming Tradeshow & Convention, which is taking place July 19-22 at the adjacent Caesars Forum.

"We think there's many synergies (between the organizations)," National Center Board Chair Derrick Watchman said. "I think we're all asking the question of how we move forward in this economy. We have a great economic engine in Indian gam-



National Center Board Chairman Derrick Watchman (center) and executives open the trade show and Native marketplace at the 2020 RES. (Photo/The National Center)

ing, and so how do we come together around that?”

Pulling all three events together made perfect sense coming out of the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, said NIGA Chairman and National Center Board Member Ernie Stevens, Jr.

“It’s more important than ever for Indian Country to unite and come together at the Indian Gaming Tradeshow & Convention and RES as we continue the rebuilding of tribal businesses following the COVID-19 pandemic,” Stevens said.

### Making connections, launching careers

After a year like no other in recent history, Native business executives are ready to catch up with their peers.

Tanya Gibbs, an attorney and partner at Rosette LLP law firm, a leading majority Indian-owned national law firm representing tribal governments and tribal entities, is excited about RES 2021 for a variety of reasons.

“RES is always a great opportunity to catch up with old friends and meet new ones,” Gibbs said. “It’s helpful to hear from others who have encountered similar obstacles or frustrations in business and even more so when collaboration and networking can lead to real solutions. Many of those relationships develop over time and become extremely valuable for one another in business and personally.”

Making connections is what keeps Eugene Magnuson coming back. Magnuson is general manager for Manistee, Mich.-based Little River Holdings, the non-gaming economic development

corporation of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians. Previously, he served as chairman of the Mno-Bmadsen Economic Development Board and treasurer of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, based in Dowagiac, Mich.

“Through the years, I’ve attended RES in three different positions, working for economic development for two different tribes, and I keep going back because the connections I make at RES help me develop new business throughout the year and beyond,” Magnuson said.

For some, such as Brent McFarland, chief development officer at Mission Holdings LLC in Wisconsin, RES can even launch a career.

“RES is the single-most important event I’ve ever attended regarding tribal economic development. It literally launched not just my career, but the creation of a more than \$100 million-plus investment portfolio for the tribes I’ve worked on behalf of,” McFarland said.

“The top industry experts attend and present at this event. And you have access to them on a personal level. I’m always amazed at the random people I meet there with amazing stories! And it’s a chance to catch up with old friends. I first attended in 2008 and have been going every year since! If you are wondering ‘should I go?’ Yes, you should! And make the most of getting to all the events possible,” he added.

### Health and Safety

For many organizations, the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a new way to host conferences. At the outset of the pandemic, state and local emergency proc-

# IN SERVICE TO INDIAN COUNTRY

Rosette, LLP is a leading majority-Indian owned national law firm representing tribal governments and tribal entities.

Offices in Arizona, California, Michigan, Oklahoma and Washington, D.C.

- Arizona (480) 889-8990
- California (916) 353-1084
- Michigan (616) 655-1601
- Washington D.C. (202) 652-0579
- Oklahoma (405) 256-1910



[www.rosettelaw.com](http://www.rosettelaw.com)

**PROVIDING TECHNICAL & MANAGEMENT SERVICES**

## TRIBAL TECH, LLC

### About Us

Tribal Tech is an American Indian, SBA (8)(m), woman-owned small business (WOSB). As a management and technical services company, Tribal Tech collaborates with federal agencies and tribes to improve security, health, education, energy and environmental services.

### Our Services

- ✓ Training & Technical Assistance
- ✓ Grants Administration & Peer Review
- ✓ Logistics & Event Planning
- ✓ Evaluation & Planning
- ✓ Program Management
- ✓ Marketing & Communications
- ✓ Information Technology

Contact: (916) 353-1084  
[info@rosettelaw.com](mailto:info@rosettelaw.com)  
[www.rosettelaw.com](http://www.rosettelaw.com)

## Experience RES 2021 Virtually

Not able to attend RES 2021 in person this year? No problem, The National Center has made provisions for anyone who doesn't want to miss out on Indian Country's premier economic development event.

A live virtual RES 2021 is being provided consistent with the themes of moving forward with resiliency and reinvention. By registering for the virtual RES experience, attendees will be able to access all general sessions and two tracks of breakout sessions.

Those who register for the virtual RES will also be able to visit the RES 2021 Trade Show by visiting exhibitor booths and the American Indian Artisan Market. The Trade Show will feature businesses from a cross-section of industries who want to do business with Indian Country. The artisan market will provide virtual attendees the opportunity to view and buy authentic Native art crafted by some of the most talented artisans in Indian Country.

The conference virtual experience is presented by The National Center at a discounted price of \$395. To learn more, visit: [res.ncaied.org/Register](https://res.ncaied.org/Register)



RES 2021 will feature a return to executive conversations and breakout sessions, this year with a focus on resilience and reinvention for American Indian enterprises in the post-pandemic era. (Photo/The National Center)

lamations forced postponement or cancellation. When it became clear the pandemic would last for months, organizations moved to reach their constituencies with virtual conferences and, later, "hybrid conferences" that offered attendees the choice of in-person or virtual attendance.

The National Center was fortunate because RES 2020 finished in early March, a week before Las Vegas began canceling conferences because of state and local health mandates.

As the pandemic began to linger, The National Center's leadership knew they had to monitor the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the reopening of Las Vegas venues as they prepared for the 35th annual RES.

The health and safety for all attendees were their utmost consideration when they began to discuss their options.

In December 2020, even before the Food & Drug Administration approved the first COVID-19 vaccine, the leadership team anxiously followed the projections to see how fast the vaccine would be distributed and how fast the country would get to community immunity.

One of the first decisions the National Center's leadership team made was to delay the economic summit, which was originally scheduled to happen in mid March. On Feb. 1, 2021, the National Center announced it would move RES 2021 to July 19-21.

"The increased distribution and availability of vaccines has given hope to people nationwide as we look toward the future and prepare for an economic reopening and return to the way life was a year ago," James said.

Many factors went into play when determining when to hold RES 2021. Conference organizers were in constant contact with hotel and conference representatives to determine availability of the facilities to accommodate the nearly 3,000 attendees.

They also monitored state and county regulations to measure the health and safety considerations.

### What's New

The theme of RES 2021 is focused on resiliency and reinvention for American Indian enterprises as the country continues to deal with and emerges from COVID-19.

RES 2021 will take place in a hybrid format with both in-person programming and a live virtual experience available to attendees.

To ensure the safety of attendees, The National Center will be following Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and local health guidelines for in-person attendees. Working with the Paris Las Vegas Hotel & Casino staff, RES personnel will conduct temperature screenings for all staff, require mask wearing by all attendees, and provide hand sanitizer and hand-washing stations throughout the RES venue.

At press time, The National Center planned to require attendees to maintain social distance during general assemblies and breakout sessions.

Each day of RES 2021 will feature traditional programming, breakout sessions, Native Edge Institutes, and SBA training. There will also be unique tracks for Agriculture, Economic Development, Finance, Natural Resources, Procurement, and Workforce Development.

RES will feature subject matter experts and leaders across diverse fields including e-commerce, taxation, federal contracting procurement, accessing capital, women in business, STEM, agriculture, energy, health care, the SBA's programs for minority and economically disadvantaged businesses, and more.

"Following the RES 2021 themes of resiliency and reinvention, we hope that a return to RES will bring a sense of normalcy back to the lives of many," James said as he looks forward to another successful RES in The National Center's long history. ■



**HERITAGE DISTILLING CO. AT TALKING CEDAR**

The first tribal-owned distillery in the U.S. and the first distillery allowed in Indian country since 1834. Established in partnership with Chehalis Tribal Enterprises.

HERITAGEDISTILLING.COM | TALKINGCEDAR.COM

*"The opening of Talking Cedar is the culmination of years of hard work, and is an exciting day for the Chehalis Tribe. We're happy to have a great team to work with, including Heritage Distilling Company. Together we expect a successful business here in Grand Mound and are looking for other Tribes to join in that success". - David Burnett, CEO of Chehalis Tribal Enterprises.*

HERITAGE  
DISTILLING CO.



**KMP**  
KALISPEL METAL PRODUCTS

**FORM AND FUNCTION.**

We specialize in crafting custom metal pieces that add beauty to any business or public space.

See our beautiful designs and quality craftsmanship at 888-3021

**KALISPEL**  
TRIBE OF WASHINGTON

**BOOTH 325**

KALISPELMETALPRODUCTS.COM | CUSICK, WA

**KMP**  
KALISPEL METAL PRODUCTS

**SPRUCE UP YOUR SPACE.**

Whether you're outfitting a city park or a campsite, our benches, picnic tables, and fire pits are the perfect pieces to enhance any setting.

See our beautiful designs and quality craftsmanship at 888-3021

**KALISPEL**  
TRIBE OF WASHINGTON

**BOOTH 325**

KALISPELMETALPRODUCTS.COM | CUSICK, WA



## UNLOCK THE SUCCESS OF YOUR BUSINESS.

SRP is dedicated to supporting business partners that reflect our diverse community. As a Supplier Diversity advocate, we promote organizations with diverse leadership groups by giving them the tools they need to be even more successful. We believe that when they succeed, we all succeed.

SRP is proud to support the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development.

Contact us at [supplierdiversity@srpnet.com](mailto:supplierdiversity@srpnet.com) or visit [srpnet.com/supplierdiversity](http://srpnet.com/supplierdiversity).



Delivering water and power®

## WE ARE YOUR TRUSTED BUILDER

CIVIL, GOVERNMENT, RESIDENTIAL AND TRIBAL  
CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTING AND MANAGEMENT SERVICES



An enterprise of the Pascua Yaqui  
Development Corporation,  
a Federally Chartered Section 17  
Corporation



[WWW.SONORANPUEBLO.COM](http://WWW.SONORANPUEBLO.COM)

**520.330.9226**

JESUS "BOY" SONORA, CHIEF ESTIMATOR

Tribal • Residential • Commercial • Federal • Civil  
Licensed, Bonded & Insured | AZ ROC #323882 #332950



The National Center's Yvette Fielder leads a discussion at the Native Edge Institute Atmore, Alabama last year. (Photo/Jeff Barehand, Sky Bear Media)

# Sharpening the Native Edge

When Chris James first joined the National Center as its CEO in 2017, the organization had a business assistance program with a distinctive name and a two-year old website that wasn't fully delivering on its potential.

The online portal, called the Native Edge, launched in 2015 to provide information and opportunities for hiring, networking, training and education for Native Americans.

When James arrived, the site was in place, but was never fully developed and the program lacked in-person training assistance, according to Program Manager Yvette Fielder.

"What they had was some technical assistance as far as resources on the website," she said. "But they really didn't have anybody managing what we now call the Native Edge Institutes."

Today, the Native Edge Institutes (NEIs) invite tribes and Native-owned businesses to one-day workshops around the country. The NEI events cover a number of key topics such as leadership, access to capital and government contracting. Participants get connected to existing resources in their re-

gion, along with one-on-one business coaching and matchmaking services that pair sellers and buyers.

Each session features a variety of resource partners like the Small Business Administration (SBA), its SCORE mentoring program and its Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), which have counselors in cities and states around the country. The NEIs also feature a wealth of information on federal contracting opportunities for Native-owned businesses, with help from the National Center's own Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC).

