



FIRST NATIONS  
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

Searching for Inclusion in Philanthropy

# A Guide to Equitable Practices in Foundation Hiring



# Acknowledgements



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The cover image, “Remember our Grandfathers,” was provided by Ojibwa artist Gordon Coons. “Remember the Grandfathers” is made with 100% duct tape and portrays a Lac Courte Oreilles elder in a pop-art style as a new way to look at our past. For more information on Gordon Coons and his artwork, please visit <https://www.gordoncoons.com>.

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# Introduction



Study after study confirms a stark reality: the field of philanthropy remains predominantly white. The Council on Foundations research notes that over 75% of U.S. foundation staff are white.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, according to the D5 Coalition, 92% of foundation CEOs, 84% of executive staff, and 87% of foundation boards are white.<sup>2</sup> While communities push philanthropic institutions to be more diverse, equitable, and inclusive in all aspects of their operations—including hiring practices, board recruitment, and giving—philanthropy has largely resisted, and measures of meaningful change have been elusive. Consequently, Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities continue to be minimized in foundation giving portfolios and invisible within the hiring and board compositions of U.S. foundations.

This study examines hiring practices of U.S. foundations as they relate to the hiring of Native Americans. Today, there are fewer than 35 Native people who control giving portfolios at private foundations. The majority of these individuals have Native-specific giving portfolios. The best data available suggests that Native people inside private foundations make up less than one-half of one percent of all foundation staff.<sup>3</sup>

**75%**

of U.S.  
foundation  
staff are  
white

**92%**

of U.S.  
foundation  
CEOs are  
white

**87%**

of U.S.  
foundation  
boards are  
white

## Native American, American Indian, Native or Indigenous?

All these terms are used to describe the First Peoples of what is today called the United States. The Native American Journalists Association notes that the term *Native American* gained traction in the 1960s for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Over time, Native American has been expanded to include all Native people of the continental United States and some in Alaska. While Native American and American Indian can be used interchangeably, these terms are used only to describe groups of two or more individuals of different tribal affiliation. Most Native people would be preferred to be identified by their tribal affiliation.

*Indigenous peoples* is a term used internationally and is another term used to describe groups of people who inhabited a country or a geographical region prior to colonization.<sup>4</sup>

1. Council on Foundations, *State of Change, The State of Change: An Analysis of Women and People of Color in the Philanthropic Sector*, 2017, <https://www.cof.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/2017-Gender-Diversity-Report.pdf>. (accessed June 2020).
2. D5 Coalition, *State of the Work 2014: Tackling the Tough Challenges to Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, 2014. <http://www.d5coalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/State-of-the-Work-2014-FINAL.pdf>. (accessed June 2020). D5 Coalition. *State of the Work 2015: Stories from the Movement to Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, 2016. <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/24194/24194.pdf>. (accessed June 2020).
3. Council on Foundations, *State of Change*.
4. For more information, see the Native American Journalists Association: <https://najanewsroom.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NAJA-Reporting-and-Indigenous-Terminology-Guide.pdf>

*The lack of diversity in the hiring and employment practices of philanthropic institutions has been directly linked to underinvestment in communities of color.*

Without diverse people around the table and in charge of giving portfolios, it is harder to implement systems of giving that are inclusive of these communities. The absence of people of color within philanthropic institutions trivializes and dismisses the knowledge, lived experiences, and innovative solutions that these individuals bring to the social issues that confront their communities.

As the previously mentioned data shows, Native people within philanthropies are particularly underrepresented. This invisibility has a direct impact on philanthropic foundations' relationship with Native communities and support of Native community-based work. For example, research shows that foundations' support of Native-led community change is small and volatile, declining in times of crisis and needing years to rebound.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, our research suggests that the lack of support for Native-led community organizations is driven by lack of relationships, misinformation, bias, and stereotypes.<sup>6</sup>

But hiring is only part of the problem. Once hired, Native people working at U.S. foundations report feeling tokenized, undervalued, and lacking in opportunities for advancement.<sup>7</sup> These Native people are also often burnt out by having to act as the experts on all things Indigenous as they are called on as historians, social experts, and cultural and linguistic translators. Many Native people employed by U.S. foundations are hired for specialized Native-focused programs and feel they have very little opportunity to contribute to larger conversations within foundations about strategy, community engagement, and other activities. Overall, Native people who work at U.S. foundations report feeling privileged and fortunate to be able to direct resources to Native communities (and beyond). But they also often feel exhausted in having to maneuver within white-dominated institutions where they are not valued as their full and authentic selves.

Many Native people currently working in private foundations report that their path to their current positions did not come from search firm recruitment. Many also report that they are not readily called on as a resource by search firms to tap their networks for open positions. Cumulatively, these data tell us that there is much work to be done by search firms to fully recognize the talent of Native leaders and the value they can add to diverse work environments.

