Native American Women, Leadership and the Native Nonprofit Sector

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There has been a significant rise in recent literature documenting the gender disparity when it comes to leadership within the national nonprofit sector. These studies have found that while roughly 75 percent of nonprofit organizations are staffed by women, about 55 percent of CEO positions are held by men (“Study: Gender gap persists in nonprofit leadership positions,” 2015; Warner, 2014a). Many scholars and think-tanks that have examined this trend have been surprised by this finding, largely because it is counterintuitive to the social justice and equity frameworks that are dominant within a majority of subsectors within the nonprofit industry.

This report examines gender and leadership within the young and maturing Native American nonprofit sector. While national trends highlight some distributing leadership tendencies as it relates to gender within the sector, we know much less about how these national trends translate to different segments of the nonprofit sector. Does this gendered leadership gap travel to other subsectors of the nonprofit industry, especially nonprofits representing different communities of color?

To answer this question I use data from First Nations Development Institute, one of the nation’s largest grantmakers supporting Native American reservation-based nonprofit organizations. In all, I find that the Native American nonprofit sector does not suffer from the same gender disparity in leadership when compared to the national nonprofit sector. In fact, top leadership positions at Native nonprofits tend to be dominated by women at almost all levels of organizational budget. Then, drawing on interviews with female Native American nonprofit CEOs, this report provides some possible reasons for this general trend and highlights other issues of gender and leadership within the Native American nonprofit sector.

Examining gender and leadership within the Native nonprofit sector highlights the essential need to disaggregate national trends and understand nuances of gender and leadership in various nonprofit subsectors. For Native communities, these findings highlight the need to elevate the positive, dynamic and transformative work of Native women as they continue to be powerful role models in Native community development. Uplifting the dynamic and positive contributions of Native women will help transform historical narratives of Native women rooted in colonial histories that have distorted the role of women in Native communities (arguably by both Native and non-Native societies). This report serves as an empirical contribution to highlight the leadership and transformative work being done by Native women and as a call to action for others to engage in dialogue about gender and leadership in local communities.

This report proceeds as follows. First we provide an overview of previous studies focused on gender and leadership within the national nonprofit sector. Then this report discusses historical and contemporary portrayals of Native women, focusing on how Native women have been largely absent from leadership frameworks. Then the report provides a brief discussion about the young and maturing nonprofit sector within Native communities. Then, using data from First Nations Development Institute, this report highlights the overwhelming leadership contributions of women within the Native American nonprofit sector. I conclude by highlighting comments and perspectives from Native female nonprofit leaders who share their perspectives and challenges on issues of gender and leadership within the Native nonprofit sector.
Gender and Leadership within the National Nonprofit Sector

Since the mid-1970s, public attention on women in the labor force has ebbed and flowed, largely following public outcry or the mounting accumulation of evidence on the persistent inequalities present within the labor force for women. A majority of the existent literature has documented the presence of a glass ceiling and how individuals and groups have been able to penetrate this ceiling (Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995; Goodman, Fields, & Blum, 2003; Kephart & Schumacher, 2005; Reis, Young, & Jury, 1999). Moreover, most of this research has focused on gendered labor issues within government and private sectors. Only within the past decade have we begun to see rising attention to issues of gender and labor inequalities within the nonprofit sector.

A rising area of research has established that women continue to shape the nonprofit sector in terms of employment and volunteerism, a trend that has remained constant since at least the 1970s (Bradshaw, Murray, & Wolpin, 1996; Gibelman, 2000; Leete, 2000; Nank, 2011; Preston, 1989; Pynes, 2000; Shaiko, 1996). Still today, research has documented that 70 percent of individuals employed within the nonprofit sector are women. Researchers have offered a variety of explanations about why women are employed within the sector at greater rates than men.

For example, some research has suggested that industry segregation may explain the overrepresentation of women within the nonprofit sector. In other words, women tend to select work in industries that are concentrated within the nonprofit sector like hospitals or education rather than industries concentrated in the for-profit sector (Burbridge, 1994). Thus, the industry an individual chooses may limit employment choice in other sectors. Other studies have suggested that women may be intrinsically drawn to the sector and motivated by altruistic values of “selfless service” and willingness to help others (Conry & McDonald, 1994; Leete, 2000; Themudo, 2009). These studies have tended to suggest women may be more value or service driven than men who tend to be motivated by values of promotion and profit. Finally, other studies have suggested that beyond values of service, women are more likely to enter the nonprofit sector because of structural factors within the sector like work flexibility, availability of part-time employment, and opportunities for skill and talent development (DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990; Hansmann, 1987; Leete, 2000; Preston, 1989).

Regardless of motive for employment within the sector, women still lag behind in terms of reaching top leadership positions within the sector. For example, the Guidestar USA, Inc. Nonprofit Compensation Report documents that in 2014 men once again dominate CEO leadership positions within the sector. In this report, Guidestar analyzes compensation data of more than 96,000 nonprofit organizations reported to the IRS for fiscal year 2014. This report documents that since 2004, there have been gains in the percentage of nonprofits led by women. But female CEO representation continues to decline steadily as the budget size of organizations increases (McLean, 2016). Similarly, data from 2013 documented that women made up a majority of CEOs at smaller nonprofits with budgets of less than a half-million annually. But female leadership dipped below 50 percent (and declined steadily) at nonprofits with budgets greater than $500,000 (“Study: Gender gap persists in nonprofit leadership positions,” 2015).

