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Executive Summary

In 2018, First Nations Development Institute (First Nations), with generous support from the Henry Luce Foundation (Luce), launched an unprecedented project to explore Native American community intellectualism in partnership with four Native-run nonprofit organizations, including: The Hopi Foundation, Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian School, The Piegan Institute at Cuts Wood School and Salish Kootenai College. First Nations has worked closely with all four of these organizations in the past, and thus was deeply familiar with their proven track record of engaging communities and helping them to excel. We were confident that these organizations would be able to help provide much needed insight into the little known concept of Native American community intellectualism.

Through this project, each organization formed an advisory committee to work with tribal leaders and other community members to articulate Native American community intellectualism within the context of their own tribal communities. Initially, First Nations adopted a working definition of Native American community intellectualism as the practice of perpetuating and disseminating Indigenous knowledge. These four advisory committees were able to help us expand and refine this definition, and also identify several strategies for better supporting community intellectuals.

The project revealed that Native American community intellectualism is more than the practice of sharing indigenous knowledge. From these four organizations we learned that Native American community intellectuals are tribal members (or descendants) actively engaged in their communities, and in activities that seek to strengthen and empower their tribal communities on many different levels – culturally, linguistically, economically, politically, socially and spiritually. Often, these individuals are engaged in work that helps preserve and perpetuate the tribe’s rich cultures, languages, histories and traditions for future generations. Some may not be in the public eye or forefront of their communities but are still important knowledge keepers and contributors to their respective communities.
With the help of these four organizations, we have identified five strategies for better supporting community intellectuals and partnerships in Native communities. These five strategies are as follows:

1. **Support Tribally-Specific Approaches:** All four organizations emphasized that community intellectualism is unique to each tribal community. Every tribe has their own distinct culture, language, history and land base. It is important to respect these differences and support tribes as they develop methods and strategies that are culturally-appropriate and relevant to the needs of their specific communities.

2. **Balance Indigenous and Western Knowledge Systems:** Although a major component of community intellectualism is to preserve and protect traditional indigenous knowledge, it is important to note that many of these knowledge systems have inevitably been affected by colonization. As a result, many community intellectuals are tasked with the heavy responsibility of learning how to navigate both indigenous and western knowledge systems.

3. **Facilitate Consensus-Building:** All four organizations relied heavily upon an advisory committee to explore the concept of community intellectualism. As many of these organizations and their advisory committees pointed out, the decision-making process is not hierarchical in tribal communities, but instead is collective, as many community intellectuals work collaboratively to reach consensus and make important community decisions.

4. **Alleviate Barriers of Geographic Isolation:** Although community intellectuals often work better collaboratively, many community intellectuals tend to experience geographic or cultural isolation as a knowledge holder/maker in their field. All four organizations emphasized the tremendous benefits of a cohort model; however, several organizations noted that some of the community intellectuals on their advisory committees did not always have access to transportation or even the internet, which consequently limited their participation in monthly meetings.

5. **Reward Innovation and Creativity:** All four of these organizations developed innovative and creative approaches to this grant project. Although each organization formed an advisory committee, they worked with their committees in different cultural contexts, languages and settings to meet the unique needs of their specific tribes. When they experienced challenges because of scheduling conflicts, weather, or transportation issues, they still developed innovative solutions to complete this project in a timely manner.

First Nations would like to thank The Hopi Foundation, The Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian Schools, The Piegan Institute at Cuts Wood School, and Salish Kootenai College for participating in this cohort, and sharing their experience and potential strategies for supporting community intellectuals and partnerships in Native communities. The lessons learned from these four organizations are a critical first step to better understanding and supporting Native American community intellectuals, who often receive little recognition or support for their significant community contributions.
Introduction

For more than 39 years, First Nations Development Institute, a Native-led 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, has worked to strengthen American Indian economies to support healthy Native communities by investing in and creating innovative institutions and models that strengthen asset control and support economic development for American Indian people and their communities. First Nations began its national grantmaking program in 1993. Through 2018, we have successfully managed 1,648 grants totaling more than $35 million to tribal and community institutions across Indian Country. For more information, visit www.firstnations.org.