We believe that Native people offer a wealth of knowledge to philanthropy at large. Thus, for philanthropic organizations to move toward greater inclusion and justice, they must hire and promote more Native people, including in top leadership positions of strategic decision-making. Philanthropy at large must integrate, demystify, and change hiring practices to ensure greater Native American representation. We acknowledge that this is a complicated and complex call to action, but we hope this report catalyzes conversations within foundations and search firms on hiring practices as they relate to Native American people.

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5. First Nations Development Institute, *Growing Inequity: Large Foundation Giving to Native American Organizations and Causes, 2006-2014*, 2018. <https://www.firstnations.org/publications/growing-inequity-large-foundation-giving-to-native-american-organizations-and-causes-2006-2014/>. (accessed June 2020).
  6. First Nations Development Institute, *Community Foundation Giving to Native American Causes*, 2018. <https://www.firstnations.org/publications/community-foundation-giving-to-native-american-causes/>. (accessed June 2020).
  7. These criticisms of people of color working in philanthropy are not unique to Native people. Similar experiences have been identified by other people of color. See for example, Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy, *Dissonance & Disconnects: How entry and mid-level foundation staff see their futures, their institutions, and their field*, 2018. [https://www.epip.org/dissonance\\_disconnects](https://www.epip.org/dissonance_disconnects). (accessed June 2020). Also see, Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE), *The Exit Interview: Perceptions on Why Black Professionals Leave Grantmaking Institutions*, 2015. <https://www.abfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ABFE-The-Exit-Interview.pdf>. (accessed June 2020).

## Research Process

At the beginning of this project, we acknowledged the difficulty in understanding why so few Native people are hired by private foundations. We know that unpacking foundation hiring practices is an extremely difficult task, and compiling consistent and reliable data on how any institution engages in hiring and the talent pools they access is complicated. Therefore, we had to consider the different pathways to employment within U.S. foundations. After weighing research strategies, we decided to interview talent search firms<sup>8</sup> to better understand hiring processes and practices of philanthropic institutions.

Within this context, our research team explored current processes around recruitment and hiring by interviewing staff at four search firms with experience in nonprofit and foundation searches and recruiting for public charities and private or operating foundations. It should be noted that only one firm interviewed had direct experience placing a Native candidate at a foundation or public charity.

### We selected these firms based on the following criteria:

1. Experience in conducting foundation searches.
2. A public-facing statement and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).
3. A recommendation by trusted colleagues in philanthropic-serving organizations, along with experience in diverse candidate recruitment.

This research is neither endorsement nor condemnation of search firms and their role in foundation hiring. Rather, it is intended to be an innovative and practical interrogation of foundation hiring process and practices. Philanthropic institutions may call on search firms because they do not have the capacity to manage hiring themselves, they want to expand outreach to diverse candidate pools, or they want to build organizational capacity around hiring diverse candidates. In sum, search firms offer a significant pathway to recruitment into the ranks of philanthropic institutions. In this role, search firms can be an important part of breaking down barriers to inclusion for Native people seeking leadership positions in philanthropy.

Critics of search firms argue that they perpetuate the status quo of philanthropic hiring, tapping into narrow and insular elitist networks. Critics also suggest that the use of search firms allows foundations to sidestep their own commitment to increasing diversity and inclusion by throwing money at the problem and using outside consultants rather than intentionally building their internal capacity. Our research does find that many search firms struggle with recruiting and placing Native, Black and people of color. The research team could not identify any Native-owned search firms that focused on foundation searches. The search firms we interviewed varied in size from 11 employees to over 6,000. This gave us perspective on practices of both small boutique search firms and large international search firms.

28

median  
search firm  
age

1,025

median search  
firm  
employees

12

search firm  
employees  
interviewed

*All firms had a public-facing statement on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)*

8. Search firms are also sometimes referred to as talent acquisition firms in the industry. Given its premise that talent is a commodity, it is language that one firm said it was committed to moving away from, as it doesn't include the concept of agency (that of candidates), talent development, and mission alignment.

All the firms interviewed were eager to offer advice and recommendations to contribute to our core goals for this brief, which are to:

**Demystify the Recruitment Process:**

The authors hope to ensure that foundations, candidates, and search firms have equal knowledge of and a basic framework for the search process. Transparency is the cornerstone of equitable hiring practice.

**Share Effective Practices in the Field:**

The authors present practical strategies and tools that can lead to increasing the number of Native people working in philanthropy, which has the power to change foundation investment strategies and ensure that Native people and communities are included, seen, and heard. We believe that change is possible with a little intention.