The Native Edge Institutes primarily draw American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian citizens and business owners. The events are also open to other minority businesses, thanks to funding from the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), which is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Since 2020, the National Center has held a dozen Native Edge Institute events around the country, despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The team moved seamlessly from live, in-person events to virtual and, later, hybrid sessions over the past 18 months, setting up NEIs in diverse locales from Anchorage, Alaska to Atmore, Alabama and several other cities in between.

**Native Edge Institutes (NEIs)** are one-day, in-person training events that provide critical business training to both established and aspiring business owners. NEIs also connect participants to existing resources available in their region, to go along with one-on-one business counseling/coaching and matchmaking services. Access to the National Center's unique N2N (Native to Native) business network will be made available to all attendees, as well as the National Center's in-region procurement and technical assistance training. Federal program and procurement coaching, accessing capital via Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), and navigating the SBA and Bureau of Indian Affairs will also be featured prominently at the events. For more information: [nativeedge.com](http://nativeedge.com)

While COVID presented travel and technology challenges, the NEI team took them as an opportunity to lean further into a strategy that had begun before the pandemic started, according to Chad Marchand, vice president of the National Center.

“Over the past two years, we’ve been focused on localizing each Native Edge Institute event so we can tailor it to the region’s tribes and Native-owned businesses,” he said. “This has really helped us sharpen the format and deliver very high value information and connections to everyone who attends.”

Giving each event a unique and local appeal starts with research on the region and local business partners such as SCORE and the SBDC. The goal is to find expert speakers that know the ins and outs of the local business community and, hopefully, a few “gems” who are very passionate about small-business development, Fielder said. In coastal states, that sometimes includes representatives from a local trade administration that can help attendees learn about exporting products and services.

Throughout the planning process, Fielder tries to stay mindful of the range of businesses that will attend the NEI session.

“We always want to be cognizant that when you bring people together, it can go from a mom-and-pop business that wants to do concessions at the powwows, up to larger Native enterprises that are in federal contracting,” she said.

Just as important, getting local tribes involved has become a crucial part of the planning process that’s rooted in Native tradition and belief.

“We always reach out to the local tribes and we invite them to come and provide a welcome because we’re in their community,” Fielder said, adding that the organization makes sure to invite both federally recognized and state recognized tribes to events near their homelands.

“We’re all sovereign nations, and we all have our language, customs, cultures and creation stories,” Fielder said. “I don’t ever go into a community assuming that it’s a cookie cutter where one thing works for everybody. You have to take into consideration the tribe and its history and traditions.”



Native Edge Institute events welcome attendees from a range of Native American businesses, from mom-and-pop businesses to large corporations in federal contracting. (Photo/Jeff Barehand, Sky Bear Media)

Getting local tribes involved in the Native Edge Institutes provides business opportunities for the Native businesses in attendance, as well as the local tribes and their enterprises.

Last February, the National Center hosted a Native Edge Institute at the Poarch Band of Creek Indians’ Wind Creek Casino in Atmore, Alabama. The lineup featured a variety of expert speakers and training sessions, as well as a welcome and comments from the Poarch Band Chairwoman Stephanie A. Bryan.

When they were planning for the event, Fielder and the National Center asked the tribe to host a lunch session — a request that was initially met with some trepidation.

“We asked them to host a panel discussion and they said, ‘Oh, we don’t really have that much to say,’” Fielder said. “And I said, ‘You have your casino operation. You have your PCI Aviation 8(a) company and other programs.’ And they realized that the Native and minority-owned businesses attending the Native Edge wanted to hear about those tribal operations because they were anxious and willing to work for the tribe.

“And so in that local community, we had a whole slew of people come and join us at our training because they were anxious to learn and hear from that lunch panel about what opportunities the tribe has to offer.”

Creating those types of in-person networking and education events are an important part of what the National Center does with the one-day NEI events. However, the work continues long after everyone has finished the day and is headed home. Attendees have ongoing access to the content from the sessions on the Native Edge website, which also includes procurement, hiring and training modules.

More than that, attendees also have ongoing access to Fielder and the National Center team. When it comes to describing how she works with Indigenous businesses after the one-day sessions are over, Fielder uses an analogy from her youth growing up in the Dakotas.

“I like to say we’re a bird dog,” Fielder said. “We’re an extra set of eyes and ears. We’ll go after it for them, and they can think of us as an extra employee, if you will. We’ll try to bridge that gap.” ■



## August 20, 2021 | NATIVE EDGE INSTITUTE: NEW YORK

Sheraton Brooklyn Hotel | New York, NY

The National Center will bring its premier business development training to the Empire state for Native Edge Institute (NEI) Brooklyn on August 20, 2021 from 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM EDT. NEIs are free, one-day, in-person and virtual training events that provide both established and aspiring business owners critical business training. Speakers and topics range from business strategy and leadership to government contracting, access to capital and brand development. NEI New York will be presented in a hybrid format, with virtual and in-person options available. NEI New York is brought to you by The National Center and funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Minority Business Development Agency. For more information or to register: [ncaied.org/events](https://ncaied.org/events)



tarbell  
management  
group

## Strengthening Native American Communities since 1953

Visit us at Booth 128 to optimize, re-invent,  
and diversify your Tribal businesses

518-358-4229

26 Eagle Drive, Akwesasne Mohawk Territory, Via: Akwesasne NY 13655

[www.thetmg.com](http://www.thetmg.com)



100% Native-American owned and operated



Photo/Courtesy of Sharice Davids.

# *An Interview with U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids*

From the octagon ring to the halls of Congress, former MMA fighter and current U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids (D-Kansas) has learned how to mix it up — and what matters most in determining the outcome of the contest.

**U**S. Rep. Sharice Davids admits there aren't too many similarities between her current role as a congresswoman and her previous experience as a professional mixed martial arts fighter.

"The hours are different, and my work clothes are definitely different," says Davids, a tribal citizen of the Ho-Chunk Nation. "But one thing is absolutely the same: All the prep work you do in the lead up to the (day) you find out whether you're going to win or lose — that's what determines the outcome."

That determination to do the prep work has driven Davids throughout her academic, athletic and professional careers. A graduate of Cornell Law School, she served as deputy director of Thunder Valley Economic Development Corporation on the

Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and later worked as a fellow at the secretary of transportation's office during the Obama administration.

On Oct. 30, 2018, Davids was selected by The National Center as one of its "40 Under 40" award winners. A week later, she was elected to represent Kansas' 3rd Congressional District in the U.S. House. Davids' election that night, along with the election of her friend and now Interior Secretary Deborah Haaland, was a landmark moment. For the first time in history, two Native American women were elected to the House of Representatives.

Davids, who turned 41 in May, said she was remembering the National Center's 40 Under 40 award on her birthday and thought "that time of my life is done."

That time may be done, but her work representing voters in the Kansas City suburbs and working

on behalf of Indian Country is on the rise. She's also recently added a new title to her resume: author.

Davids recently released an autobiographical children's book about her journey from a young Ho-Chunk girl growing up in Kansas to a representative in Congress. Ho-Chunk means "the people of the big voice," a description that Davids embraces.

"I got in trouble when I was a kid for talking too much in school," Davids said. "Once I started growing into my voice, I feel like I learned to communicate things in a way that is respectful ... (and that) something that might have been considered a flaw by some people has actually turned out to be a strength that I have."

*NC Magazine* invited Rep. Davids to share her voice about a range of issues. (The interview below has been edited and condensed for clarity.)

*"A lot of what I saw, what I encountered, is that there's often a baseline misunderstanding or lack of knowledge about what sovereignty is, what the government-to-government relationship is and in a lot of ways, even what's the framework of economic development in Indian Country."*

— Sharice Davids, U.S. Rep.

**You received the National Center's 40 under 40 Award in 2018. What is your advice to Native youth about working to assist their tribal communities to become more economically independent?**

First of all, I think it's really cool that we've got organizations like the National Center, folks who are doing work to try to make sure that our youth recognize the opportunity that's out there.

It's our family connections, it's our languages, it's our practices. It's all kinds of things that we have had to either revitalize, maintain, or fight for. So it's hard, but we have also overcome so many other things. And I think that's a really important thing, particularly for our young people to remember. It doesn't mean it's not going to be hard, and it doesn't mean don't ask for help. Absolutely ask for help from people. I think that's one of our strengths — that we know we need each other.

**How has your work as deputy director of Thunder Valley Economic Development Corporation on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation helped you make decisions in Congress on economic development for Indian Country?**

While I was at Thunder Valley, I interacted with a ton of federal agencies and other tribes and tribal organizations doing community and economic development work. And I realized that a lot of people don't know a ton about the federal government. I don't mean tribal communities, I mean across the board, all over the country, a lot of us — we just don't know. A number of times I was sitting there thinking, 'Who made this policy? Who decided it would be this way?'



Top: Davids represents Kansans in her Congressional seat, but also works to make sure there are people who understand Indian Country and Native voices in every office of the federal government. (Photo/Courtesy of Sharice Davids). Bottom: National Center CEO Chris James discusses economic development in Indian Country with Rep. Davids at her congressional office in Washington DC. (Photo/The National Center)

**What did you learn from your experience there?**

A lot of what I saw, what I encountered, is that there's often a baseline misunderstanding or lack of knowledge about what sovereignty is, what the government-to-government relationship is and in a lot of ways, even what's the framework of economic development in Indian Country.

Then you've got those of us who are making policy or laws in Congress, who are authorizing programs, and you see stuff like tribal organizations being sometimes inadvertently left out of a program that was clearly designed to help. Then you've got a tribal organization — and I saw this at Thunder Valley for sure — where leaders would say, 'Oh, we want to build infrastructure,' and then we are looking to get infrastructure dollars from the U.S. Department of Agriculture or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

**During the Obama administration you were a fellow placed at the secretary of transportation's office. What did you learn about road and bridge conditions (infrastructure needs) in Indian Country while there?**

I learned that it's really important that we have folks who understand Indian Country and Native voices in every department, in every aspect of the federal government. When you don't have somebody at the U.S. Department of Transportation who understands Indian Country or is Native or understands how to work with tribal governments ... then the conversation ends up being about rural needs (because) there's a lot of tribal governments that are in rural places.

There are a lot of people who are really surprised at just how many miles of road, how many bridges, and how much transit there is in Indian Country. I would say I probably knew some of it, but I learned a ton about that while I was at the DOT.



Dauids has been a long time proponent of Native Community Development Financial Institutions to help remove barriers Native communities face when it comes to accessing capital and financial services. (Photo/Courtesy of Sharice Davids)

### **What have you done since entering Congress to help economic development in Indian Country?**

One example that comes to mind is the Native 8(a) contracting program. The 8(a) program provides invaluable contracting opportunities to tribes, Alaska Native Corporations and Native Hawaiian Organizations across the country.

Last Congress, the Small Business Subcommittee on Investigations, Oversight and Regulations held a hearing on this topic. Though I don't sit on this subcommittee, they allowed me to be a guest and ask questions to dive deeper into this program. A large focus of my questioning was on how the program functions as a part of the trust responsibility the U.S. owes to tribes. Because we know that the federal government has never fully lived up to its moral and legal obligations to Indian Country.

Now, the 8(a) program has done a tremendous job of providing economic opportunities to tribal lands, but there are real concerns about the Small Business Administration's management of this program and if it is living up to its trust responsibility with tribes.

I believe that any proposed changes to the program must involve extensive, meaningful collaboration and consultation with Native communities impacted.