As part of its mission, First Nations invests in the preservation and perpetuation of Indigenous ways of knowing, and supports innovative ideas that grow, develop and sustain Native communities. We support tribes, Native communities and leaders working to maintain and strengthen cultural connections, identities and practices maintained through language, land/place, food, traditional art and other forms of cultural expression. These partnerships are intended to counter paternalistic and imposed models that are exclusively based on foreign knowledge systems and values rather than Native knowledge, values and goals.
Over the years, First Nations has had the privilege of working with countless Native American leaders including tribal elders, knowledge keepers, cultural advisors, language experts and other members of indigenous communities dedicated to using their wisdom and ingenuity to restore, rebuild and/or perpetuate Indigenous knowledge systems. First Nations has witnessed these community intellectuals spark significant innovation and positive change in their communities.

In 2018, First Nations, with generous support from the Henry Luce Foundation, launched an unprecedented project to support, reflect on and share learning about Native American community intellectuals. The purpose of this project is to raise awareness about community intellectualism, and how it may manifest uniquely in different communities.

Over the past year, First Nations and Luce have partnered with four Native-led nonprofit organizations to better define and articulate Native community intellectualism, explore best practices for communities and organizations to nurture and support these individuals, and examine how the knowledge of Native community intellectuals may further or be furthered by Western education systems. We partnered with the following four organizations to learn more about Native community intellectualism:

- **The Hopi Foundation** – a Native-led nonprofit organization that hosts a number of community-based projects serving the Hopi reservation, including 12 Hopi and Tewa villages in Northern Arizona.

- **The Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian School** – a culturally- and community-based think tank that focuses on the most critical policy issues affecting the 22 tribes in New Mexico.

- **The Piegan Institute at Cuts Wood School** – a Native-led nonprofit in Browning, Montana that serves as a vehicle to research, promote and preserve Native languages, specifically the Blackfeet language.

- **Salish Kootenai College** – a tribal college located in Pablo, Montana that promotes community and individual development, and perpetuates the cultures of the Confederated Tribes of the Flathead Nation.

Each of these organizations are anchors in their communities and are centers of excellence that support local community intellectuals. Their work is elevating the Native voice in influential circles. Through this project, each partner organization has worked diligently over the last year on projects that engage community-identified intellectuals representing diverse areas of expertise and ages to discuss concepts of intellectualism specific to their Native culture, its foundation, and historical and contemporary applications.

This report highlights lessons learned and best practices for supporting community intellectuals and partnerships in Native communities. We hope the information shared by these four programs will assist tribes, Native organizations and their philanthropic partners in their efforts to support community intellectuals throughout Indian country.
What is Community Intellectualism?

Since time immemorial, Native American people have had their own sophisticated knowledge systems. However, non-native settlers often dismissed this knowledge as outdated or quaint superstition of a primitive people rapidly nearing extinction. Because of this damaging and pervasive stereotype, few people recognize the amazing intellectual and community contributions of Native American men and women that have worked hard to preserve and perpetuate their rich cultures, languages, histories and traditions for countless generations.

On March 22-23, 2018, representatives from The Hopi Foundation, The Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian School, and The Piegan Institute at Cuts Wood School, and Salish Kootenai College participated in a two day training session to explore the little known concept of Native American community intellectualism. The four organizations began by unpacking the phrase “Native American community intellectualism.” Immediately, all four participants acknowledged that they (and many in their communities) were uncomfortable with the idea of community intellectualism. Specifically, they were uneasy with the words “intellectualism” and “intellectuals,” as they often conflated it with academic scholarship and Western knowledge systems, which emphasize thinking and writing by individuals.

For many, this phrase seems contrary to community beliefs in the collective ownership of knowledge and the importance of sharing knowledge within the community. One participant noted that the hierarchical association of the word “intellectual” suggests a conflict with tribal community values. For many, an intellectual connotes an individual with a Ph.D. – one expert, as opposed to a collective group of individuals that make informed decisions based on the best interests of the tribe and its people.

Additionally, several of the organizations pointed out that it was difficult for most fluent Native language speakers to translate the terms “intellectualism” and “intellectuals” into their own languages. As a result, two of the organizations adopted different phrases to describe Native American community intellectuals. The Hopi Foundation and The Piegan Institute used the phrase “knowledge keepers,” and Salish Kootenai College coined the phrase “community contributors” to describe tribal members making a positive contribution to their tribal communities.

Although these four organizations were initially uncomfortable with the phrase community intellectualism, they acknowledged that it was critically important to discuss indigenous knowledge, and how it is transmitted, retained and shared within their own communities. “The phrase community intellectual is just a placeholder,” said Carnell Chosa, co-founder of The Leadership Institute. “It’s an English word that we each have to translate into our own languages and define on our community’s own terms.”