## Discovery and Job Description

The search process begins when a search firm meets with its client or hiring organization to better understand the culture of the organization and the position it is tasked with filling. This is referred to as the discovery stage, in which the search firm reviews internal and external documentation (e.g., strategic plans, department goals, organizational charts), interviews key players, and creates the job description. Most of the firms interviewed for this project stated that they see themselves as counselors or guides for ensuring that the entire process is viewed through an equity lens. For example, job descriptions can be significant barriers to Native candidates if the language used is unwelcoming or exclusionary.

During this stage, the search firm has an opportunity to introduce DEI concepts and coach an organization to address hiring biases. For instance, a search firm may point out socioeconomic bias if the job description requires an advanced degree when the same knowledge could be learned through past job experiences or other means.

## Effective Practice

Key questions for organizations to ask:

1. Are advanced degrees needed or can this knowledge or skill be acquired another way?
2. Is this skill a must-have to be hired, or can the candidate receive training or coaching to acquire it?
3. Is previous experience in grantmaking necessary, or can this be learned on the job through coaching and through professional associations?
4. If a candidate has previous experience in grantmaking, is the size of the portfolio they previously managed a dealbreaker?
5. What are our priorities in this job description? Are our descriptions so extensive and packed with requirements that viable candidates may self-select out before we even get a chance to engage with them?
6. Does the description use unnecessary jargon? Certain terms and phrases can create barriers in the search process.

# Centering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the Search Process



Each firm conceptualized, structured, and operationalized DEI differently within their organization and search processes. Some firms had designated departments or personnel responsible for research, learning, and candidate management around DEI while others embedded DEI practices throughout all aspects of their processes. These designations yielded different discussions surrounding approach, process, and perceived success in recruiting and placing candidates from underrepresented communities, especially Native candidates. Most firms acknowledged that their DEI work is constantly evolving based on their own learning.

We encourage all organizations and candidates to inquire about DEI models and processes when considering a search firm. Every firm we spoke with underwent unconscious bias training, incorporated some sort of blind<sup>9</sup> element into the interview process, and shared some internal staff education (e.g., book club, topic-driven lunch, firm-wide knowledge session). The difference between firms, then, comes from how they apply these DEI learnings to shape their search processes. Search firms that had an organization-wide learning agenda were less likely to have one person shoulder the DEI processes, instead distributing the learnings throughout the entire organization.

**When working with search firms, here are some questions organizations should ask:**

1. How expansive and embedded is your DEI approach?
2. How does the approach go beyond seeking a diverse selection pool?
3. How is DEI moved from addendum to ***center*** of the process?

## How DEI Informs the Search Process

### No More Unicorns: Moving from Individual Characteristics to Mission

The job of a search firm is to understand why DEI is important to a prospective client. Search firms that participated said they encourage their teams to move DEI out of individual characteristics and align it with the organization's mission. These firms noted that such an approach helps guard against tokenism and/or a "check the box" attitude toward DEI. Shifting the focus to mission alignment pushes clients to understand the impact of DEI on their organization, rather than relying on one individual to represent the organization's diversity efforts.

Moving DEI efforts beyond the individual also challenges organizations to shift from the "unicorn effect," the unfair and unrealistic expectation that candidates from underrepresented groups must possess a set of unreasonable skills and characteristics to satisfy the organization's DEI "checklist." When DEI is based on individual characteristics rather than mission alignment, search efforts can perpetuate barriers that prevent some candidates from moving beyond a token hire.

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9. *Blind* in this context means removal of identifying information that could be subject to bias (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity).

Pro-tip: Challenge institutions and firms that make candidates unicorns, tokens, or boxes to be checked off a list.

## Creating Connections: Search Pools and the Recruitment Market

So-called “pipeline issues”<sup>10</sup> are an oft-mentioned barrier for search firms. In fact, philanthropic fellowships have been created to perpetuate the myth that qualified people of color do not exist or that people of color need more training to fill positions in philanthropy. There are many, many talented and experienced Native people who are content experts in broad and diverse areas of work.

Prospective candidate lists are often provided by networks that are small, monolithic, and repetitive, many of which offer few entry points for newcomers. One firm explained:

*“Search is elitist in general because we ask the leaders of organizations who they think are good leaders, and the cycle repeats itself.”*

But there are ways in which search firms are pushing back against the inherent bias and exclusion of established search networks. These firms made the following suggestions:

1. *Know that representation matters.* As one firm put it: “Our diversity of search pools has increased as our internal diversity increases. There is a level of trust with people who will give us names because they trust that we will be respectful and non-transactional.”

In sum, the diversity of search firms and their teams matters in terms of accessing wider, deeper networks within underrepresented groups. Without a diverse search team, a firm is more likely to perpetuate elitist, closed networks. Given that there are currently no Native-led search firms, search firms themselves should hire Native consultants and advisors.

