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COVID-19 Emergency Response and Resiliency Fund September 2020

First Nations Development Institute's COVID-19 Emergency Response and Resiliency Fund makes grants to Native American-controlled nonprofit organizations and tribes in rural and urban areas to help meet urgent daily needs (including food, clean water, and personal safety) and longer-term economic and cultural resiliency related to the pandemic.

What COVID-19 Means for Native Communities

Systemic inequities compound Native American communities' susceptibility to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- With health already compromised by high rates of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and other chronic illnesses, Native peoples are a seriously at-risk population. According to an August 2020 report released by the Centers for Disease Control, Native Americans are contracting COVID-19 at a rate greater than 3.5 times that of White people.¹
- 13% of Native American homes² lack safe drinking water and proper wastewater disposal, creating conditions in which recommended sanitary standards cannot be maintained.
- 16% of homes in tribal areas are overcrowded³ and multigenerational, making social distancing impossible.
- Food shortages and the logistics of accessing food will further threaten the health and resilience of Native families. One out of 12 Native individuals is so food insecure as to be classified as hungry.⁴ American Indians have the highest food insecurity in the U.S., and Native households with children have a food insecurity rate of 28% compared to 16% for non-Natives.⁵ An overlay of the USDA Food Deserts Locator map with Native communities shows a marked absence of retail supermarkets, meaning that healthy and fresh food is not easily accessible for Native people.⁶
- The Indian Health Service (IHS) – the primary health care provider for 2.5 million American Indians and Alaska Natives – is chronically underfunded.
- The lack of leadership and coordination by the federal government with Native nations has delayed tribal access to much-needed relief funds.

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6934e1.htm?s_cid=mm6934e1_w

² Retrieved from: <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/616.html>

³ Retrieved from: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-research-022117.html>

⁴ Henchy, G., Cheung, M., & Weill, J. (2000). *WIC in Native American communities: Building a healthier America – Report summary*. Food Research and Action Center. Washington, DC.

⁵ Gunderson C. (2008). Measuring the extent, depth, and severity of food insecurity: an application to American Indians in the USA. *Journal of Population and Economics*. 21: 191-215

⁶ Retrieved from: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>



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- Closed tribal gaming operations that fund much-needed services for tribal members are creating economic emergencies as unemployment – and the resulting demand for social services – will rise to new heights.
- With many Native businesses closed, scholars at the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development estimate a \$50 billion loss in economic activity in Native communities.
- There is a serious lack of philanthropic funding directed to Native-led organizations and tribal programs. First Nations' report, *Growing Inequity: Large Foundation Giving to Native American Organizations and Causes - 2006-2014*, found a 29% decline (\$35 million) in grants to Native organizations and causes from large philanthropic foundations from 2006 to 2014.

In short, we anticipate history repeating itself, as the effect of COVID-19 could mirror the devastating pandemics that decimated Native populations upon colonization.

For Native communities, we are looking not only at potentially tragic death tolls but also the irreplaceable loss of tribal elders who are the keepers of traditional knowledge, tribal cultures and lifeways, and Native languages.

Needs Identified by Community Leaders

First Nations' September 2020 report, *The Native Nonprofit Sector and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Charting a Path Forward*, highlights findings from a survey of nearly 300 Native community-based organizations that are responding to the pandemic. Among the survey findings:

- 69% of Native nonprofits expect to see a revenue decrease as a result of COVID-19. 43% of respondents expect to see a decrease of 25% or greater.
- Most Native nonprofits anticipate seeing the greatest impacts of COVID-19 in greater than three months.
- 35% of Native nonprofits believe they will have to reduce their staff size.
- Native nonprofits cite the need for general operating grants, personal protective equipment (PPE) and technology to help meet operational and programmatic needs.

Moving forward, survey respondents articulated the need for:

- General operating support, with unrestricted dollars critical to helping Native communities rebuild post COVID-19.
- Technology, equipment, and training on best practices for virtual operations.
- Funding to help youth and elders cope with the mental health effects of COVID-19.
- PPE to help keep staff and clients safe.
- Adequate Internet and broadband access.
- A commitment from philanthropic institutions to 1) combat systemic inequities that continue to directly affect Native communities such as access to water, quality housing,



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technological infrastructure, and direct strategies for community and economic development to improve the wellbeing of Native citizens; 2) commit to funding Native-led organizations; and 3) commit to general operating and multi-year support.