Over the past year, these four organizations worked closely with tribal members of all ages, genders, and backgrounds to clarify and refine this definition within the contexts of their own tribal communities. They each worked with their advisory committees and other community members to develop curriculum, books, presentations and radio programming to describe the roles and responsibilities of Native American community intellectuals.

Although these roles and responsibilities varied from community to community, there were some similarities and commonalities among these definitions. For example, each organization seemed to agree that community intellectuals from their tribal communities must demonstrate
a deep understanding of the tribe’s culture, language and traditions, and a willingness to share that knowledge and understanding with other community members, especially younger generations. They all agreed that community intellectuals acquired this knowledge through personal experience – it was not information that they could glean from a book or learn in a classroom. Often, they acquired this knowledge through family, community involvement and respect for others.

Despite these similarities, all four organizations emphasized that community intellectualism is tribally-specific, meaning that every community intellectual’s roles and responsibilities are specific to their own unique culture and community. Every tribe has their own unique cultures, languages, histories, and traditions. As a result, each community intellectual must work closely with their community to decide how to preserve and share indigenous knowledge.

“A community intellectual is not somebody with a Ph.D., which is what we tend to assume in Western society,” says Darren Kipp, Director of The Piegan Institute. “It might be a tribal elder, but just because you’re old doesn’t mean you have the wisdom of an elder,” says Kipp. He, like the other four organizations, firmly maintains that a community intellectual is an individual that is deeply immersed in their culture and language, and actively involved in the community.

Community connection is also key. For this project it was essential to identify and engage community intellectuals as project consultants who were trusted members of their communities and with whom elders were comfortable sharing their knowledge, noted Salish Kootenai College Project Coordinator Rene Dubay.

With the assistance of these four organizations, First Nations was able to expand and refine its earlier definition of Native American community intellectualism. The new definition is as follows: Native American community intellectuals are tribal members (or descendants) actively engaged in their communities, and in activities that seek to strengthen and empower their tribal communities on many different levels – culturally, linguistically, economically, politically, socially and spiritually. Often, these individuals are engaged in work that helps preserve and perpetuate the tribes’ rich cultures, languages, histories and traditions for future generations.

“The phrase community intellectual is just a placeholder,” said Carnell Chosa, Co-founder of The Leadership Institute. “It’s an English word that we each have to translate into our own languages and define on our community’s own terms.”
Lessons Learned: How to Better Support Community Intellectuals

The primary objective of this project was to develop strategies for supporting community intellectuals and partnerships in Native communities. The Hopi Foundation, Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian School, The Piegan Institute at Cuts Wood School, and Salish Kootenai College offer the following five recommendations for better supporting Native American community intellectualism.: 1.) Support Tribally-Specific Approaches; 2.) Balance Indigenous and Western Knowledge Systems; 3.) Facilitate Consensus-Building; 4.) Alleviate Barriers of Geographic Isolation; and 5.) Reward Innovation and Creativity.

Perhaps the most important lesson shared by all four organizations and their advisory committees is that community intellectualism is unique to each tribe, and thus it is important to encourage and support tribally-specific approaches. In fact, the roles and responsibilities of each community intellectual might actually differ among each tribe, reservation and state. For example, Salish Kootenai College, which is located on the Flathead Reservation, serves three different tribal communities. The Hopi Foundation, which is located on the Hopi Reservation, is home to 12 different Hopi and Tewa villages, and the Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian School serves the 22 tribes located throughout New Mexico. Although these tribes and Native organizations are located in approximately the same area, each tribe is composed of smaller bands, clans, families and villages that each have their own distinct cultures, languages, histories and traditions as well as their own unique economic, social, and political structures. Often, community intellectuals are responsible for learning these cultural and linguistic nuances, and developing methods and strategies that are culturally appropriate for his/her specific community.

Second, it is important to note that many community intellectuals are often tasked with balancing Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. Most if not all tribes and indigenous communities have been affected by the devastating effects of colonization, either through boarding schools that sought to extinguish Native cultures and languages; federal Indian policies that stripped away land and natural resources, and many other legacy effects. Because tribes, communities and families have been so deeply affected by colonialism, many community intellectual leaders have learned how to apply indigenous traditions to modern challenges, in ways that are respectful and empowering to their tribal communities. For example, The Hopi Foundation is using radio programming to share traditional stories and cultural teachings with community members. The Piegan Institute, Salish Kootenai College and the Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian School are publishing books and developing curricula and/or materials in both their traditional languages and English to ensure that they reach everybody in their communities.