2. *Build a strong internal research strategy.* Search firms interviewed used their knowledge of the structural barriers that impede the inclusion of underrepresented groups to inform their research strategy. Firms researched new ways to raise awareness of their position openings, identify underutilized affinity groups, and uncover bias and coded language in the way positions were advertised.
3. *Connect with connectors.* Search firms spent time to build relationships with “connectors” of different communities who have bridged the gap between philanthropy and other sectors. One firm stated, “This is the first step of access. We post in key outlets, and we think about where opportunities are for people to see the posting. We are looking not only for up-and-coming talent but also for those who are not looking because this arena may have been closed off to them previously.”
4. *Disaggregate!* Only one search firm discussed a process of disaggregating search pool data. This provided the firm with high-quality information and afforded it precision in understanding placements and identifying areas where it needed more inclusion and representation. Inequities can only be addressed and eliminated through increased understanding of accurate and detailed data.

10. Words matter. While a commonly used term, *pipeline* is problematic. It is extractive and especially offensive to Native people as Indigenous communities fight against actual pipelines invading their lands. The reality is that this kind of terminology assigns “blame” to candidates rather than acknowledging that there are significant and systemic hiring issues (e.g., access, support, training) within diverse sectors and industries, including philanthropy.

Disaggregation of data is extremely important. All employers should be able to discuss the racial, ethnic and gender composition of their staff, boards, members, and volunteers. Across many sectors, employers include white women as “diversity hires.”<sup>11</sup> But we know that the effects of race, ethnicity, and gender creates a “double burden” in the workplace for women of color in terms of barriers to hiring and promotion.<sup>12</sup> Thus, search firms and foundations need to disaggregate data to get a clear and accurate picture of a firm's history in hiring people of color.

Pro Tip: Represent, connect, disaggregate!

11. For examples, see: Blanche, “Diversity in Tech Too Often Means ‘Hiring White Women.’ We Need to Move beyond That,” *Vox*, December 20, 2016. <https://www.vox.com/2016/12/20/14013610/gender-diversity-women-race-age-geography-initiative>. (accessed June 2020).  
Cross and Braswell, “A Data-Driven Approach to Hiring More Diverse Talent,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 20, 2019. <https://hbr.org/2019/12/why-isnt-your-organization-isnt-hiring-diverse-talent> (accessed June 2020).  
Tulshyan, “Do Your Diversity Efforts Reflect the Experiences of Women of Color?,” *Harvard Business Review*, July 1, 2019. <https://hbr.org/2019/07/do-your-diversity-efforts-reflect-the-experiences-of-women-of-color?registration=success> (accessed June 2020).  
Reid, “What Happens When White Women Become The Face Of Diversity,” *Forbes Magazine*, February 20, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maryannreid/2020/02/18/what-happens-when-white-women-become-the-face-of-diversity/#4e96b02f287d> (accessed June 2020).
12. For examples, see: Fisher, “Women of Color and the Gender Wage Gap,” Center for American Progress, April 14, 2015. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2015/04/14/110962/women-of-color-and-the-gender-wage-gap/> (accessed June 2020).  
Maura Cheeks, “How Black Women Describe Navigating Race and Gender in the Workplace,” *Harvard Business Review*, March 26, 2018. <https://hbr.org/2018/03/how-black-women-describe-navigating-race-and-gender-in-the-workplace> (accessed June 2020).

## Building the Candidate Pool

Search firms use many tools and strategies to build a candidate pool, such as LinkedIn Recruiter, referrals from leaders in the field and associations, and client referrals. Unfortunately, this approach is built on the premise that all candidates have the same access to social capital and networks, which is not the case. Here are a few suggestions to increase the number of Native people in a candidate pool:

- Build intentional, lasting partnerships with leaders at Native-controlled nonprofits and professional associations across the U.S. They have strong networks in Native communities and organizations and can lead you to an abundance of talent.
- Post positions in Native-run media outlets such as *Indian Country Today* and *Indianz.com*. Such listings both encourage potential candidates and let communities know you are serious about DEI.
- Connect with faculty and staff at the nation’s 37 tribal colleges and universities. They have job boards, alumni associations, and electronic newsletters.
- Reach out to Native American programs at mainstream colleges and universities.

## Effective Practices

- Search firms can expand their networks and demonstrate their commitment to DEI by offering training for people of color on the search process and how to work successfully with recruiters.
- The Bush Foundation offers a webinar for every job opening in an effort to increase transparency and answer questions from prospective applicants. They also make public the salary for every position to promote pay equity.

## Coaching for Clients and Candidates

One of the barriers to advancing DEI in the search process is showing preference for candidates with philanthropic experience, especially those who present that experience in a particular way. Firms with a deeper understanding of these barriers offered coaching to clients as well as candidates. Clients would often call on these firms to offer implicit bias training or coaching on language to be used in interviews or job descriptions. Firms also coached their clients on different ways to interpret a resume that was less traditional or lacked philanthropic experience.