How We Help

First Nations' Emergency Response and Resiliency Fund ensures that Native nonprofits and tribal programs have resources to rise to the occasion and coordinate access to services, supplies, and with other local service providers and state agencies. Funds support:

- **Staff Employment** for Native nonprofit organizations that are on the front lines of providing vital services in their communities.
- **Communications Equipment and Technology** for working and providing services virtually.
- **Continued Critical Services** such as homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, veterans support, healthcare providers, food banks, etc. -- to meet community needs.
- **Pandemic Response** to coordinate with local service providers and state agencies to access services, supplies, and protective equipment for community members.
- **Strengthening Cultural Connectedness and Addressing Mental Health Issues** among youth and elders who experience isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Economic Relief** for individuals and local businesses to promote long-term recovery that will save jobs.
- **Capacity Building and Leadership Development** to support sustainable and effective programs and organizations.
- **Advocacy Training** to enhance Native access to philanthropic funding that will help to address community needs.

Current priorities are in high-concentration areas – Arizona, California, New Mexico, New York, the Pacific Northwest, and other COVID-19 hotspots.

All grantee partners meet First Nations' eligibility standard of being a tribe, Native-run nonprofit organization, or Native community group. Grant recipients and sizes (ranging from \$5,000 to \$75,000) are determined by First Nations' senior staff familiar with the potential grantees.

First Nations' efficient and easy grantmaking process delivers these funds quickly to where they are most needed.

Because of First Nations' long history and effectiveness as a grantmaker and our deep connectivity with grassroots and grass tops Indian communities, we have a key role to play in ensuring that philanthropic efforts reach Indian Country constituents, who are often invisible or an afterthought in times like these.



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What Else Can Funders Do to Support Native Communities

1. If you have existing relationships with Native communities, reach out and ask how you can support them directly.
2. If you have existing grant relationships with Native organizations and communities, ask these communities if they need current program-restricted grants converted to general operating grants to support relief and resiliency efforts.
3. If you have the resources, give new general operating grants to Native communities especially those most effected by the current pandemic. Almost all Native communities will also be affected by the economic crisis gripping our country, so will need additional support.
4. Elevate Native voices. Share articles with your colleagues about how this pandemic and economic crisis are affecting Native communities.

Learn More

Though information about COVID-19 is readily available in most areas, for Indian Country, access to news is dependent on already strapped tribal governments, independent journalists and the handful of Native news outlets diligently trying to push reliable news out. Here are a few links to News articles highlighting COVID-19 and Native communities.

- [Covid-19 incidence more than triple among Native Americans, new CDC report says](#)
- [The COVID-19 hit to Indian Country is nearly \\$50 billion](#)
- [The Native Nonprofit Sector and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Charting a Path Forward](#)
- [Coronavirus total sees 20 new cases](#)
- [Workers battle coronavirus — and jini — at epicenter](#)
- [List of infected grows; PPE supply dwindles](#)
- [Rep. Tom Cole: Fighting an invisible enemy](#)
- [Indian Health Service works to distribute more coronavirus funding to tribes as cases continue to grow](#)
- [Kevin Abourezk: Indian Country can't be left behind in coronavirus crisis](#)
- [Trump administration moves slowly on coronavirus funding for Indian Country](#)
- [Tribal leaders face great need and don't have enough resources to respond to the coronavirus pandemic](#)
- [The US Has Neglected Indian Country for Years. Now Comes a Pandemic](#)
- [How the coronavirus threatens Native American communities](#)
- [Emergency coronavirus funds for American Indian health stalled](#)
- [Tribes take measures to slow spread of new coronavirus](#)



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- ['Timing is critical': Native Americans warn virus may overwhelm underfunded health services](#)
- [Native American tribes brace for coronavirus: 'It's going to be a test'](#)
- [As Schools Close Amid Coronavirus Concerns, the Digital Divide Leaves Some Students Behind](#)

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Please feel free to share this document with others who may want to participate in pandemic relief and resiliency for Native communities.