All four organizations learned how to support both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems by forming advisory committees to engage in community discussions. To create these dialogues, several organizations emphasized the importance of facilitating consensus-building. Traditionally, many tribes relied (and continue to rely) upon a consensus-based decision making process. This collaborative process, notes Monica Nuvamsa of The Hopi Foundation, is a time-consuming and potentially costly process. However, she notes that it’s important for tribes to engage in this process. She says: “Consensus building isn’t just about agreement. It can also be about disagreement, and how to make a decision despite differences. In our community, we don’t treat conflict as something...
negative, but rather we see it as an opportunity.” It is an opportunity that Nuvamsa and the other three organizations hope that their philanthropic partners will encourage and support.

Although community intellectuals often work better collaboratively, many community intellectuals tend to experience geographic, cultural or community isolation as the only knowledge holder/maker in their field. All four organizations emphasized the tremendous benefits of a cohort model. “I really like the cohort approach to grantmaking, meaning the four organizations that met through monthly webinars and conferences,” says Carnell Chosa, Co-founder of the Leadership Institute at the Santa Fe Indian School. “It really helped me getting to know people doing similar work. I wouldn’t have met these individuals otherwise. I strongly recommend using these types of cohorts in the future.” However, many of the organizations noted that some of the community intellectuals on their advisory committees did not always have access to transportation or even the internet, which then limited their participation in monthly meetings.

The Hopi Foundation, the Leadership Institute at Santa Fe Indian School, The Piegan Institute at Wood Cuts School, and Salish Community College (SKC) also faced several other challenges while trying to support community intellectuals in their communities. For example, it was difficult for all four organizations to form their advisory committees and schedule regular meetings that everybody could attend. These challenges were due to scheduling conflicts, lack of transportation, poor internet access, time constraints and limited financial resources.

The Hopi Foundation and SKC note that there were often scheduling conflicts among their advisory committees. At The Hopi Foundation this was often because different communities on their reservation held ceremonies at different, often conflicting, times of the year. At SKC, advisory committee members were leaders of the tribes, culture committees, and educators including the SKC Vice President; each with incredibly demanding schedules. Additionally, members of The Hopi Foundation’s advisory committee often had to travel long distances to attend in person meetings – sometimes as much as 60 miles roundtrip, meaning if they didn’t have a running car or gas money they could not make it to the meeting. Virtual meetings (i.e., webinars) might have alleviated this issue; however, many committee members were living on a fixed income, and did not have access to a computer or internet. All of these issues are compounded by the fact that many community intellectuals are limited by obligations to family, community, and primary jobs.

Despite these challenges, all four of these organizations, which represent the best of Native American community intellectualism, met their project goals and objectives in a timely and efficient manner. Indeed, many community intellectuals work extremely hard with little reward or recognition for their important community contributions. It is important for tribes, Native organizations and their philanthropic partners to reward Native American community intellectuals for developing innovative and creative approaches that transform and inspire Indian country.
PARTNER PROFILES
Founded in 1985, The Hopi Foundation’s mission is Lomasumi’nangwtukwsiwmani or “strengthening communities through collaborative action.” The Hopi Foundation, established by local Hopis, believes in attending to the community in which they live by promoting self-sufficiency, proactive community participation in their own destiny, self-resilience and local self-determination.

With this community intellectual grant, The Hopi Foundation documented traditional knowledge, historical events, and stories that define the community, both historically and today. Much of this knowledge is only available through oral tradition and customary practices, but the group hopes to share these cultural teachings more broadly through the platform of the local radio station.

Over the past several months, The Hopi Foundation has met with nine community members to define community intellectualism in the context of Hopi culture and practices. Initially, the committee consisted of five community intellectuals, but expanded to 10 individuals as spouses and other family members joined the group.

The community intellectual advisory committee met every month for a year in different locations throughout the Hopi reservation, which is more than 2,500 square miles, and includes 12 Hopi and Tewa villages in Northern Arizona. At the end of the retreat, The Hopi Foundation hosted two special sessions at Mesa Verde and Bears Ears, two geographic locations that are culturally-significant to Hopi people.