### **What legislation have you worked on that may help small tribally owned or Native-owned businesses obtain financing?**

We know that Native communities face unique barriers to economic growth, including heightened difficulty accessing capital and financial services. That's why I've been a longtime proponent of Native Community Development Financial Institutions, which help Native entrepreneurs succeed by increasing their access to capital, credit and other vital financial services.

As a member of Congress, I've advocated for greater support for the Native American CDFI Assistance program. Last year, I joined a bipartisan group of my colleagues in urging the House Financial Services appropriations committee to increase funding for the Native American CDFI Assistance Program to \$16 million.

I also recently chaired a Small Business Subcommittee hearing with CDFIs and (Minority Depository Institutions) to hear about how they have been

working to reach the most underserved business owners, what's working and what needs to be examined and improved. This is so critical to the growth of our Native communities, and Native CDFIs play an even more critical role now during the pandemic.

### **How will the American Jobs Plan — the infrastructure bill — help Indian Country?**

First of all, we know that the pandemic has been devastating across the country, but we also know that Indian Country has felt that. There's been a disproportionate impact on some of our (people), whether it's jobs or businesses, some of the health outcomes, that sort of thing. But when it comes to the American Jobs Plan, there's an opportunity to help close some of the gaps that we're seeing. Let's take broadband, for instance, or safe roads. These are all part of infrastructure — making sure that people are safe so they can get to work, making sure that they have access to broadband so that they have access to jobs and education.

When it comes to the American Jobs Plan, what we're going to see is more opportunities for good-paying jobs, the chance to really tackle our climate crisis, and the chance to build back our infrastructure, or build new infrastructure in a more resilient and sustainable way that's going to lead to more opportunities down the line.

When we look at the Tribal Transportation Program, what we're seeing (is) a push for bigger investments than we've ever seen before — \$2.4 billion for the Tribal Transportation program over five years. That's pretty significant. And then, making sure that we're getting a good amount of funding to the Indian Housing Block Grants. These are the kinds of things that I think are going to really lead to economic development opportunities, job growth, educational opportunities ... when it comes to Indian Country.

### **What can small businesses do to get ready to participate in infrastructure projects that may become available in their communities?**

A big focus of the American Jobs Plan is on streamlining and simplifying the process for things like federal contract bidding, so that more businesses, particularly small businesses, can participate in these transformational infrastructure projects. Breaking down barriers like that is critically important. It's why I introduced a bill to simplify the process for small communities to access existing but underutilized infrastructure grants. I also co-sponsored a bipartisan bill that expands and improves SBA's 504 loan program so that more businesses can access these important SBA products.

To get ready for any potential projects, business owners should be sure they are connected with their local SBA office and any CDFIs in their region. This will ensure they hear about these improved programs when they come to fruition. ■

# WE SUPPORT YOUR LENDER SO THEY CAN SUPPORT YOU.

HAVE  
BUSINESS  
IDEAS?  
WE HAVE  
FINANCING  
SOLUTIONS.

WE'RE EXPERIENCED.  
WE WORK WITH LOCAL LENDERS.  
WE'RE ALL ACROSS INDIAN COUNTRY.



OVER \$2 BILLION IN  
LOANS FACILITATED  
SINCE 1992.



The Indian Loan Guarantee and Insurance Program (ILGP) is a federal program that provides loan guarantee and insurance for a wide range of Native business ventures.

**Contact us today**

[www.bia.gov/as-ia/ieed/division-capital-investment](http://www.bia.gov/as-ia/ieed/division-capital-investment)

(202) 219-0740

[dci@bia.gov](mailto:dci@bia.gov)

HELPING GUARANTEE THE ECONOMIC FUTURE OF INDIAN COUNTRY

DIVISION OF CAPITAL INVESTMENT, OFFICE OF INDIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT





# HONORING THE TRADITIONS OF YOUR PEOPLE AND OURS

We are the Inupiaq people of northwest Alaska. Our native lands are north of the Arctic Circle, bordering the Chukchi Sea, and encompasses more than 38,000 square miles. Managed by local tribal councils, the predominant way of life is subsistence.

We chose the symbol of the Arctic hunter to represent our people. The hunter exemplifies courage, confidence, humility, respect, integrity, and sharing with others. We extend these qualities in our business practices and partnerships with other indigenous people. We are committed to the success of our mutual tribal economies.

Organized as a result of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) passed by Congress in 1971, NANA is a for-profit business. NANA is owned by more than 14,500 Inupiaq shareholders and their descendants who either live or have roots in northwest Alaska.

As a NANA Regional Corporation-owned company, NMS is committed to improving the lives of the Inupiaq people and preserving our traditions.

Partnering with NMS extends these commitments to your tribal community through the same dedication we share at home in the northwest Arctic.



**NMS**

# DELIVERING A BROAD RANGE OF SERVICES TO TRIBAL ORGANIZATIONS

## Dining Programs

- K-12 schools and tribal colleges
- Hospitals
- Elder care communities

## Hospitality & Resort Support Services

- Fine dining, buffet restaurants, fast-casual food courts
- Hotel management

## Facilities Services

- Building operations
- Janitorial appearance care
- Asset management and preventive maintenance
- Network of specialists (i.e., landscaping, elevators)

## Security Support Services

- Specialized training
- Security patrols
- Virtual monitoring



**CONTACT: PAT HAYES**

Join me at RES 2021  
[pat.hayes@nmsusa.com](mailto:pat.hayes@nmsusa.com)  
(907) 273-2400  
[nmsusa.com](http://nmsusa.com)

# BREAKING

## *Through Barriers*

The landscape of federal contracting for Native businesses is changing. Increased competition, bundling and cybersecurity requirements are a few of the changes that are creating new barriers for tribal enterprises and Indigenous entrepreneurs. Even so, there are still plenty of federal, state, local and tribal opportunities for Native businesses that do their homework and get help navigating the changing terrain.

**W**e are nearly an hour into our conversation about government contracting for Native businesses when George Williams bottom-lines the situation for me: “The main thing you need to know is that the federal government is a very, very unforgiving customer.”

When he says “unforgiving,” Williams is not implying the federal government is mean or unfair when it comes to purchasing. He’s merely describing it for what it is: an enormous enterprise and an exacting master that seeks out companies with a proven track record, competitively priced products and healthy cash flow.

“With federal contracting, you’ve got to put a lot of money out there before you get anything back,” he explains.

Williams leads the National Center’s American Indian Procurement Technical Assistance Center (AIP-TAC), a job he’s held since 2000. At the time, he’d been downsized out of a corporate purchasing job in the wake of an aviation-aerospace merger. His first day on the new job serving Indian Country was the Monday after Thanksgiving. “It must have been fate,” he quips.

Today, the National Center’s AIPTAC is one of 97 PTACs that operate in 300 locations across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the territories of Puerto Rico and Guam and throughout Indian Country. PTACs serve as a bridge between buyer and supplier, bringing to bear knowledge of both government contracting and supplier capabilities. The people who run PTACs are part teacher, part coach, part matchmaker and part mentor. They’re a vital resource for any Native-owned business that wants to sell products or services to federal, state, local or tribal governments.

PTACs sprung from the Procurement Technical Assistance Program — known as PTAP — that was authorized by Congress in 1985 to expand the number of businesses capable of supplying the federal government. The PTAP program is administered by the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) of the U.S. Department of Defense.

The National Center has been involved with the PTAP program since it launched in the mid 1980s.



George Williams, AIPTAC Program Manager

Now the only remaining member of the five original Native PTACs, the National Center’s AIPTAC provides professional business consulting services and technical assistance to Native American-owned businesses that want to market and sell to government agencies and prime contractors. They offer assistance to business enterprises owned and operated by American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians. Services are free, funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the DLA.

“We help Native businesses do business in government contracting,” Williams said. The primary focus is the DOD and other federal agencies, then it staircases down to state and local agencies, including tribal governments.

“That’s where the Native American PTACs set themselves apart,” Williams said. “We work strictly with Native American owned businesses, and our primary focus is helping them receive government contracts.”

### **A changing landscape**

Business has changed a lot over the last two decades since Williams joined The National Center. At the time, he focused on helping Native businesses grab a lot of the “low-hanging” opportunities that existed in federal purchasing.

“The low-hanging fruit for me when I got this job was trying to introduce Native American businesses to the large primes,” Williams said, referring to the large prime contractors that could claim a 5-percent rebate on revenues paid to Native businesses under the DOD’s Indian incentive

program. At the time, few companies took advantage of the incentive program. Congress had allocated \$5 million a year for the payment of the incentive funds, and a large chunk of the money wasn’t claimed.

“They were sending the money back,” Williams said. “They weren’t even using it.”

That’s changed over the past 15 years, due in part to the National Center’s efforts to promote the program and the AIPTAC’s efforts to educate and assist Native businesses. Today, the annual set-aside for Native businesses under the program has grown to approximately \$25 million annually.

Still, there are some challenges on the horizon that will increase competition and become potential barriers for Native businesses looking to do business with the federal government, according to Williams.

The first is the increased amount of business being procured on what the government refers to as “Best In Class” (BIC) contract vehicles, an effort called “Category Management” by the Federal Government. Williams describes this trend as “consolidation” or “bundling.”

Regardless of what you call it, what it means is that more individual contracts that have traditionally been awarded to small businesses are now being consolidated under one large contract that’s typically awarded to one or a limited number of larger capacity businesses. That makes it difficult for smaller companies selling individual products and services to compete, Williams said.

While the Biden Administration has made some moves to reduce bundling, Williams doesn’t see it going away. Instead, businesses are being encouraged to team up with other companies, a practice that Williams sees as viable for Native firms.

The other issue that worries Williams a lot is cybersecurity, which he calls “the biggest hurdle to entering government contracting.”

The DOD and other federal agencies are demanding increased cybersecurity certifications and audits for their suppliers, which will add cost and complexity that may be difficult for small companies to swallow.



**ENERGY SOLUTIONS  
FOR YOUR  
COMMUNITY,  
YOUR BUSINESS,  
AND YOUR FIRST  
RESPONSE CENTERS.**

**SCALE**  
MICROGRID SOLUTIONS

---

Ask us about a free energy consult: [info@scalemicrogridsolutions.com](mailto:info@scalemicrogridsolutions.com)

## Patience, determination and a little help

Patience and stick-to-itiveness are two good traits to have when working with the federal government.

That's a lesson that Michelle Stephens learned recently as she applied to the U.S. Small Business Administration for a Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) certification for her Native-owned construction company. Stephens is a member of the Southeastern Mvskoke Nation.

The process took several months of waiting and Stephens had to resubmit her application "numerous times" before earning the WOSB certification for her Luverne, Alabama-based Stephens Construction & Concrete Inc. Incorporated in 2003, Stephens Construction is a multi-discipline company with a focus on civil and heavy civil construction services.

With the certification process completed, Stephens has begun focusing her attention on the next step: "Now I have more time to focus on bidding more projects with the WOSB set aside," she said.

Participation in the WOSB Federal Contracting Program makes her business eligible to compete for federal contracts set aside for the program. Participants are certified as small businesses that are at least 51 percent owned, controlled, and managed by women who are U.S. citizens.

Stephens praises the National Center's American Indian Procurement Technical Assistance Center (AIPTAC) for helping her earn the certification and build her business.

"I am so thankful to have (AIPTAC Procurement Specialist) Crystal Pierce lend a helping hand not only with this certification process but also with other issues that may arise with owning your own business," Stephens said. "She is always willing to help in a professional and efficient manner."