For underrepresented candidates—those who are unconventional or new to the search process—a few search firms offered prep calls. They, in effect, bridged the resources gap so that candidates could have access to what they need to be competitive in their interview. This coaching can be ad hoc, pro bono, or a direct part of the job. As one firm stated:

*“We make the time—and it is effectively volunteer time—to help do this work and help candidates who need a little extra support to manage executive positions. We see it almost as a sense of responsibility on the part of the firm to prep those candidates who have had less experience interacting with search firms. We also did calls with those who did not make it so [that] they got concrete feedback. We try to provide support and feedback all the way through.”*

Across the firms interviewed, approaches to coaching ranged from strategic and well-designed to paternalistic.

**Pro Tip:** Those who can, coach! Use your knowledge to bridge resource and knowledge gaps on both sides of the process.

## Listening Differently

A few firms incorporated new techniques to translating resumes (to be discussed in a later section). These firms coached clients on how to interpret non-traditional/non-philanthropic work experience and also considered cultural ways of communicating achievements and skills. One firm said, “As a team, [we] had to listen differently and hear differently those aspects of [non-traditional candidates’] lives and find a way to put that in their resumes... then offer coaching.”

## Sharing Learnings with the Field

A few firms have been part of the knowledge generation for incorporating DEI into the search process. These firms have been invited to publish, speak on panels, and train firms, clients, and prospective candidates on new ways to look for recruits as well as best practices for embedding DEI in processes. The findings here are tips, tools, and approaches we learned that directly affect candidate pools. Most search firms are leading the way in developing new approaches to increase the representation of excluded groups within philanthropy. The best search firms we interviewed worked with clients to dissect and unpack individual and organizational biases that appear in hiring processes, sought out and coached “nontraditional” candidates, and shared their broader lessons with the field.

# Placing Native American Candidates: Perceptions and Practices



The majority of firms we interviewed had no experience placing Native American candidates. The single firm that did have experience had placed fewer than five candidates over its organizational tenure. It is important to note that many of the larger firms we spoke with do not disaggregate their candidates but lump all people of color together and, in some cases, even combine their count with that of white women. This makes it difficult to understand the strengths, weaknesses, and overall representation of their networks. Furthermore, despite having entire departments devoted to research and development of diverse networks, many firms were paralyzed by their lack of knowledge of Native communities and causes. Our respondents were high-functioning but struggled to be proactive and intentional about inclusion of qualified Native candidates.

## Perceptions

Given that many of the firms had no experience with Indigenous communities, we asked them about their perceptions of Native Americans in the field to shed light on the possible reasons that Native Americans are absent from the search process.

### Location, Relocation, Location

We found many assumptions and lack of understanding around where Native Americans live, their ties to their “homelands,” and challenges to relocating for a job. Several firms were surprised to learn that many Native Americans do not live on reservations.

Native Americans fall outside of the rural/urban divide in philanthropy, as rural is often code for poor and white and urban for poor and Black or brown.

The search firms we interviewed acknowledged that the hardest part of their job is relocating people for their placements. For Native people, the issue of potentially moving for a job highlighted interesting assumptions about Native candidates. Most all firms assumed some level of difficulty in relocating Native American candidates. They have heard from individuals or other sources that Native American people are more tied to their communities, and thus they assumed that Native candidates would be unwilling to relocate. Search firm recruiters also expressed discomfort about “pulling” Native people away from their communities.

The majority of search firms noted that relocation tends to be a significant consideration for all people of color they place. In other words, it is not necessarily an elevated consideration for Native candidates. Since the majority of foundations are often located in less diverse locations and are white-dominated institutions, people of color tend to think more critically about the significant life-changing prospects of relocation. But the increase in remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity for search firms and foundations to embrace employees working remotely.

## Skills to Pay the Bills

The skills and values of Native Americans are often assumed to translate poorly to the philanthropic sector. As is the case in American society on the whole, many in philanthropy are not familiar with Native communities, histories, cultures, or practices. For example, our research under the Reclaiming Native Truth project shows that the majority of Americans have very little factual knowledge about Native American people and communities,<sup>13</sup> and the same is true for people who work within philanthropy.<sup>14</sup> Native leaders report that search firms often perceive their experiences as “less than,” trivializing their skills and abilities because their previous work took place exclusively in Indian Country. Search firms confirm that they and/or their foundation clients are often asked if Native candidates can actually do work outside of their local community (or outside of Indian Country).

Some Native leaders have noted that leadership in their communities looks very different from standard hierarchical and punitive work spaces that often show up in mainstream behavioral leadership assessments. These leaders suggest that search firms and their foundation clients may have a hard time understanding the more relational workplaces that operate in Native communities.