Instead of community intellectuals, the advisory committee decided to use the phrase Hopi knowledge keepers to describe individuals with a strong Hopi worldview learned through experience, and shared through teaching or other important community roles. The committee settled on the term Hopi knowledge keepers for two reasons: 1.) the term community intellectual seemed like a “foreign concept;” and 2.) Hopi knowledge keeper was easier for the advisory committee to translate into their own languages. “It’s a term our community members were able to understand and respect,” said Executive Director Monica Nuvamsa.

Together, the advisory committee developed the following vision statement for what it means to be a Hopi knowledge keeper:


“We are bringing our vision together to keep our Hopi language alive for our children to grow up knowing why Hopi customs and ways are important. Our Hopi knowledge shares a desire to grow old and live a long happy life by practicing our knowledge daily, teaching our youth identity of clan and relationships
and using our elders as a support system. By following this knowledge it will help us follow the path to our spiritual life. By participating and sharing through songs, stories, and ceremonies we envision a model Hopi community.”

Initially, the group wrote their vision statement in English, and then translated it to Hopi. They note that dialectical differences between different villages made it difficult to translate this vision statement to be inclusive of all their communities. These linguistic nuances are an example of tribal diversity and the subtle, but important differences that exist among people and communities of the same tribal nation. Even tribes and villages that seem similar, are actually culturally and linguistically distinct, meaning that their knowledge systems are also unique, and thus often known only to a few individuals or families.

According to Ms. Nuvamsa, it is important to acknowledge and respect these differences. She reasons that these differences are part of the process and in order to truly support Hopi knowledge keepers (or other Native community intellectuals), time and space is needed to achieve community consensus. Ms. Nuvamsa notes that the advisory committee had several spirited discussions about what it means to be a Hopi knowledge keeper. “Consensus building isn’t just about agreement,” she says. “It can also be about disagreement, and how to make a decision despite differences. In our community, we don’t treat conflict as something negative, but rather we see it as an opportunity.”

The opportunity to discuss community intellectualism, and the differences embedded in that phrase, allowed the committee to articulate a framework for indigenous knowledge sharing that would benefit all 12 villages within their community. At the center of this framework is family, which provides the foundation of indigenous knowledge sharing and teaching.

Each family’s clan has different responsibilities in the community when it comes to ceremonies and knowledge sharing. “Those clans give us our identity,” says Ms. Nuvamsa. Throughout life, our families and clans teach different aspects of knowledge including: Hopi philosophy and language, as well as kinship, land, ceremony, songs, etiquette, communication and self-care.

The Hopi Foundation intends to use this framework to help guide the organization. They also intend to share this new framework with the rest of the community through the Tribe’s radio station, which provides news, entertainment and public information, and also serves as a platform for teaching Hopi language, knowledge and culture to new generations of Hopi and Tewa people.

“Consensus building isn’t just about agreement,” she says. “It can also be about disagreement, and how to make a decision despite differences. In our community, we don’t treat conflict as something negative, but rather we see it as an opportunity.”

Through this platform, The Hopi Foundations hopes to share the stories and cultural teachings learned from their monthly Hopi knowledge keepers’ meetings. However, determining what stories to translate and share and in what manner is a sensitive and time-consuming process that requires further input and consensus from all community members.
Although the community intellectual grant period has ended, The Hopi Foundation will continue to work with the advisory committee to translate stories and share cultural teachings with the community. The Hopi Knowledge Keepers will continue this work despite a lack of financial support, transportation and other resources. Their dedication to continuing this project is further testament to their vision and commitment as Hopi Knowledge Keepers.
Established in 1997, the Leadership Institute (LI), which is based at the Santa Fe Indian School in Santa Fe, New Mexico, was modeled after some of the nation’s top think tanks. The LI is unique due to its culturally and community-based approach. The LI serves the 22 tribal nations in New Mexico by creating a space for discourse on a wide range of public policy and tribal community issues that challenge the vitality and spirit of these tribes.

First Nations has worked closely with the LI for 15 years, awarding them several grants totaling more than $300,000 through various grant programs, including: the Native Youth and Culture Fund, the Native Arts Initiative, Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative, Native Boys and Men of Color and Native Giving. During this time, we have witnessed the LI spark significant innovation and change among tribes in the Southwest region.

Currently, the LI offers five programs, including: 1.) The Community Institute; 2.) Summer Policy Academy; 3.) Program and Curriculum Development; 4.) Research and Evaluation; and 5.) Enrichment Opportunities. Over the past two decades, the LI has served thousands of community members and students through these five community-based programs. All five of these programs are guided by four themes: Leadership, Community Service, Public Policy, and Critical Thinking.