Stephens Construction also is an Alabama Disadvantaged Business Enterprise, or DBE, certified by the state's Department of Transportation.

"The firm is well positioned as a civil construction services company to provide infrastructure and construction projects for the federal government or state in the future," Pierce said.

"Hackers target small companies," Williams said. "For companies that have that top-secret type of information, (DOD) has always had good procedures about guarding that information. So the hackers are targeting smaller companies that have a lot of controlled unclassified information. They gather it together to figure out what the government is doing."

"If you're a supplier to the DOD or some other federal agencies, you're going to have to have a higher level of cybersecurity for your company because the federal government cannot afford for its information to get out there."

### 8(a): A Romantic Notion

Williams often sees another potential pitfall for Native businesses in 8(a), the SBA business development program that aims to award at least 5 percent of all federal contracting dollars to small disadvantaged businesses each year.

To be clear, Williams doesn't dislike the program. On the contrary, he thinks it's an invaluable opportunity for Native businesses across the country. The potential pitfall, he said, is that some Native entrepreneurs and small business owners have unrealistic expectations about how it works.

"I think people have this romantic notion of the 8(a) program and that it automatically is going to get them contracts," he said. "The 8(a) program is just a license to hunt. While the competition is limited to other 8(a) businesses, you're still in essence competing against them, whether it is a sole source or competitive 8(a) set-aside contract."

It's not just the other businesses' products and pricing you're competing with, either. You're competing against their track records and their relationships, as well as the inertia that comes with an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" approach to business, Williams said.

"When I was a buyer at Lockheed Martin, when I found a good supplier, I wasn't going to go out and reinvent the wheel," he said. The volume of items that he was buying on a daily basis could be overwhelming at times, giving him little incentive to change up his practices and try out an unproven supplier.

### New opportunities

While issues like cybersecurity, bundling and competition have created new barriers for Native-owned businesses wanting to supply government agencies, the landscape has gotten better in other ways, Williams said.

Nearly \$41 billion in tribal funding under the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan have helped refill tribal coffers after a devastating 2020. Additionally, new federal laws that The National Center helped spearhead are also expected to create additional opportunities for Native businesses.

The federal money flowing to the tribes from pandemic relief funds offers an opportunity for Native businesses, particularly smaller firms located on reservations that aren't quite ready for federal contracting.

"What we have found is that the first business opportunity for a lot of Native businesses is working with their tribes because tribes have their own contract preference programs and TERO (Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance) departments," Williams said. "We get them started working with their own tribal government and there's different registrations and steps that they have to follow that are similar to those required by the federal government. It's a good first step sometimes that allows us to transition them from tribal procurement to federal procurement."

An example of this type of assistance is the PTAC's annual "Navajo Nation Business Opportunity Day" Conference, which focuses on how to do business with the Navajo Nation government while including participation of federal agencies such as the U.S. EPA, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Indian Health Services.

There is also opportunity with the new Indian Country Economic Enhancement (ICEE) Act, which was signed into law on Dec. 30. It includes an expansion of the Buy Indian Act that will build on work done by Native PTACs over the past year.

Williams credits some of that enhanced opportunity to Jacqueline Wolfe, a small business development specialist who worked at the Department of the Interior from 2020 to early 2021. Wolfe helped move the needle on Native purchasing at the Bureau of Indian Affairs during the year she spent working there.

A former PTAC counselor herself, Wolfe worked with the six Native American PTACs to expand use of the Buy Indian Act set-aside for Native businesses. Together, they updated the agency's database of Native American businesses, trained BIA contracting officers to educate them about the Buy Indian Act, and coordinated a matchmaking event that helped increase the BIA's spend among Native suppliers by nearly \$85 million from fiscal 2019 to fiscal 2020.

"In the short time she was there, we really had some amazing gains," Williams said.

While the BIA may not have done a good job of using the program in the past, now the "genie is out of the bottle," he said. "There's a new awareness of the Buy Indian Act with the BIA, and I think Indian Health Services is wanting to get on board, too. I really do believe that opportunities with those two agencies are going to increase."

As new contracting opportunities rise and others sunset, Williams offers some common-sense advice and a practical warning for Native business owners.

"What you really need to do is you've got to do your homework and research, and that includes taking advantage of the many free, federally funded resources available to your business," Williams said.

"My number one warning is don't plan your business around the success of other businesses," Williams said. "You can look at them and use them as an example, but don't assume that you know what made that business successful." ■



# UpHealth



## Healthcare Reshaped.

Bringing people and services together to deliver the best care possible to each patient across the care continuum.

Learn more at [www.uphealthinc.com](http://www.uphealthinc.com).



# A CRAFT BREWERY OWNED BY CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST TRIBE



[yurokag.com](http://yurokag.com)  
[madriverbrewing.com](http://madriverbrewing.com)



# Z7SOLUTIONS

## ANALYZE, MODERNIZE AND SECURE YOUR ENTERPRISE

Customer-Focused & Proven Turn-Key Solutions Provider

Business Intelligence | Automation & Orchestration

Zero-Trust Modern Workforce Solutions (BYOD, VDI, VMI)

Full-Scope Security Solutions | Vulnerability Assessments

Indian Economic Enterprise (IEE) | ISO Certified | MWBE | DBE



READ OUR  
CAPABILITY  
STATEMENT  
BY SCANNING  
THE QR CODE

CONTACT US TODAY

1-407-605-5845

[office@z7solutions.com](mailto:office@z7solutions.com)

[sales@z7solutions.com](mailto:sales@z7solutions.com)

[Z7SOLUTIONS.COM](http://Z7SOLUTIONS.COM)



Being 100% native owned, Pinnacle Bank understands the unique challenges facing Native Americans. Contact us today for your financing or investment management needs, and keep your money in Indian country!

Member FDIC  
Contacts: David Burrell or Jody Fank  
Phone: (641) 752-2393 • Fax: (641) 752-2737  
[www.bankpinnacle.us](http://www.bankpinnacle.us)



# RxM

Care Centers

**CARE where it's needed.**

Bringing dialysis centers direct to Indian Country.

[RXMtribalcare.com](http://RXMtribalcare.com) | #866-798-2533 | Booth #1234



# Honoring Indian Country's Young Champions

The National Center's annual 40 Under 40 awards have become more than an endorsement and resume builder for recipients. It's one of those nights when you can't help but be proud that our ancestors' prayers are being answered, says the program's founder.

**I**n 2009, The National Center began honoring the best of Indian Country's young champions and contributors in fields ranging from education to the environment and beyond with the 40 Under 40 Awards.

A decade-plus later, the awards have become "like the It Award for that age group" according to National Center board member Margot Gray, who started the program.

"The list of the awardees is just so incredible and it's so competitive," Gray said. "It's the cream of

the crop. There are tribal leaders, doctors, activists, individuals from the film and music industry. It's a unique club within Indian Country."

Presented at an annual ceremony, the awards are a powerful endorsement and resume builder for recipients, as well as a way to support continuing advancement and innovation that empowers and enriches every corner of Indian Country.

For Gray and others, the 40 Under 40 awards ceremony is a very emotional event.

"It's just one of those nights when you can't help but be proud that our ancestors' prayers are

being answered. That's how I look at it," she said. "To make it to that 40 Under 40 class is a high accomplishment."

When Gray proposed a 40 Under 40 program, she had already been part of selection committees for similar programs for young professionals in Oklahoma cities. She realized an award solely focused on contributors to Indian Country in the same age cohort was sorely needed.

"I saw a gap in Indian Country of not recognizing them and all their accomplishments," Gray said.

She said one of the sparks that ignited her idea

*“The award is a spotlight that showcases the hard work that you put into being the best advocate or leader that you can be in Indian Country.”*

— Tommy Jones

for the program was Cherrah Giles, an impressive and tireless Muscogee and Cherokee woman in her 20s.

Gray witnessed Giles, the youngest member of the Muscogee Tribal Council, go above and beyond for her community while simultaneously raising four children, one of whom has special needs. Giles also worked as director of operations for Gray’s company, Horizon Engineering Services.

Gray nominated Giles for the award, and Giles was selected among the first class of 40 Under 40 recipients.

“It just opened so many more doors and so many more connections. It was great. Our class still has a Facebook group,” said Giles, who has a master’s degree in social work from the University of Oklahoma. “It’s such a great network. I am committed to nominating people every year. My goal is to nominate a male and female from my tribe and a male and female that I know in other tribal communities.”

More than a decade after winning the award,



Left: Tommy Jones (Cherokee Nation) was part of the 2016 group of 40 Under 40 honorees. Cherrah Giles (Muscogee/Cherokee) was part of the first group of winners in 2009. (Courtesy photos)

Giles is still giving her all to Indian Country. She currently works as a behavioral health specialist at Tribal Tech Inc., an American Indian- and woman-owned company based in Virginia.

Tommy Jones, an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Naknek Native Village, and a Native shareholder of Bristol Bay Native Corporation of Alaska, won the award in 2016.

Now serving as a deployment specialist for the Office of Indian Energy, Jones has a bachelor’s degree in biology and Spanish from Oklahoma City University, a master’s degree in tropical conservation biology and environmental science from University of Hawaii at Hilo, and a doctorate in natural resources and American Indian studies from the University of Arizona.

He said the prestige associated with the award has been a boon to his career and helped in making connections.

“Many people see this award as an indicator that this person means business,” said Jones, who works at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colo. “The award is a spotlight that showcases the hard work that you put into being the best advocate or leader that you can be in Indian Country.”

Jones said the opportunities for networking and getting to know his own 40 Under 40 class as well as winners from other years stands as one of the biggest benefits of receiving the honor, and that the recognition propels them all forward as a united force.

“There are so many different fields that people are focusing on,” Jones said. “You just get a better pulse on the positive things that are going on in Indian Country and that all comes together to inspire you to keep pushing.”

Both Jones and Giles also take advantage of other National Center programs and events, including the annual Reservation Economic Summit.

“I have gone to RES for the past several years and it’s a great venue for bringing people together,” Jones said.

One of the most rewarding results of the program, according to Gray, is how the recipients come back to contribute their expertise and experience directly to The National Center.

“Three 40 Under 40 recipients sit on our executive board right now,” Gray said. “I can just sit back and smile because it worked out. That’s how it’s supposed to work. That’s what we want. We want the best of the best.” ■

## Indian Country Media, LLC

Publisher of:



## TRIBAL BUSINESS NEWS

## Marketing Services:

- Custom Publications
- Digital Marketing
- Website Development
- Graphic Design

For more information, contact  
[info@indiancountrymedia.com](mailto:info@indiancountrymedia.com)  
 (616) 229-0649

# TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

---

- HIV & STD TESTING & TREATMENT
- HEPATITIS C TESTING & TREATMENT
- PrEP SERVICES
- SAME DAY PrEP
- PATIENT CARE COORDINATION
- TRANSPORTATION SERVICES
- MEDICAL PEER NAVIGATORS
- CASE MANAGEMENT
- COMPREHENSIVE PRIMARY CARE
- TRANSGENDER CARE
- LIVER FIBROSCAN
- DENTAL CARE
- BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
- ADDICTION COUNSELING
- HIV PREVENTION & EDUCATION
- COMMUNITY OUTREACH
- RAPID START PARTNER PROVIDER
- ON-SITE PHARMACY
- SEXUAL HEALTH SUPPORT
- MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT
- SUPPORT GROUPS
- AUTHORIZED RYAN WHITE PROVIDER
- RYAN WHITE FOOD PANTRY
- NUTRITIONAL SERVICES
- FREE PRESCRIPTION DELIVERY
- FREE HIV TESTING
- HIV HOUSING SERVICES
- SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT
- INFECTIOUS DISEASE
- INTERNAL MEDICINE
- WOUND CARE
- DIABETES SCREENING
- BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENING
- WELLNESS STRATEGY
- ACUTE & CHRONIC DISEASE MANAGEMENT
- LABS
- HRT SERVICES
- WALK-INS WELCOME
- MAJOR INSURANCE ACCEPTED



FOR MORE INFORMATION  
(844) 922-2777  
CANCOMMUNITYHEALTH.ORG    

# Operating responsibly

At Raytheon Technologies, our continued mission is to expand the talent and diversity of our suppliers and our team members.

