

Lessons Learned with Philanthropy, Report One Executive Summary

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Read Report 1

Roanhorse Consulting, LLC (RCLLC) and Community Connects Consulting, LLC (CCCLLC) co-created a survey and interview with the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative (ECFC) and the Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) team to learn about ECFC members and to ground our understanding of key themes and strategies for future workgroup meetings. Nine organizational interviews and surveys were completed and analyzed by RCLLC and CCCLLC.

The survey revealed that the overall investment in early childhood funding that is dedicated to Native communities is extremely low, with the majority dedicating 2% or less within the last five years. The interview revealed that while there are various challenges these organizations face when working with Native communities there is also a desire to proactively overcome these challenges—to build strong relationships and effectively work with these communities for years to come. What currently stands in the way of more partnerships and funding is, primarily, the discomfort of the unknown in working with Native communities; the one-size-fits-all approach (i.e. assuming the needs of one community are the same as another); the pre-established standard of “smart” investments wherein philanthropic needs are put before the needs of the community, which ultimately ruptures the relationship with the community; and the characteristics of White Dominant Culture—as explained by Tema Okun—which are prevalent in many organizations. Members were specifically interested in understanding how to engage with Native communities, how to move forward when challenges arise, as well as tangible resources and tools to help inform their decision-making.

Given these themes, there are some opportunities identified to overcome these challenges. Sharing organizational policies and procedures as well as personal experiences and knowledge with members can contribute to shared learning within philanthropy, reduce barriers, and increase investment in Native-led initiatives in the philanthropic sector. This can help strengthen relationships and guide organizations on how they might support and partner with Native partners. Furthermore, what has proven to work so far is customizing philanthropic goals for individual community needs and having more open and oral communication rather than written communication. It is vital for the durability of partnerships that these organizations dedicate time to understand not only the cultural beliefs and values of children and families in each community but also the current efforts, goals, and practices to strengthen and revitalize their culture today.

The report concludes with seven recommendations.

1. Create a collective space for members to share concrete tools and resources that will help build their understanding of Native communities.
2. Build a relational culture and spend time at each workgroup meeting discussing Tema Okun's characteristics of White Dominant Culture and how to shift this culture within the group to foster strong relationships with Native communities.
3. Host opportunities for members to provide "case stories" of their work with Native communities—what worked well for them, what was challenging, and if there are places for members to further learn from one another and/or work together on a project.
4. Consider the Trust-Based Philanthropy Framework and how it could be a key guide for members.
5. Invest in ongoing professional and organizational development within foundation personnel and in partnership with community partners to build trust and build capacity for future investments.
6. Agree on processes and approaches that are meaningful and culturally appropriate for community partners and philanthropy in the early stages of relationship building to proactively address differences that will inevitably emerge.

Ways ECFC and NAP might continue to build/strengthen the partnership.

The ECFC Indigenous Workgroup is in a great place to build on the learnings from this report as they collectively work to deepen investment in Native communities. We close this report with some tangible recommendations for not only how the workgroup can learn from one another but also how they can strategize on key areas for building relationships with Native communities.

Lessons Learned with Community, Report Two Executive Summary

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Prepared by: Olivia Roanhorse and Lilly Irvin-Vitela, Roanhorse Consulting



Read Report 2

Roanhorse Consulting, LLC (RCLLC) and Community Connects Consulting, LLC (CCCLLC) co-created guided interview questions with the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative (ECFC) and the Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) team to learn about values, beliefs, successes, challenges, strengths, and opportunities for growth in relationship building between the philanthropic sector and Native communities when it comes to funding early childhood education.

In Phase 1, we conducted a survey to better understand the investment in Native communities and the Native representation in governance, staffing, and decision-making in philanthropy. We also conducted interviews with organizations in the philanthropic sector to illuminate key themes that ultimately determine the level of philanthropic investment in Native communities as a whole. In Phase 2, we conducted ninety-minute interviews with people in the early childhood sector with the purpose of exploring key themes and reflections of the Phase 1 findings. These interviews were also needed to learn from those working directly for and with Native communities and understand what they needed from philanthropy. The participants candidly shared both their challenges and frustrations in working with philanthropy while also balancing their input with hopes, ideas, and recommendations.