In 2018, First Nations awarded the LI a community intellectual grant, which they decided to use to re-evaluate their five programs by developing surveys that they administered to 100 youth and 88 adults. After collecting these surveys, a small advisory committee of three community evaluators reviewed and coded this data. From this data, they identified 14 recurring themes that tribal members felt were important to growing and supporting community intellectuals. These 14 themes included:

- Balance Traditional/Western Education
- Participate in Community
- Preserve Traditional Knowledge
- Care for the Community and Others
- Transfer Knowledge & Information
- Maintain Continuity – Move Forward
- Maintain Community Core Values

The LI advisory committee noticed that many of these new themes overlapped with the four major themes that have guided the organization for the past twenty years. For example, many survey respondents emphasized the importance of community service and indigenous knowledge sharing. However, the LI noted that there were a few unexpected responses, such as the theme of moving forward with continuity.
“I’m a bit of a preservationist,” notes Co-Founder Carnell Chosa. “However, after discussing it over with the advisory committee, we realized that a community intellectual is somebody who is always moving the community forward with the changing times, changing resources and new ideas. Our lives are different because of our ancestors who themselves were always moving things forward for our communities.” In other words, community intellectualism is not just about preserving indigenous knowledge. It is also about learning how to adapt indigenous traditions to address modern challenges in ways that are respectful and relevant to the community.

The LI advisory committee will continue to use this survey information to design a new set of curricula for the Santa Fe Indian School. “This project has been a guide for us at the Leadership Institute,” says Chosa. “We will use this information to enhance our programming and develop new programming. We are currently in discussions about how to incorporate some of these outcomes into the new curriculum we are designing for the Santa Fe Indian School.”

Additionally, the LI advisory committee also hopes to launch a new social media campaign for Pueblo youth to share stories and experiences, and discuss their cultural identity in a modern tribal context. They also plan to develop a new community institute that focuses on community intellectualism and these 14 themes. Bringing together this cohort, inspired the LI and other organizations to explore new approaches in their communities for transmitting, retraining and sharing indigenous knowledge.

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Established in 1977, Salish Kootenai College (SKC) is a tribal college located in Pablo, Montana that serves the Séliš, Qlíspé and Ksanka (Salish, Pend d’Oreille, and Kootenai) people of the Flathead Nation. The mission of SKC is “to provide quality post-secondary educational opportunities for Native Americans, locally and from throughout the United States. The College will promote community and individual development and perpetuate the cultures of the Confederated Tribes of the Flathead Nation” (https://www.skc.edu/mission).

SKC is recognized as an academically robust and competitive institution that prepares Native and non-Native students to be successful in their careers and leaders in their communities. They currently offer 16 bachelor’s degrees, 25 associate degrees, 6 certificates of completion and 5 workforce certificates in the fields of education, business, nursing, forestry, and tribal government and administration to name a few fields of study. Over the past 42 years, SKC has matriculated and graduated more than 3,600 Native and non-Native students seeking to better themselves, their families and their communities.

SKC fosters student success through culturally-relevant instruction. Like many tribal colleges and universities, SKC seeks to merge Native American culture, language, and philosophy with Western academics. Specifically, they are dedicated to preserving and perpetuating the cultures and knowledge systems of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Peoples.

In many ways, SKC is a fitting example of community intellectualism. “The college is an activity hub. We are centrally-located and apolitical, so a lot of people in the community look to us to host these types of events and activities,” says Daniel Durglo, vice president of academic affairs.

In 2018, First Nations invited SKC to participate in the Supporting Community Intellectuals and Partnerships project. Through this grant opportunity, SKC created forums for community conversations with all three tribes within their tribal government structure including the Seliš, Qlíspé, and Ksanka communities. Although the Seliš and Qlíspé communities are distinct, they are culturally and linguistically related. The Ksanka, however, are a cultural and linguistic isolate. These cultural and linguistic differences made it challenging for SKC to meet the needs of all three communities.
To engage all three communities, SKC formed an advisory committee of key leaders from the Seliš, Ql’ispé, and Ksanka communities represented by their culture committee directors. Also serving on the advisory committee were: a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Council, the SKC academic vice president who served as project director, and a leading SKC educator. The purpose of this advisory group was to work together to develop culturally-appropriate processes and programming that would connect tribal elders and youth; facilitate the intergenerational transfer of knowledge; and, foster communication across all three communities. Durglo further emphasizes that, “like many tribes, our elders feel a sense of urgency – the need to pass on their knowledge to future generations. Through the community intellectual project, we were able to support emerging elders as they attained cultural knowledge, and became more comfortable with passing that knowledge on to younger generations.”