Learn more about our commitment to increasing opportunities in our community and beyond at [RTX.com](https://www.rtx.com).



COLLINS AEROSPACE  
PRATT & WHITNEY  
RAYTHEON INTELLIGENCE & SPACE  
RAYTHEON MISSILES & DEFENSE

# 2020 Native Youth Business Plan winner Acorn Bites

## Adapts to pandemic, adds e-commerce option

Last year, The National Center teamed with the First Nations Development Institute to create the Native Youth Business Plan Competition, a project designed to simulate a real-world process that entrepreneurs engage in to seek startup funds for business ideas.

The competition was separated into college and high school age divisions. Five semi-finalist teams attended RES to refine their business plans with Native American leaders and then participated in an on-stage competition.

The first-place winner of the college division was the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center's Tribal Youth Ambassador program for a product named Acorn Bites.

Members of the winning team shared the progress with the product in the months since winning the competition.

### How has The National Center helped your business?

The National Center last year provided our California Indian Museum and Cultural Center's Tribal Youth Ambassador leaders with invaluable training in the field of business. Not only were our youth able to learn directly from Native business leaders from across the U.S., but they were also able to share their story and inspire other youth to pursue their business dreams.

Our team left the conference last year with key knowledge from the business development sessions and were eager to apply it to their Acorn Bites business venture.

To their immense excitement, they were also winners in the Native youth business competition as well. They were grateful to have left with an award that aided them in continuing to develop their business venture.

### Tell us a little about your organization and Acorn Bites.

The California Indian Museum and

Cultural Center (CIMCC), based in Santa Rosa, Calif., is a Native-owned and operated nonprofit that was established in 1996. The goals of the CIMCC are to educate the public about California Indian history and cultures, to showcase California Indian cultures, to enhance and facilitate these cultures and traditions through educational and cultural activities, to preserve and protect California Indian cultural and intellectual properties, and to develop relationships with other indigenous groups.

The Tribal Youth Ambassador Program was established in 2010. It centers as a service-learning program that revolves around cultural revitalization projects that positively impact our tribal community. Youth ages 12-25, from local Pomo and Miwok tribes, engage in learning new skills and tools that ultimately guide them to becoming young leaders in our community.

In 2016, our youth began a journey with us to assess food sovereignty and food security among the 24 plus tribes in our region of the state. Out of that assessment, we learned that tribal community members would like to be more connected to their traditional foods.

Inspired by community member responses, the team created a product that strives to make traditional food more accessible, that product being an acorn bite. This idea came into fruition when youth sat together and thought: Why not make a protein bar type of product with acorns?

Our youth engaged Chef Crystal Wahpepah (Kickapoo), who is based in Oakland, Calif., to develop the product and quickly moved on to making it a product available in their community at local farmers markets.

### How has the business been affected by COVID-19?

CIMCC has been closed to the public as of last March 2020. We are still working on our reopening plan as the safety of community members is our



Members of the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center's Tribal Youth Program celebrate their first-place award in the Native Youth Business Plan Competition at RES 2020. (Courtesy photos)

number one priority. Despite our location being closed to the public, as of last March we quickly shifted to offering our programming virtually for our community.

Our youth meetings shifted to the world of Zoom and outdoor activities with strict COVID prevention protocols that allowed the youth to keep learning about their traditional foods and gathering practices.

### How has your business model changed since the pandemic started?

Our Acorn Bites business venture was paused at local farmers markets. So, our business model changed as we no longer relied on in-person sales as being the main source of sales. Our Tribal Youth Ambassadors quickly

moved on to learn how to make acorn bites sales online a possibility and make curbside pick-up an option. As COVID-19 restrictions lift in our region, we will continue to reassess the safety and options available to make in person sales an option once more.

### What advice would you give to other aspiring Native entrepreneurs?

We would encourage aspiring Native entrepreneurs to follow their dreams and begin the journey of setting up their business venture. There are amazing Native business models out there to receive inspiration and guidance from. We encourage everyone looking to set up a business to make connections with others and take the first steps needed to build their business and prepare to thrive. ■

# On Their Terms



**W**hen KeyBank launched its Native American Financial Services business line in 2005, the Cleveland-based bank did so with the mission of providing capital, financial services and expertise to Indian Country based on each tribe's own terms.

While KeyBank had previously worked with tribal leaders for some 70 years, the organization, which maintains branches across 15 states, saw an opportunity to form a purpose-built team that would serve tribes and their enterprises. KeyBank structured its Bellevue, Washington-based Native American Financial Services team with individuals who understood what it takes to do business in Indian Country and were familiar with the specific financial challenges and aspirations of each tribe.

Now, more than 15 years later, KeyBank continues to execute on the original mission of the Native American Financial Services group. As tribal leaders diversify their economic holdings, KeyBank has also expanded to assist tribes in navigating new arenas ranging from entering additional business sectors to home ownership and financial education. In particular, the Native American Financial Services Group focuses on helping tribes expand beyond the gaming industry.

"Gaming has taken a leap forward on what economic independence can look like," said Mike Lettig, national executive of Native American Financial Services. "But not every tribe has access to the resources — proximity to a major population as an example — so they can develop that opportunity. They have to look for other ways,

like renewable energy and manufacturing. Those are the challenges that are a little bit deeper, but the ones that are most rewarding when solutions come together."

KeyBank hopes to continue strengthening its connections with Indian Country through the upcoming Reservation Economic Summit (RES), where the bank will have an opportunity to connect with tribal leaders, economic developers, small business owners and entrepreneurs alike.

"The National Center has the well-deserved reputation of effectively meeting the economic independence aspirations of tribes — starting from the individual entrepreneur to connecting tribes for broader capital needs and solutions — and they've done a very fine job of doing this year in and year out," Lettig said. "Their conferences are how they are recognized, but they are doing the work, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, meeting with tribes, connecting tribes with capital resources and financial solutions providers."

Doing business in Indian Country presents a unique opportunity for the private sector, Lettig said. Tribal leaders and economic developers tend to focus on business opportunities that will bring long-term growth and community development to their nations.

"One of the things that has been an ingredient of doing business in the space is how safe it is to do business there from a risk perspective," Lettig said. "Tribes are effectively looking at developing long-term relationships with the private sector and they do so with a high degree of integrity. It's a really great space to do business." ■



Mike Lettig is the national executive of Key Bank's Native American Financial Services group (Courtesy photo).

*Thank you to our Funders*



**Business News and Strategies  
from The National Center**

# Rooted in Trust

A national fund hopes to grow Native American agriculture

**L**everaging funds from a historic class-action discrimination settlement against the federal government, the Native American Agriculture Fund aims to develop and grow one of the food and agriculture industry's most underserved and underappreciated resources for sustainable, rural economic development in Indian Country.

That's according to Toni Stanger-McLaughlin, the new CEO for the \$263 million fund serving Indian Country.

NAAF supports and promotes Native American farmers and ranchers in their continued engagement in agriculture. In three years, the organization has served thousands of Native Americans through annual grant funding cycles.

Funded projects include full-scale agricultural production, practices that address food security and food sovereignty and the adoption of hydroponics and aquaponics.

"Our projects are very, very diverse," Stanger-McLaughlin said. "Given the rural nature of most reservations in the country, agriculture is one of the only business enterprises that they can engage in."

According to Stanger-McLaughlin, more tribes are returning to their historic connection to agriculture to build up food supplies and trade within their greater communities.

For example, the Modoc Nation in Oklahoma received \$127,403 in 2019 for native seed cultivation using aquaponics, which involves growing plants using fish waste. Projects vary in size and scope, as well as the reasons behind them.



The Native American Agriculture Fund supports and promotes Native farmers and ranchers throughout Indian Country. (Photo: Courtesy of NAAF)

"Some of them are small-scale, and some of them are about building up entire agricultural infrastructure for food security for various tribal regions," Stanger-McLaughlin said. "Others are based on the protection or the continuation of subsistence lifestyles, such as fishing or harvesting."

NAAF averages about 100 grant applicants each year, with funding going toward business assistance, agricultural education, technical support and advocacy services. Interested applicants must be an eligible entity outlined in NAAF's trust agreement, which sets specific requirements for operations and grants.

"We have tribes who are creating their processing plants or doing value-added agriculture," Stanger-McLaughlin said. "As a private funder, the funding we give out to tribes can be used more creatively than federal funding."

According to Stanger-McLaughlin, support for agriculture has even grown at the Reservation Economic Summit (RES), which will be held July

19-21 in Las Vegas, Nevada. This year's conference includes 10 ag-related breakout sessions.

"It's an opportunity for economic development," Stanger-McLaughlin said. "A lot of people don't realize how much agriculture is present at RES, and it's all across the sector of agriculture from individual producers to those who are coming in with new inventions to assist agricultural production."

Funding for NAAF is the result of the federal government's \$680 million settlement of a class-action discrimination lawsuit against the USDA. After paying out more than half of the funding to the affected Native farmers and ranchers, the courts used the remaining funds to establish a NAAF as a charitable trust, which will wrap up in 20 years.

"We're not going to be here forever," said Stanger-McLaughlin, "but we hope that our grantees' successes become our legacy."

She added NAAF will be making its 2021 grantee announcement this fall. ■

*for their support of The National Center*





Councilman Francisco Valencia (far right) participates in the 2019 Tribal Border Summit Panel. According to Valencia, Pascua Yaqui is relatively new to the economic development arena, which makes attending the Reservation Economic Summit even more important. (Photo/Courtesy of Francisco Valencia)

# Pascua Yaqui Tribe

**A**s a relative newcomer to non-gaming economic development, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe has high hopes for building tribal enterprises and spurring Indigenous entrepreneurial activity among its members.

The Arizona-based tribe operates two well-known casinos with golf course and resort amenities, and a third casino is in their sights after a 2021 gaming compact with the state. Over the last two years, the tribe has also expanded its economic development activities with the launch of a contracting firm and a property management firm through its Pascua Yaqui Development Corp.

As it looks to the future, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe wants to talk with and learn from other tribes and their economic development initiatives. Those discussions about economic development and gaming, as well as new programs, are a few reasons why the Pascua Yaqui Tribe attends the Reservation Economic Summit (RES) every year.

Another reason is to network, said Francisco Valencia, councilman for the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, a federally recognized tribe since 1978. According to Valencia, the tribe is relatively new to the economic development arena, which makes attending RES even more important.

“We hope to be able to create businesses for our tribe that can service any country in the future, both from the tribal standpoint and our members’ entrepreneurial standpoint,” Valencia said. “The importance of networking with other tribes and businesses throughout the country will help get our name out there.”