Additionally, “philanthro-speak” seeps into many hiring processes, creating artificial barriers for Native candidates. If a candidate does not have a mastery of jargon and other insider language, then they may be deemed “not a good fit” for positions when actually familiarity with this language is non-essential.

In some cases, there was a perception that Native candidates may not have the necessary skills to “fit” in philanthropy. This may be an indicator of a misalignment around the perceived value of community-based work of Native leaders.

As stated previously, firms with success placing Native American candidates spent more time with candidates to “listen differently,” finding ways to communicate candidates’ achievements and skills and translate non-traditional or non-philanthropic work experiences into their resumes. The firm stated, “We built up our sensitivity in order to offer cultural support.”

## Fundraising and Donors

Many of the perceptions around the absence of Native Americans in search processes echoed the larger barriers that underrepresented candidates must overcome in applying for executive positions of donation-based public charities. Those making hiring decisions assume that candidates of color do not have access to high-net-worth networks or deep donor pools, and that they lack the ability to develop these networks. These assumptions omit candidates of color from many C-suite or executive level manager positions at public charities.

**Pro Tip:** In building your candidate pool, do not make assumptions about the communities in which you seek to recruit. Don’t be paralyzed, be proactive! Learn more about unfamiliar communities to expand your candidate pool.

13. First Nations Development Institute and Echohawk Consulting, “Reclaiming Native Truth: Research Findings: Compilation of All Research,” 2018, <https://rnt.firstnations.org/>. (accessed June 2020).

14. First Nations Development Institute. We Need to Change How We Think: Perspectives on Philanthropy’s Underfunding of Native Communities and Causes, 2018, <https://www.firstnations.org/publications/we-need-to-change-how-we-think-perspectives-on-philanthropys-underfunding-of-native-communities-and-causes/>. (accessed June 2020).

## Practices

Great preparation is often informed by the barriers that can derail a process or perpetuate a negative or predictable outcome. The search process is no different. Before beginning the interview process, firms and clients must adjust for biases in the search process and within philanthropy as a whole. These adjustments help build the most diverse pool of applicants possible and create an inclusive process that will hopefully yield more equitable results.

Each firm shared the internal preparations it incorporated as a way to hold itself accountable to DEI goals while pushing its clients to do the same.

### Understanding Biases: Who is Leading the Search Process?

It is important to understand who is leading the search process, both within the search firm and on the client side. In our interviews, we found that firms with the longest records of placing candidates from underrepresented groups were those who articulated a consistent learning agenda, underwent continuous trainings, disaggregated their search portfolios by demographic characteristics (e.g., race, gender, geography), and had someone at the leadership level spearheading DEI-based strategies. Firms with a robust DEI learning and implementation agenda are more likely to be equipped to offer coaching and training to their clients to effectively incorporate a DEI lens for their own staff and search committees. Such training can be on implicit bias or language used during the process, such as in interviews or job descriptions.

For example, one firm shared that if a Native candidate has deep experience with Native communities and groups, a search committee will ask if the candidate can pivot to work with a broader diversity of people. For this firm, this question can signal bias:

*“The issue is, does that question get asked in the same manner of white candidates? [We are] trying to help committees navigate how to ask that question of all candidates in a way that gets to how all of them can pivot their experiences working with a broad diversity of communities regardless of their personal race or ethnicity....The bias that traditionally white institutions have against candidates of color who have been very steeped in working in one community—it’s like a double-edged sword.”*

On the organization/client side, it is important for search firms to understand who is leading the process and their motivation to incorporate a DEI lens. Broaching the DEI conversation with clients can ensure that the DEI process isn’t a box to check or a quota system. Similarly, search firms can steer organizations away from the tendencies to have unrealistic expectations of a candidate from an underrepresented group or assign one person on the committee “the DEI stuff” rather than incorporating a DEI lens throughout the process.

**Pro Tip: Invest in a learning agenda.**

- Invest in ongoing training and learning agendas to broaden and deepen knowledge about the barriers to diversifying search processes.
- Remember that diversity of the hiring committee matters. Ensure diverse representation on all foundation hiring committees.
- Ask yourself: How am I understanding my bias training and who is keeping me accountable?
- Have deliberate conversations about the committee's biases before the interview process begins. Encourage the whole committee to take the implicit bias test <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/> created by psychologists at Harvard, the University of Virginia, and the University of Washington to measure unconscious bias.

**Hiring with DEI in Mind: Firm Selection**

Hiring the right search firm can lead to expanding the reach and diversity of a foundation's networks, including into Native communities. Some questions for foundations to ask when hiring search firms include:

- Does the search firm make a public statement on its commitment to DEI?
- Are you expanding outside your typical networks of search firms? How are you tracking the vendors you use? What percentage of the firms that your foundation contracts with are led by people of color? How are you publicizing opportunities?