The Flathead Reservation is approximately 1,938 square miles, thereby making travel time-consuming and expensive for individuals beyond the college. It is also important to note that SKC representatives, like many community intellectual leaders, are working with limited time and resources, as they are often the only individual working in their particular field.

In support of the three distinct cultures and communities, the advisory committee decided to support each community individually by awarding sub-grants to community intellectuals, whom they referred to as community contributors. Each individual designed a project that involved inter-generational transfer of knowledge in a specific area. This creative approach allowed SKC to meet the unique cultural and linguistic needs of each community. They provided funding to support the following three community contributors:

- **Traditional Foods Plant Project**: This project served the Seliš (Salish) community, and sought to increase knowledge of and access to traditional Salish food plants. As part of this project, Community Contributor, Rose Bear Don’t Walk, interviewed tribal community members about their cultural and linguistic knowledge. She observed plants in their natural environment and collected samples for the creation of a tribal herbarium and community gathering area where knowledge keepers will share their knowledge about traditional Salish food plants with the larger community. Eventually, Bear Don’t Walk, a graduate student at the University of Montana, hopes to use this research and data to create a traditional Salish food plant curriculum and/or field guide to encourage tribal members to revitalize and strengthen their relationship with traditional Salish food plants.

- **Traditional Cooking for Ceremonies**: This project served the Ksanka (Kootenai) community by creating a guidebook for traditional cooks to assist with wakes and funerals. Since 1890 and even further, Kootenai girls and young women have cooked for the family of deceased tribal members. Many of the head cooks and elders who assisted with these efforts have started to “age out,” and would like to train the next generation to take their place. To train these individuals, Community Contributors Leslie Kallowat and Cleo
Kenmille interviewed three tribal elders and created a guidebook for assisting with wakes and funerals, dinners and feasts. The guidebook details how to make menus, shop and prepare meals for grieving families. By gathering and disseminating this knowledge, this project will help ensure that this traditional practice continues for generations to come.

- **Nighthawks Youth Warrior’s Society:** This project served primarily the Ql’ispé (Pend d’Oreille) and Selis (Salish) communities, and seeks to facilitate cultural connection between tribal youth and elders. As part of this project, Community Contributor Buck Morigeau coordinated monthly meetings for tribal youth to share meals with culture keepers and learn about traditional practices. The purpose of this mentorship program is to teach Native boys and young men the traditional ways that have been passed down for generations. For example, participants learned traditional arts such as how to make tomahawks, hide preparation, and more contemporary items such as ribbon shirts. More than 20 tribal youth, families and community members attended these monthly meetings over the past year. The Youth Warrior’s Society was so popular that they expanded from a monthly group to a biweekly one. It looks highly probable that the tribes will fund the group’s activities for another year.

“Id really was a labor of love. Everybody worked so hard with very little resources,” said Shelly Fyant, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Council Member and First Nations Project Advisory Board Chair. Each community contributor received a sub-grant of less than $5,600, which was just enough for tools and supplies for each project. However, these small sub-grants did not necessarily cover the costs of time, expertise, or physical energy.

Unlike academics, researchers, professionals and other experts, community intellectuals are not often recognized or compensated for their significant contributions. In 2019, First Nations and Luce partnered together to launch a new fellowship intended to reward community intellectuals, knowledge keepers and community contributors for their invaluable service to their communities.

“Every single one of these projects will have a long-lasting impact on each of our three communities,” says Project Coordinator Rene Dubay. Ms. Dubay added, “SKC, the advisory board and the community contributors are already engaged in discussions with each community about how to share and utilize this knowledge over the next 30 plus years and beyond.”
Montana is home to twelve tribes on seven reservations, and an estimated 10 native languages. In 1985, the Blackfeet Tribe of Montana conducted a reservation wide survey of the Blackfoot language. The survey indicated that a majority of first language speakers – those who learned the language as children – were now in their late fifties. The study projected that within twenty years, the remaining speakers would be in their eighties, thus posing a serious threat to the language. Without new speakers, the language, as well as the cultural values and traditions embedded within it, would be gone.