Although the tribe is well known for its Casino of the Sun and Casino del Sol gaming business, it wants to get more exposure for its other ventures, including Pascua Yaqui Development Corp., which oversees their construction company, Sonoran

Pueblo Contracting LLC, and their real estate management firm, PYDC Property Management.

At RES 2021, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe also plans to showcase its Enhanced Tribal Card (ETC) program to provide members with a secured form of identification and assist other tribes in the development of their own ETC programs.

“The Pascua Yaqui Tribe were the first in the nation to develop and implement the ETC program and began offering the program to its membership in 2010,” Valencia said. “The ETC card equates to a U.S. passport card, increasing the nation and tribe’s security while facilitating domestic air travel and international border crossings by land and seaports of entry.”

Valencia said the program meets the federal mandate of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, a Congressional requirement for U.S. citizens and other travelers to present a passport or other accepted documents when re-entering the United States.

All enrolled tribal members can receive a card. “We felt we can take this service and help other tribes,” Valencia said. “We developed a consulting service known as Sacred Path to assist tribes with their Enhanced Tribal Card programs. This is an opportunity to help other tribes and do some business at the same time.

“I see it as a service to Indian Country.”



## Border Problem Persists

Building on the ETC program, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe in 2018 helped form the Tribal Border Alliance to help transnational tribes protect their sovereignty. The group currently counts 10 tribes as members.

Valencia said dozens of tribes are transnational because borders now cross their ancestral lands.

Some of their border challenges include access to lands, water, hunting grounds and sites of symbolic importance. The transit of cultural items and traditional cultural regalia, such as ceremonial gourds and rattles, is also a concern for tribal nations.

“After 9/11, border crossings can at times be places of arbitrary stops, arrest, detention, racial profiling and an absence of due process or respect for basic human rights,” Valencia said. “For Yaquis separated by and living across the southern international border, many challenges exist. Our ability to maintain our culture and traditional practices is at times compromised.”

Valencia said it’s harder now to obtain permits or visas to attend religious ceremonies or visit relatives in ancestral homelands.

The survival of many tribes depends on migration, seasonal hunting and trade, he said. All items are at risk without proper border materials and guidance.

“We seek to enhance coordination, collaboration, communication and cooperative agreements,” Valencia said. “Having the proper documents is key. That’s why we created the Tribal Border Alliance, where we try to spread the word and recruit as many tribes as possible to help us in our fight and our efforts with border security.”

Continued messaging of the Travel Border Alliance will help those efforts, Valencia added.

“We’re trying to establish our category or process of passage mobility with the federal government,” he said. “We felt highlighting the Tribal Board Alliance at RES by networking with tribal leaders, CEOs, directors, managers who have their boots on the ground and doing the work in Indian Country is key.” ■

**FAR FROM THE ORDINARY  
CLOSE TO THE ADVENTURE**



**12 TRIBES**  
COLVILLE CASINOS

**12 TRIBES RESORT CASINO**  
28948 HIGHWAY 87  
OMMAK, WA 98841  
509.432.6648

**12 TRIBES MILL BAY CASINO**  
4155 WAPATO LAKE ROAD  
MANSON, WA 98831  
509.687.6911

**12 TRIBES COULLEE DAM CASINO**  
315 BIRCH STREET  
COULLEE DAM, WA 99116  
509.831.0164

COLVILLECASINOS.COM  

**CHANGING THE WAY  
ALL ECONOMIC  
DECISIONS ARE MADE!**



 **AI Market Analytics/Technology  
Development Solutions**  
aLocalSolutions.com

**TANKA<sup>®</sup>**  
**BAR**  
**BUFFALO MEAT SNACKS**  
TANKABAR.COM

From the forefront of  
innovation to  
the frontlines of  
the mission.



Lockheed Martin.  
Your Mission is Ours.<sup>®</sup>



© 2021 Lockheed Martin Corporation



Owned by the Yurok Tribe, Mad River Brewing is one of a growing number of Native businesses that have entered the craft beverage space. Right: Mad River Brewing CEO Linda Cooley. (Photos: Courtesy of Mad River Brewing).

## Crafting New Opportunities

Entrepreneurs across Indian Country have begun to embrace the craft beverage space, bringing their creativity, culture and ingenuity to an ever-growing industry.

These entrepreneurs view craft beverages like beer, wine and spirits as vehicles for positive change and economic advancement. Some see the industry as a way to share their tribe's values and culture, while others believe craft beverages are a perfect opportunity to help drive business in established tribal industries.

Below are some of the craft beverage companies planning to share their expertise and advice at this year's Reservation Economic Summit (RES):

### Mad River Brewing

Blue Lake, California  
[madriverbrewing.com](http://madriverbrewing.com)

Located in Humboldt County, Mad River Brewing is fully owned by the Yurok Tribe, which purchased the 30-year-old brewery in 2019. Under tribal ownership, the brewery recently completed a rebranding campaign to closely align the company and its beers with the culture and values of the Yurok Tribe.

Mad River Brewing was one of the first ventures by the Yurok Tribe outside of its traditional focus on natural resources, language and culture, said CEO Linda Cooley. Because of that, the Yurok Tribe leaned heavily on The National Center for support and resources, according to Cooley.

"The National Center has been a great hub for us for resources and support," Cooley said. "I attended RES last year ... and it was such a connection and support group for economic development. They provided us with resources and training. It was

the only specific convention where we could meet like-minded people focused on economic growth. It is really the only spot where all of the economically focused tribes and businesses who want our business can get together."

This year, Cooley plans to use RES as an opportunity to network with other tribes to build an inter-tribal system of commerce where she can purchase agricultural products and cultivate a larger tourism network.

### Twisted Cedar Wines

Cedar City, Utah  
[twistedcedarwines.com](http://twistedcedarwines.com)

Twisted Cedar Wines was built on the culture and beliefs of the Cedar Band of Paiute Indians. The Cedar City, Utah-based winery follows the Cedar Band commitment to the natural environment by adhering to the Lodi Rules for Sustainable Wine Growing. The winery also reflects the Cedar Band of Paiute Indian's matriarchal culture with Karen Birmingham leading the company's winemaking efforts.

Named for the cedar trees that grow across southwest Utah, Twisted Cedar Wines is eager to attend RES, learn from other tribally owned organizations and network with other tribes interested in economic development, according to Bill Tudor, executive vice president of CBC Bev Co., the parent company of Twisted Cedar Wines.

"We hope to be able to learn from other tribal entities and I hope to spread some information on what we've done to be successful and what our failures have been so nobody steps in the same pile," Tudor said.

Tudor and his team also hope to get plenty of their award-winning wines into glasses during the summit.

### Heritage Distillery

Gig Harbor, Washington  
[heritagedistilling.com](http://heritagedistilling.com)

While Gig Harbor-based Heritage Distilling is not a tribal-owned business, the largest independently owned distillery in Washington developed a licensing model aimed at helping tribal businesses break into the craft beverage industry.

The model — coined the Tribal Business Network — allows Heritage Distilling to license its brand, recipe, programs and products to tribal businesses so they can set up their own distilleries. Heritage Distilling went so far as to lobby Congress in 2018 to remove an 1834 law prohibiting distilling on Native land.

This year will mark the second year for Heritage Distilling at RES. The distillery, which operates six locations across Washington and Oregon, hopes to rekindle some of the relationships it made last year and meet other Indigenous entrepreneurs, said Justin Stiefel, CEO and co-founder of Heritage Distilling.

"RES is the largest gathering of its kind with the tribes and their economic development arms attending," Stiefel said. "One thing that was striking to me last year at the conference was that the tribal leaders are looking for new and unique ways to diversify."

Stiefel notes the Tribal Business Network allows tribes to generate jobs, revenue and collect taxes on spirits. The model can also provide a value-add to tribes' existing gaming businesses. ■



# PROTECTING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF *YOUR* SOVEREIGN NATION

*We Manage Risks, So You Can Manage Everything Else*



## PROTECT YOUR PRF (PASTURE, RANGELAND, FORAGE)



Our trusted risk advisors are trained to help you understand and analyze complicated insurance data so you can make the most informed decision for your tribe. Our goal is to ensure you never purchase unnecessary coverage and pay more than you need. Protect your land and livelihood against potential losses during times of drought.



Expertise in Pasture, Rangeland & Forage

A division of Brown & Brown of Florida, Inc.

CONTACT YOUR CKP TRUSTED RISK ADVISOR TODAY  
[ckpinsurance.com](http://ckpinsurance.com) • 877-CKP-INS1 (877-257-4671)

# Caesars Entertainment Expands DEI Efforts, Seeks More Tribal Business

**A**fter a year of uncertainty with the pandemic, the Paris Las Vegas Hotel & Casino will host RES 2021, the premier economic development conference focused on Native and Indigenous communities. Caesars Entertainment Inc., which owns the venue, has an ongoing partnership with The National Center for the past decade and is looking to build its rapport with tribal businesses.

Hosting the largest Native business trade show and a diverse Indian artisan market is no small feat, but Paris Las Vegas is up to the challenge. In previous years, attendance ranged between 3,000 to 4,000 visitors from Indian Country and those wanting to do business with Native communities. The hotel offers 2,916 guestrooms and suites with 140,000 square feet of meeting space for exhibitors from across the U.S. and Canada.

As a Gold Sponsor of RES 2021, Caesars will be an integral presence throughout the conference with multiple booths at the trade show and host to a RES Talk. Not only is this an ideal space for participants to learn more about the organization, it is a potential opportunity to meet prospective suppliers and make other corporate connections.

Since 2018, Caesars has grown its external purchasing and partnership strategy with Native populations. Caesars' leadership team wants to gain deeper knowledge of Indigenous communities, how to support environmental stewardship and refresh its diversity, equity and inclusion strategy partnerships.

"There's a lot to learn and scale with these properties. We like to share who we are, be a better listener, and truly support each other by incorporating culture and language," said Gwen Migita, vice president for social impact, sustainability, diversity, equity and inclusion at Caesars.

Migita has a long career of driving sustainable practices, directing charitable giving and leading community engagement efforts. At Caesars, she directs the CodeGreen Steering Committee, an enterprise-wide and award-winning sustainability strategy program, and serves as the corporate leader of 30 property CodeGreen Teams. Through CodeGreen Challenges, team members engage in a range of environmental activities to minimize carbon footprints and raise awareness of green practices to decrease overall environmental impact.

"Our sustainability works with tribal leaders and (builds) longer strategies," Migita said.

Caesars also is building on other relationships with tribes. In December 2020, Caesars announced it would sell the Caesars Southern Indiana casino



Since 2018, Caesars Entertainment has grown its external purchasing and partnership strategy with Native populations. (Photo courtesy Paris Las Vegas/Caesars Entertainment)

to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians for \$250 million. The tribe and Caesars had an existing relationship, and part of the transaction includes maintaining the use of the Caesars brand and rewards loyalty program.

"The purchase of Caesars Southern Indiana operating company marks the beginning of an exciting new future for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. We are pleased to build upon our long-standing partnership with Caesars as we look to advance our interests in commercial gaming in the coming years," Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Principal Chief Richard Sneed said in a statement at the time of the transaction announcement.

According to its 2019/2020 corporate social responsibility report, Caesars' commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion focuses on five key strategic elements: team members, suppliers/contractors, communities, guests and advocacy. Caesars has a multi-faceted approach to diversify partnerships and contractors.