- What is the makeup of the search firm's staff and leadership? A search firm's ability to reach diverse networks is related to the diversity of their recruiters. If the firm is committed to DEI, it will be reflected in their staff and leadership.
- Does the firm have references from successfully placed candidates of color? How do those candidates feel they were treated throughout the process?
- Does the search firm assess its own performance? What does it currently do to place Native people across all its searches? How often are Native candidates in a final selection pool? Ask for disaggregated data on past placements. If Native people are not included in the data sets, ask why.
- How does the firm check its own biases? Ask for examples of what the firm has learned over time and what changes and improvements have been made to its processes.
- What type of education is the search firm doing with its own staff to better understand how to build meaningful and intentional partnerships that could result in placements of Native people in key philanthropic positions?

While answers to these questions may not be deal breakers when it comes to hiring a firm, we all benefit if foundations and search firms share the responsibility of raising awareness and asking for accountability in increasing the number of Native people working in philanthropy.

## Storytelling vs. Resume

Many search firms have incorporated a narrative-focused approach to reviewing a candidate's qualifications with their clients. This approach allows search firms to tell the "entire story" of the candidate rather than merely focusing on outputs. It also prevents bias in the interpretation of certain skill sets and backgrounds by translating the candidate's skill sets for the client. Storytelling is especially useful in translating skill sets of candidates who do not have philanthropic experience. Search firms have seen candidates rise to prominence who would have otherwise been overlooked had they presented traditional resumes.

*"The narrative approach can be transformative for the hiring committee and can lift a candidate to prominence who may have otherwise been missed."*

Like many sectors, philanthropy favors a certain set of skills, experiences, and educational opportunities, presented in a specific way, to predetermine whether a candidate is qualified. The bias in these selection frameworks often prevents candidates from underrepresented groups from being viewed as viable when in fact they are qualified—or even overqualified—for a position.

For example, one search firm explained that it needed to clarify extensive misinformation and misperceptions about the complexity of a prospective candidate's tribal governance experience. The candidate did not have a master's degree in public policy but instead offered a wealth of direct experience navigating the layered political landscape of their tribal community, including tribal, state, and federal policy. The firm translated the complexity of the candidate's experiences so that the hiring organization could understand how the candidate was indeed a fit for a senior role.

*There is not a "pathways" issue of qualified candidates but rather a need to address the inherent bias that limits the pool of applicants tremendously.*

Pro tip: Narrative is a necessity.

1. Learn to translate skills through a narrative-centered approach.
2. Promote the inclusion of different ways to communicate rather than focusing on a western, output-based approach.

## Communicating Your DEI Approach

If DEI is important to a foundation or public charity, every candidate should be given the opportunity during the interview process to learn about the organization's DEI approach. Candidates should also be given the opportunity to express their hopes, fears, experiences, and expectations of the ways in which DEI will be operationalized within their work.

Pro tip: Search firms and clients can work together on developing questions that reflect a commitment to DEI for all candidates.

Here are some suggestions for doing so:

- First, discuss how your foundation or organization takes on DEI work internally.
- Then, ask questions related to the candidate's expectations around an inclusive workplace: What has their experience been with inclusive workplaces? What do they hope to gain professionally from a workplace that promotes DEI? Probe and ask for examples of challenges or progress made.

## Negotiations

During the negotiation process, we encountered a lot of conversation about pay equity. Some search firms had clients who refused to discuss any salary amount with candidates other than what was posted, while others educated both clients and candidates on the market, current salaries of various positions, and optics around mishandling offers.

**Effective Questions:** Both search firms and foundations clients should ask themselves:

- What are we doing to ensure or further pay equity with new hires?
- Do we share salary ranges of the current position? Is the salary based on the salary range of current employees in similar positions or a salary survey?
- How do our recruitment and hiring processes perpetuate pay inequities?

## Onboarding

Search firms often encourage clients to set up resources, coaching, and other supports beforehand to ensure onboarding and retention of hires. In addition, firms encourage clients to offer potential candidates peer-to-peer interactions with staff as an opportunity to ask how the organization supports them as leaders and as a way for clients to be held accountable to their professed DEI values.

One Native person who worked in philanthropy shared that coaching and mentoring are critical to a candidate's onboarding and long-term success in the field.

*“There were mentors who went out of their way to help me avoid pitfalls and guide me. I saw a lot of people come in who didn’t have mentors and weren’t coached. And they failed because they didn’t have the right support network. There is no handbook on how to be successful as a program officer and how to avoid pitfalls....We need to lift as we climb. We need to pass that knowledge on.”*

## Effective Practices

- Identify mentors for new staff to navigate the organizational culture and processes and provide overall advice.
- Do not burden an employee with being the sole educator on Native American experiences.
- Provide funds for new employees to participate in professional development through grantmaker associations and affinity group memberships.