Two years later, a group of visionary Blackfeet leaders established The Piegan Institute, a Native-led nonprofit in Browning, Montana dedicated to preserving and perpetuating the Blackfoot language. Founded in 1987, the mission of The Piegan Institute is to promote, preserve, research and restore Native American languages. Guided by this mission, the founders of The Piegan Institute helped launch three language immersion schools to teach children across the reservation to speak the Blackfoot language without passing judgment on their intellectual abilities.

The Piegan Institute operates under a model of collaboration, and the belief that generosity brings prosperity and positive change. It originated with two university trained tribal members and a group of older generation Blackfoot speakers and ceremonial people. The Piegan Institute has served the Blackfeet community for more than thirty years, and has become a well-respected organization in the community and beyond. Over the years, these community intellectual leaders have helped several other tribes launch language revitalization efforts in their own communities. This includes the White Clay Immersion School on the Fort Belknap Reservation, the Nkwusm Salish Language Institute in Arlee, and the Nigaane Ojibwe immersion program in Leech Lake, Minnesota.

The Piegan Institute, guided by this collaborative model, has spent the past year working with community intellectuals, such as elders, youth, and political leaders, to discuss the tribe’s history, language, economy and the future of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. They met monthly with tribal members to explore the concept of community intellectualism. Their approach was simple: sit and listen.

Each session began with a series of questions that allowed tribal members to engage in a community dialogue about community intellectualism. They
asked tribal members the following questions: Who are you? How are you connected to your tribal community? How do you support your tribal community? Do you attend ceremony? Are you a member of any tribal societies?

Based on these responses, Director Darren Kipp says he learned that concepts of community intellectualism are not pan-indigenous. He observes that community intellectualism is tribally-specific, grounded in the culture, language and traditions of each tribe. “It is very community-specific,” says Kipp. “Our community is a little bit different from Missoula or Great Falls or Cut Bank. When we talk about our community, we are talking about Browning. We are talking about the Blackfeet Nation. We are talking about our tribal community.”

Additionally, Kipp notes that the interviews also revealed that community intellectuals are individuals who were born and raised in the community. He notes that most of the individuals surveyed felt strongly that community intellectuals and knowledge keepers must work on the ground. “On the local level, most people feel strongly that you have to be in the trenches,” says Kipp. “You have to be on the rez. You have to be doing the hands-on work because that’s where the life experience comes from – that’s where you are going to develop those skills and qualities as a community intellectual, as a knowledge keeper.”

Over the past year, Kipp and his team have collected 10 interviews that they will publish as a book for the rest of the community. Each interview addressed a core set of questions developed by community members. He hopes the book will spark a conversation among tribal members, and encourage them to be self-reflective and ask themselves who they are, where they come from, and how they can better serve their community. As an example, Kipp shared the following quote about community intellectualism:

“In my opinion, a community intellectual is someone who can relate and converse with everybody within that community without demoralizing, without putting down, without misrepresenting anybody in that community. Whether it’s just your humor, your story, or whichever, but a community intellectual is somebody who can relate to everybody within that community, and humans and animals. Somebody who is understanding enough to be able to give life advice to a child and at the same time, show compassion to the man on the street who is suffering with addictions. Without degrading, like I said.” – Jesse Derosier, Blackfoot Language Instructor
Concluding Remarks

Community intellectuals play a vital role in preserving and perpetuating indigenous knowledge. First Nations recognizes that there is not one form of indigenous knowledge; rather it takes many forms. Indigenous knowledge is diverse and reflects unique cultures, languages, geographies, histories, traditions and values. To effectively support community intellectuals, a tribally-specific, community-based process is needed to appropriately consider, honor, and elevate their voices on opportunities and challenges facing their communities, as well as to recognize and value their contributions.

Tribes and Native organizations already have the knowledge and expertise needed to strengthen and empower their communities. Unfortunately, they don’t always have access to the funds and other resources needed to harness and share their rich cultures, languages, histories and traditions with younger generations. We would like to commend the four Native organizations highlighted in this report for leading efforts in their communities to reclaim, revitalize and share traditional knowledge systems. First Nations hopes that the information presented here will assist tribes, Native organizations and their philanthropic partners' efforts in supporting Native American community intellectuals.
First Nations Development Institute
2432 Main Street, 2nd Floor • Longmont, Colorado 80501
Tel 303.774.7836 • www.firstnation.org