For example, "Arrive and Thrive" is an inclusive contracting initiative to engage small local contractors under a mentorship program. Over a two-year span, the program facilitated approximately \$30 million in spending with more than 36 diverse businesses (DBs) across seven diversity categories. Overall, there were 49 total partnerships, between 37 DBs and 18 different prime subcontractors.

"For all Caesars properties, we present our needs to do the best matches," said Bridget Carter, manag-

er of supply diversity, regarding needs assessments.

Carter oversees and advocates for internal and external supplier diversity throughout Caesars Entertainment and its properties. Over her 20 years of experience, she has implemented diversity initiatives and expanded supplier outreach through recruiting and educating vendor events.

For suppliers and contractors, Caesars' commitment to DEI efforts include the recently established Economic Equity Tour. This provides tours and webinars for current and potential team members, suppliers and community organizations to cover financial empowerment and help diverse networks grow.

Additionally, Caesars supports tribal partnerships by giving back to communities in fun and accessible ways.

During last year's Giving Tuesday, members of the Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians in conjunction with Harrah's Resort Southern California and USO gave away 500 lunch boxes and \$25,000 gift cards to troops, frontline workers and first responders. Firefighters and health care workers from Rincon Cal Fire, Rincon Fire Department and Palomar Medical Centers in Escondido and Poway also received Golden Tickets, which offered a free night's stay at the resort with a guest. Harrah's Resort SoCal serves as a major revenue source for the Rincon Band while providing jobs and supporting the local community.

"As a managerial partner, we're looking to get more engaged and support the properties," Carter said. "It's exciting to work more in the communities." ■



Square is proud to support The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development

**ACTIV**BONDING®  
a wholly-owned subsidiary of **Bold Concepts**

Does your **tribally-owned construction firm** need a larger bonding program to maximize **Federal** opportunities?

Learn how to develop and increase your Federal bonding program faster.

**Take our assessment by visiting**

[www.activbonding.com/business-assessment-survey](http://www.activbonding.com/business-assessment-survey)

**SHOULDA HAD A PLAN**

**PLAN YOUR 2021 MARKETING STRATEGY WITH US!**

See you at the RES (Booth 1010)

**MABU**

MARKETING ADVERTISING BUSINESS UNLIMITED INC.  
1003 Gateway Avenue, Bismarck  
Phone: 701-250-0728 | [agency.mabu.com](http://agency.mabu.com)



Dawn Houle,  
Sun Singer  
Consulting  
CEO.  
(Courtesy  
Photos)

# Indigenuity:

How Dawn Houle's unconventional career path prepared her to help tribal enterprises and Indigenous entrepreneurs

Starting an entrepreneurial endeavor can be intimidating as it takes patience, planning, collaboration and flexibility.

For Sun Singer Consulting CEO Dawn Houle, understanding this and working it in her favor has been the key to crafting the career she wanted.

The Chippewa Cree mother originally hails from Montana, but throughout her 20-year career, Houle has worked and lived across Indian Country. Eventually, she settled in the Washington, D.C. metro area, where she launched the Sun Singer Consulting firm, which was inspired by her son's Cree name, Chief SunSinger.

Houle's firm works with tribal communities and small Native business startups to provide forward-thinking consultations and offer solutions for economic longevity. For the past six years, she's leveraged her strategic planning, diversity training and tribal liaison skills to help clients and grow her firm.

As a former policy advisor to the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs during the Obama administration, Houle was determined to learn the federal government's internal processes so she could help tribes navigate them more efficiently. She went on to become the chief of staff for the National Indian Gaming Commission and built intentional partnerships with federal and state agencies. Later, she developed a government procurement program for the Seminole Tribe of Florida Inc., a Section 17 federally chartered corporation.

Regardless of her position, Houle's intent is always to help people and find solutions to problems.

"I try to be as vertical as I possibly can to support Native businesses. We have to be our own advocates," Houle said.

There is an art to networking and Houle's ability to make effective assessments of partnerships helped cultivate long-term relationships with clients. She's provided paths to help others build up their businesses through collaborations and relationship bonding.

This past March, Houle contributed to the entrepreneur anthology book entitled "Business Success Secrets: Entrepreneurial Thinking That Works."

The *USA Today* and *Wall Street Journal* best-seller offers expert advice on overcoming challenging experiences and making business dreams a reality.

In her chapter "Indigenuity: Indigenous Ingenuity," Houle goes in-depth about her unconventional career path that led her to starting her own consulting company. She mentions overcoming her fear of failure and tuning out self-induced roadblocks by making lists and setting obtainable benchmarks to turn a crisis into an opportunity.

"Regardless of entrepreneurial experience, it's easy to read. The information is so succinct, and it can empower. Let's not repeat mistakes, think faster and move forward," Houle said.

Houle's chapter in the book also highlights the power of economic development and describes best practices for tribes and their members.

Her approach is simple: Treat people with respect and align business models that meet the client's values and goals. Houle debunks the notion of having to sacrifice cultural values and natural resources for the sake of successful strategic planning. For example, Houle has a forestry degree and worked with Northwest Coast tribes to protect tribal sovereignty, maintain land resources and rec-

ognize sustainable options, such as carbon offsets, to provide tribal revenue.

Part of her practice is encouraging others to step out of their comfort zones and expand their interests. That makes a convention like the Reservation Economic Summit (RES) an ideal opportunity. She recommends that clients and other attendees participate in as many business development workshops as possible and keep track of helpful resources.

"RES is what you make of it. Learn about current business trends and expand your interests," Houle said. "Sometimes you don't know what you don't know. The conference gives great options and the diversification of types of business at RES has yet to be replicated."

While the conference may be overwhelming to some, Houle is excited to return this year and get back to hosting private receptions to support her clients' networking needs and providing a space for potential sales.

"I love the fellowship and business networking at RES. If COVID taught us anything, it's that nothing can replace face-to-face experience," Houle said of the friendships she made in the past at the convention and getting her mother to become a volunteer.

Over the years, Houle watched as The National Center expanded from a focus on tribal gaming to other business endeavors. She hopes more tribes will shift focus from gaming and tourism investments to sponsoring more entrepreneurial programs and establish "visionary investments" that support citizens and their businesses.

"You don't know where things can lead in your life," Houle said. "Business moves fast. If you're not part of the current, you'll be swept away." ■

# The leader in Microsoft technology for Tribes

Committed to building  
strong relationships and  
driving innovation

We specialize in

- **Cloud Managed Services & Security**
- **Dynamics 365**
- **Power Platform**
- **Azure Cloud Migration**
- **Tribal Enrollment & Social Services Software**

[arcticit.com](http://arcticit.com)



Ready to elevate and simplify?

Contact us at 844.461.9500 or [connect@arcticit.com](mailto:connect@arcticit.com).

Gold  
Microsoft Partner



# No Pie-in-the-Sky:

## Diné Development Corp. is on the Rise

Some executives talk about taking a 30,000-foot view when they look at business opportunities, but Austin Tsosie's vision is stratospheric – literally.

The Navajo Nation-owned company he leads, Diné Development Corp., launched its Red Canyon subsidiary in May to perform planning for the U.S. Space Force and other agencies involved in space activities. Another subsidiary landed a contract in March to help operations of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, a Department of Defense agency that processes information from U.S. satellites that gird the globe.



Tsosie

That's not to say that Tsosie's vision is pie-in-the-sky. The bulk of the work performed by the some 500 employees of Diné Development can be anything from surveying unmarked burial grounds in the Southwest, planting trees in a reforestation project in South Carolina and performing information technology work in Poland and Bahrain.

"Our employees work from our corporate offices and locations scattered all over the world — where they sit behind military fences," said Tsosie, who was named CEO in 2016 after heading up the DDC IT Services subsidiary. Main corporate offices are located in Scottsdale, Ariz., Dayton, Ohio and Odenton, Md.

While the eight subsidiaries of Diné Development conduct an impressive variety of work, nearly all of it is performed under federal contract outside of the Navajo Nation.

"Our charge is to provide services to the federal government and bring the money back home," Tsosie said. "We're part of the Navajo Nation strategy to diversify our revenue streams, so our work right now is primarily off reservation. That's different from some (tribally owned) companies that stick to enterprises on reservation such as farming and agriculture."

The strategy has paid off for both Diné Development and the Navajo Nation. Established in 2004, the conglomerate posted revenues of about \$80 million last year, up from the approximately \$50 million that it racked up in 2017 when it employed about 150 people. Diné Development issued two dividends and a one-time payment for COVID-19 relief totaling \$1.2 million last year to the Navajo Nation.

The company has had its share of growing pains over the past few years, but that is a good problem to have, Tsosie said.



Dine Development Corp. launched its Red Canyon subsidiary in May to perform planning for the U.S. Space Force and other agencies involved in space exploration activities. (Courtesy photo)

"We've gone through a maturation process," he said. "Back in the early days when the organization was getting on its feet, there were a couple of subsidiaries that were carrying the whole operation. They operated more as independent companies.

"But over the past couple of years, we built our back office support services with processes, people and technology. Now we've really adopted a teamwork mentality to realize our potential as a tribal organization."

In addition to Red Canyon, other subsidiaries include NOVA-Diné for technology assessment and other services; DDC IT Services for testing and maintaining software and hardware; DDC 4C for environmental services and natural resources management; BRIC for cultural resources management and other services; Diné Source for information technology services to federal customers; and North Stone for I.T. services to federal agencies. This spring, it established 7th Emergence, another I.T. services company that is focused on the intelligence sector of the federal government.

The company plans to create a ninth subsidiary this year for a yet-to-be determined enterprise.

One of the most apparent signs of the new emphasis is the rebranding effort that Diné Development launched this spring. The company retained a marketing consultant last fall to develop the brand and spent winter refining concepts.

"We're becoming a branded company rather than a house of brands," Tsosie said.

Part of that rebranding includes a new logo that consists of a cascade of triangles on its left that gradually forms the letters "DDC," which conjures up the image of a cloth being woven.

Weavings that use strong geometric patterns are a core element of Navajo textiles.

He noted that the logo and brand guidelines offer a new identity, but more fundamental changes have occurred behind the scenes.

"We've done our growth in layers," Tsosie said. "At first, growth was really focused on survival and compliance — really making sure all of the compliance, technical details and good business operating practices were there.

"Now, we feel like we're in a growth pattern of building to scale. We had to patch all the holes in our ship and steer in the right direction, and now we're just focused on more speed and growth."

In addition to the emerging space sector, Tsosie anticipates a great deal of opportunity in the management and remediation of abandoned uranium mines that dot the landscape of the Southwestern states and Navajo Nation.

"The Navajo Nation has hundreds of abandoned uranium mines, and so we wanted to get into servicing the mines on our land," he said. "We're doing a little piece of that work now, primarily some analysis on the mines. Many have been untouched for years, and very few have been remediated. It's a long-term effort, one that may take 30, 40 or 50 years.

"We intend to make the land safe and to hire Navajo employees, and make a profit along the way. But profit is the least of the reasons." ■



DINÉ DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Many elements must work together to achieve success for our clients. Whether you're looking to ink a game-changing M&A deal, requiring guidance on a sensitive employment issue, needing a trusted advocate to resolve a business dispute, or seeking a partner who knows the ins and outs of government contracting, PilieroMazza attorneys deliver smart solutions that seamlessly integrate every element.