The interviews revealed that a lack of understanding of Native history, worldviews, and values that are foundational within Native communities creates barriers to effectively and harmoniously supporting, investing, and partnering with these communities. The lack of context, understanding, and acknowledgment of Native history results in superficial relationships, mistrust, and disconnection.

One of the major findings was that philanthropic groups must take the time to work with community leaders directly, learn about the individual communities, visit the community to understand a program or initiative, and demonstrate a true desire to understand and build relationships to effectively work with Native communities. It is essential that they touch base with community leaders to ensure there is a mutual understanding of goals, expectations, and realistic timelines in consideration of community needs. Furthermore, funding programs that are already doing well—rather than reinventing something to fund—will build trusting and long-lasting relationships. Each Native community has their own unique gifts and strengths that can be honed to overcome the challenges in their community and some communities have ancestral and cultural experts, all of which should be included in philanthropic processes to avoid restricting research with Western constructs. More importantly, learning intended to strengthen partnerships should be led by the Tribe/Pueblo. This allows for authentic knowledge sharing without the potential for minimizing, superficial, or extractive conversations.

Philanthropic organizations cannot hope to form meaningful partnerships with Native communities without understanding the individual needs of the respective communities first.

Another major finding was that the current approach to early childhood education is centered on Western worldviews—which do not align with Indigenous ways of living—and makes it difficult to accurately address the needs of the individual community, thereby limiting the quality of education that Indigenous children can receive. Indigenous communities are rarely included in evidence-based programs that develop and evaluate early childhood curriculums which results in a limited definition of “high-quality” education and “success”. One community has successfully adapted Western-based models but this takes time to develop and should not have to be the case for Indigenous communities to get a high-quality, culturally relevant early childhood education. Truly Indigenizing curriculums must start with a grassroots approach—consulting elders and community members to successfully implement an effective program that resonates with the families involved. It is crucial for philanthropic organizations to approach Native communities with an openness to self-determination and sovereignty when it comes to building strong and sustainable partnerships.

Lastly, philanthropic success has built off the resources and lands of Indigenous people but has yet to acknowledge this or the fact that it has contributed to systemic inequities. Native communities are coming to understand this more and more and it makes it extremely difficult to create trusting relationships with the philanthropic sector. Philanthropic groups must be open to conversations on accountability and acknowledgment of the wealth that they have gained at the expense of Native people. If they are not open to these conversations then it creates a barrier for Native communities in the application process—a barrier that other groups do not have to face. They must recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work, especially for Native communities because their history is fundamentally different from other groups. The customized approach for Native communities is not “special treatment”, it is the appropriate approach to effectively addressing the needs of Indigenous communities—to effectively create meaningful and lasting change.

The ECFC Indigenous Workgroup is in a great place to build on the learnings from this report as they collectively work to deepen investment into Native American communities and Native Hawaiian communities. We close this report with some tangible recommendations for not only how the workgroup can learn from one another, but also can strategize on key areas for building relationships with Native communities.

1. Take accountability in the truth and reconciliation process and recognize the actions that can be taken to make things right.
 2. Create mutual accountability for both philanthropy and grantees. This could be in the form of a public statement and commitment to actions or it could be in funding that is operational, rather than programmatic, and recognizes a transformational approach—like investing in landback efforts. Foundations should also consider the Trust-Based Philanthropy values and approaches when working with these communities to ensure they are truly supporting and strengthening Tribal Nations.
 3. Understand that White Supremacy Culture is deeply embedded in our lives and, consequently, our business practices, and actively find ways to disrupt these harmful norms in order to successfully work with Native communities.
1. Invest in both early childhood education within Native communities and in their respective cultures and languages. It is impossible to separate the two without compromising the success of the investment as it is the very foundation of their Tribal sovereignty and self-determination.
 2. Seek ethical and non-extractive ways of learning, building partnerships, and investing in Native communities. The Trust-Based Philanthropy approaches and values are foundational to these changes.
 3. Center relationships in the context of the communities the philanthropic groups wish to work with in order to build strong relationships that are more than transactions. This fosters the opportunity to learn from community leaders and their expertise to operate ethically and co-create positive outcomes.