# CONCLUSION



We began this project to better understand why Native people remain largely invisible from the hiring pools of foundations. This is no easy task, as we know that there are entire bodies of research by scholars and others to understand the ways in which bias translates into exclusion of racial and ethnic minorities and others. However, one thing is for certain: There is no lack of available talent or qualified Native candidates, only a gap in the way qualified candidates are recruited and presented throughout the process. This report highlights the issue of hiring and offers tips to improve the hiring process so that we can see more talented and qualified Native people working in philanthropy.

## Advice for Native Candidates

1. Look at job boards by Candid, as well as national and regional philanthropy-serving organizations (including state and subject-area grantmaking associations and state nonprofit associations).
  - a. Read the job descriptions posted on these sites (even if you do not want to apply for the job) and create a list of search firms that are responsible for hiring. A search firm will usually have a job board listed on their website, and you can search these boards for position postings.
2. It's all about who you know! Build your network as much as you can with "recruiters" and "connectors."
3. Learn to tell your story.
4. Take experimental jobs. Sometimes it is okay to take an experiential job early on in your career. There are so many gateway opportunities.
5. Leverage opportunities. Native candidates should consider ways they can contribute to Native community development through careers in philanthropy.
6. Build a LinkedIn presence. Many firms rely heavily on the LinkedIn Recruiter database to build a candidate pool. If you have one, keep it current. If you don't, create a profile.
7. Investigate the search firms on your list from item 1, particularly with regard to their approaches to DEI.

### Advice for Foundations

1. Learn to see and find value in non-traditional backgrounds, cultures, and work experiences within the scope of the job description. Firms committed to DEI will offer coaching in this critical area.
2. Stress the connection to mission alignment. Mission and value alignment attract people, so be explicit with regard to how your organization lives its mission and values.
3. Track goals, measure progress, and be transparent. For example, if the goal is for staff to represent the communities served, find the current baseline staff demographics and report progress regularly to the entire staff, board, and communities served. Remember to disaggregate data.
4. Acknowledge and own the history of your foundation. Have honest conversations about the difficult relationship between philanthropy and Native communities. This may also include examining how foundations have accumulated wealth and how this has impacted Native American people and communities.
5. Develop an organizational commitment to understanding and practicing diversity. Diversity is not a single characteristic, and no one person is going to make your organization more diverse. Rather, diversity is a collective process and journey that the entire organization must commit to achieving. If you are going to bring on your first Native American staff member, never make it a one-and-done hire.
6. Once Native people are hired, be sure to avoid tokenism and placing undue burdens on them. Do not make a Native staff member the poster child for all things Indian within your foundation. If a foundation is committed to learning more about Native communities and issues, hire the appropriate experts to educate your organization.

# Additional Resources



## We Need to Change How We Think: Perspectives on Philanthropy's Underfunding of Native Communities and Causes

In this report, First Nations Development Institute examines the state of large foundation giving to Native American organizations and causes from 2006 to 2014. This study finds, among other things, that from 2006 to 2014, total grant dollars awarded to Native American organizations and causes declined by 29%, a \$35 million drop in funding.

<https://www.firstnations.org/publications/we-need-to-change-how-we-think-perspectives-on-philanthropys-underfunding-of-native-communities-and-causes/>

## Growing Inequity: Large Foundation Giving to Native American Organizations and Causes, 2006-2014

Why does philanthropy continue to only minimally support Native American organizations and causes? That's the crux of the issue that has plagued Native American nonprofits and causes for some time. Despite the high need in Native communities and the proven ability of Native-led organizations to help address those needs, mainstream philanthropy has shied away from adequately funding these initiatives.

<https://www.firstnations.org/publications/growing-inequity-large-foundation-giving-to-native-american-organizations-and-causes-2006-2014/>

## Recommended Reading List

Staff members of First Nations Development Institute have compiled a list of essential reading for anyone interested in the Native American experience. Certain entries on the list are boldfaced, indicating that the employees of First Nations consider them to be “a good place to start.” Visit: <https://www.firstnations.org/knowledge-center/books/>

### Indian 101

The National Congress of American Indians ([ncai.org](http://ncai.org)) offers a publication called “Tribal Nations and the United States,” which provides a helpful starting point for people who want to learn more about tribal nations and Native history. Access the document here: [ncai.org/about-tribes](http://ncai.org/about-tribes)

### Reclaiming Native Truth

Reclaiming Native Truth is a national effort to foster cultural, social, and policy change by empowering Native Americans to counter discrimination, invisibility, and the dominant narratives that limit Native opportunity, access to justice, health, and self-determination. The Reclaiming Native Truth project team also produced a guide for allies and supporters to participate in this movement. You can learn more here:

<https://rnt.firstnations.org/research/>