## Business & Transactions / Mergers & Acquisitions

The Business & Transactions Group advise and counsel a broad base of clients, from small entrepreneurs to large corporations. As a testament to the depth and strength of our legal and business acumen, our attorneys often act as an extension of our larger client's legal departments or as virtual in-house general counsel to smaller clients. We handle wide-ranging projects, from short-term discrete matters, such as drafting and negotiating one-off agreements (shareholders agreements and non-disclosure agreements), to long-term, more complex commercial transactions, such as mergers and acquisitions, corporate reorganizations, capital markets transactions, and commercial lending.

## Litigation & Dispute Resolution

Our attorneys are not reluctant to litigate when necessary. However, due to the expense and uncertainty inherent to litigation, we usually find that our clients' interests are best served by exploring other options for dispute resolution prior to filing suit. To that end, our attorneys are well-versed in all manner of alternative dispute resolution, including arbitration and mediation.

When litigation is necessary, PilieroMazza pursues its clients' interests skillfully, cost-effectively, and with tenacious resolve. Our litigation practice is diverse, and includes experience in government contracts, employment disputes, commercial disputes, and general civil litigation.

## Labor & Employment

Workplace laws and regulations are becoming increasingly complex. Given the myriad of issues confronting in-house counsel and human resource departments, it is essential that employers have a solid understanding of labor and employment law, and its impact on the workplace.

We offer companies tailored advice that minimizes the risk of expensive mistakes. Whether conducting an internal audit to ensure compliance with such laws as the Fair Labor Standards Act or Service Contract Act, or drafting separation agreements to protect the employer, our attorneys provide strategic planning and innovative solutions to complex labor and employment issues.

## Government Contracts

PilieroMazza's GovCon attorneys assist clients by helping to shape the future of federal procurement law, interacting with key government decision makers, and testifying before Congress.

Our in-depth knowledge of the law helps clients avoid penalties resulting from unfamiliarity with contract requirements. We guide clients through the complexities of doing business with the government. From initial bids and proposals to contract closeouts, clients rely on our counsel to position them for contract awards, and to defend them in size, eligibility, and bid protests—always placing a premium on resolving disagreements through good contract administration practices.

For more information, please contact [marketing@pilieromazza.com](mailto:marketing@pilieromazza.com)

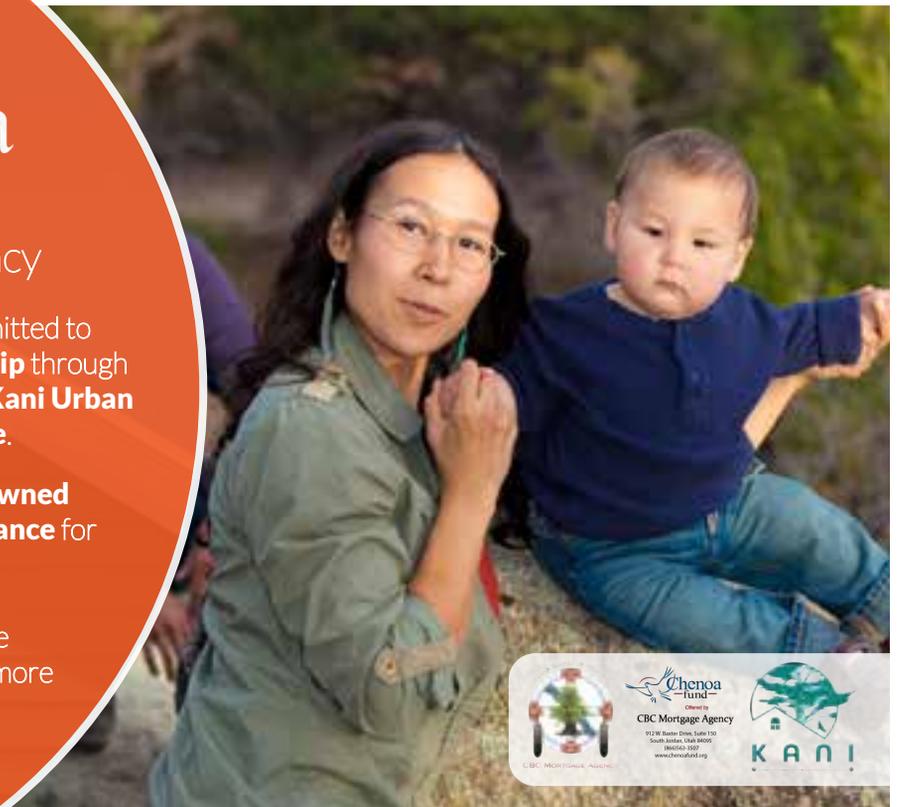
Check us out at  
[WWW.PILIEROMAZZA.COM](http://WWW.PILIEROMAZZA.COM)



**CBC Mortgage Agency** is committed to changing the face of **homeownership** through **Chenoa Fund** offered through our **Kani Urban Indian Housing Initiative**.

We are **proud to be a tribally owned** provider of **down payment assistance** for **creditworthy borrowers**.

The time is now for sustainable homeownership solutions. Learn more at [chenoafund.org](http://chenoafund.org).



# Q&A

## Casey Lozar

Vice President, Director of Center for Indian Country Development



*The effects of COVID-19 have been severe in Indian Country, with tribes and their enterprises suffering massive losses in revenue, even as they maintained payrolls to avoid layoffs or extended furloughs of their most valuable assets — their people.*

*Now, as vaccination rates increase and the nation returns to a sense of normalcy, there are lingering concerns about how long it will take Indian Country to bounce back economically.*

*While those concerns are certainly valid, the historic \$41 billion of investment in Indian Country through the federal CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan represents “an incredible opportunity” for the tribal economy, according to Casey Lozar, vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and director of the Center for Indian Country Development (CICD).*

*NCMagazine caught up with Lozar, an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, via Zoom last month to talk about where the tribal economy is headed in 2021 and beyond. The conversation has been edited for clarity and length.*

**I was reading the new CICD report on the lasting effects of the pandemic in Indian Country. The summary headline reads, ‘The financial impact of the pandemic on tribal entities remains bleak for the foreseeable future.’ I guess the first questions are: How bleak and how long is the foreseeable future?**

The Center for Indian Country Development has conducted five different surveys since the pandemic started to evaluate real-time impacts in Indian Country, specifically around revenues and workforce for tribal governments and their enterprises. What we found in the analysis of the surveys is that revenue losses have been extensive for Indian Country and, specifically, tribal governments. The respondents reported a median tribal government revenue loss of 40 percent in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. So if you’re talking about a bleak outlook ... 40-percent revenue reduction is a very significant factor and certainly has a sig-

nificant impact on decision-making for our tribal leaders, who are running sovereign nations and taking care of our tribal citizens, as well as being primary employers.

**Is there a sense of how long this kind of impact from COVID is going to last? Is this a two- or three-year bleak outlook for tribal entities?**

We don’t necessarily pose questions of how long the negative impacts may affect tribal economies and tribal employers, so we can’t necessarily provide any sort of specifics on the length of this level of impact. There are tribes who have been able to reopen their enterprises, in some cases close to pre-pandemic levels. But most are really still operating at a fraction of where they were prior to the pandemic.

**What will it take to get them back to pre-pandemic levels?**

It just depends on the individual tribe and the region. It really depends on how Indian Country and the rest of the country is able to get back to some level of normalcy as it relates to the job market ... and being able to get back to operations at pre-pandemic levels. I think it’s also going to come down to how Indian Country continues to deliver vaccinations in our tribal communities and the communities in which tribal community members live. As the country opens up, we’re going to see more and more jobs come back online and more of an opportunity for our tribal enterprises and tribal member-owned businesses to get back into the swing of things.

**One of the findings of CICD’s research was that tribes really didn’t lay off or furlough employees at rates that the revenue losses might have suggested. Did that surprise you?**

Initially, that was surprising to our team. When you look at our first survey in late March of last year, the anticipated layoffs were severe when you looked at where tribes anticipated their workforce being at the end of April and then six months out. So those numbers were significant at that point in time. As we continued to survey tribal leaders, those numbers certainly were reduced, which is certainly positive, but definitely surprising when you compare that to the reported revenue losses.

**Any thoughts on why tribes kept staffing levels up?**

I certainly have heard from tribal leaders who say the lifeblood of their tribal enterprises are the employees that allow the operations to move forward. They’ve made great efforts ensuring that they maintain those relationships with their employees both now and as we recover from the pandemic. While I don’t necessarily have three or four reasons why furloughs are inconsistent as it relates to the exten-

sive revenue losses, I do know, anecdotally, that the tribes have really elevated and prioritized ensuring that they continue to have those relationships with their employees.

**With the massive losses the tribes have suffered, how much will the CARES Act or the American Rescue Plan help mitigate those losses?**

(They) certainly represent historic investments into Indian Country, (and offer) the opportunity to address the systemic barriers to economic prosperity that have challenged our tribal economies and our communities for decades, if not hundreds of years. These funds represent an incredible opportunity to prioritize critical investments in infrastructure ... in the Native workforce (and) to create a new foundation for diversifying our tribal economies and improving the public health delivery for tribal members in transformative ways.

**Talking about economic development diversification, do you think the pandemic exposed some concentration risk that tribes, at least in the lower 48, have in gaming and hospitality?**

Certainly, gaming, hospitality, and entertainment have played an outsized role in increasing the economic health in Indian Country. Over the past 20 to 25 years, as more gaming operations have come on board, tribal leaders have been very thoughtful about how to use the resources generated through the entertainment industry and to deploy those into a diversified model. Economic diversification is not just thinking about what should be the next enterprise that the tribal government rolls out for their community, but also thinking about other revenue streams ... such as taxation (and) investment portfolios that tribes have. (It’s) thinking about revenue streams holistically ... in a way that will allow for diversification to ensure that tribes can mitigate the type of economic shock that we’ve experienced since March of 2020.

**Can the tribes really afford to diversify over the next couple of years, or are they a little hamstrung in their ability to do that at this point?**

Tribal leaders’ primary focus has been protecting our tribal communities and ensuring public health measures are put into place to reduce the spread of the virus. Tribal leaders have a lot on their plates ... both urgent needs, but also thinking about long-term economic prosperity. I don’t think that tribes are necessarily ‘hamstrung’ as it relates to strategies and plans to diversify their economic holdings and markets in which they do business. If anything, it’s put more of a priority on having those discussions. Change doesn’t happen quickly. Enterprises don’t pop up immediately. ■

# Making change, together.

Mayo Clinic is proud to be a sponsor and participant in RES 2021.



Mayo Clinic is committed to Native American communities. We are actively identifying new solutions for care delivery, providing culturally appropriate education materials and tools, partnering to address Tribal Nations' health priorities through research, and growing a more diverse workforce with a broad array of education programs from kindergarten to professional degrees. To find out more about how we can make change, together, connect with us at [Capossela.Guthrie@mayo.edu](mailto:Capossela.Guthrie@mayo.edu).



VIDEO PRODUCTION  
FOR INDIAN COUNTRY

Corporate

Government

Non Profit

Feature Films

TV Commercials

Documentaries

Social Media

Aerial Videography

Educational

Virtual

**Jeff Barehand**

President/CEO  
(Gila River/Navajo)



**SKY BEAR MEDIA**

MBE DBE SBE

[www.skybearmedia.com](http://www.skybearmedia.com)