Why does the overrepresentation of women within the nonprofit sector not translate into top CEO positions? Answers to this question have been much more elusive. Survey data has noted that factors like time commitment and stress are industry related factors that women commonly cite for not aspiring to be a CEO within the sector. But survey data has also documented that there is significant ambition among female nonprofit workers to be in top CEO positions. For example, over 60% of women 18-44 who are employed within the sector say that they aspire to be a nonprofit CEO, and nearly 50% of women age 45-54 respond the same way (DiMento, 2014). While stress and time may be serious considerations for women when considering career choices, ambition seems to remain high among various age cohorts.
Other scholars have argued that industry selection factors by women do not help explain the lack of female CEOs within the nonprofit sector. These scholars have suggested that other more discriminatory and structural factors influence the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions. These scholars have argued that a glass ceiling within the nonprofit sector does exist and women are not only underrepresented in top leadership positions but also make less than men at almost all levels within organizations. Typically discussions of glass ceilings have been examined within the private sector and it was only in 2000 that the term was used to describe gendered trends within the nonprofit sector (Gibelman, 2000; Goodman et al., 2003; Joslyn, 2003; Sampson & Moore, 2008).

The glass ceiling is defined as discriminatory attitudes or organizational biases that create real barriers that “impede or prevent qualified individuals, including (but not limited to) women, racial and ethnic minorities, and disabled persons, from advancing into management positions” (Gibelman, 2000; 251).

Beyond organizational bias, glass ceilings that impede the rise of female leaders are also systemic and structural as these trends tend to reinforce societal gender norms and values. That is, trends of leadership and gender within the nonprofit sector mirror gendered trends within other sectors. For example, among Fortune 500 companies, women make up only 14.6 percent of executive officers, 8.1 percent of top earners, and 4.6 percent of CEOs (Catalyst, 2016). Moreover, women only occupy roughly 17% of Fortune 500 board seats (Warner, 2014b). These inequities persist despite the fact that women make up roughly 45% of the labor force within Fortune 500 companies (Catalyst, 2016).

Gender inequities persist in the face of evidence that women in top leadership positions is correlated with a variety of positive outcomes. For example, a recent study by the Peterson Institute for International Economics notes that the presence of women in corporate leadership positions is positively correlated with the revenue size of firms globally (Noland, Moran, & Kotschwar, 2016). Similarly, other research on U.S firms has examined gender diversity and corporate performance, finding that gender equity is positively correlated with higher profits and stock values (Barsh & Yee, 2012; Carter, Simkins, & Simpson, 2003; Erhardt, Werbel, & Shrader, 2003; Leete, 2000, 2000; Woetzel, 2015; Yee, 2012). This trend of performance, gender and underrepresentation holds true across other sectors. For example, women in academia win roughly 56% of academia’s most prestigious awards yet only 29% of women have tenure. Moreover, among hedge funds, research has documented that funds managed by women produced greater average returns than those managed by men. But data from 2011 finds that women only managed roughly 3% of hedge funds in the U.S (Warner, 2014b).

Limited data exists within the nonprofit sector on gender, race and leadership. But available data from other sectors paint a disparaging view for women of color and leadership. For example, in 2014 women of color only occupied about 3 percent of all board seats among Fortune 500 companies. In terms of pay, women of color (with the exception of Asian women) remain at the bottom. While some theories of gender and diversity have suggested that the scarcity of minority women within different sectors forces companies to pay more for talented women of color, data has documented that women of color “vie for last place on the earnings pyramid at every level of education” (Deborah, 2014).

Perhaps the only documented philanthropic subsector where women outpace men in top leadership positions is within the foundation philanthropic community. The D5 Coalition has documented that women make up roughly 52% of staff positions within foundations but occupy about 55% of CEO positions (D5 Coalition, 2016). Ironically the D5 Coalition also documents that the lack of transparency within the foundation community does not easily allow researchers to tease out possible explanations of gender parity when it comes to CEO and executive staff positions (D5 Coalition, 2011). But encouraging openness about this trend may help inform practices that may be implemented within other institutional settings.

1 For counter arguments, see R. B. Adams & Ferreira, 2009; Carter, D’Souza, Simkins, & Simpson, 2010; Smith, Smith, & Verner, 2006.
Narratives of Native American Women and Leadership

Historically, mainstream society has viewed Native American women on a spectrum from “Pocahontas princess” to “sexualized drudge” (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008; Green, 1975a; Hirschfelder, Molin, Wakim, & Dorris, 1999; LaFromboise, Heyle, & Ozer, 1990; Stedman, 1982). These narratives and images of Native American women emerged over time and were largely created to dehumanize and subjugate Native American women (and Native people generally). Moreover, these narratives were created and sustained to support colonial polices that stripped Native nations of their assets, including Native lands and cultures. Only recently have we started to see more accurate portrayals of Native women in scholarship, media and other literary forms. But much work remains to be done in terms of telling narratives of contemporary Native women as leaders within various sectors in Native communities.

Much of the early literature on Native American women emerged in the journals and documents of male European settlers and missionaries. These Europeans were ready to create a new world of liberties and equalities, albeit with the exclusion of women. Thus, Europeans drew on their own cultural interpretations and interactions in documenting their experiences with Native people and women in particular (Berger, 2004; Fryberg et al., 2008; Meranto, 2011; Oshana, 1981). On one end of the spectrum, early narratives of Native American women focused on Native women as beasts of burden, “the abject slave and drudge of men in her tribe ... trudging along a trail behind her swarthy warrior husband, who was riding a horse” (Lajimodiere, 2013). At the other end of the spectrum, Native women were portrayed as a Princess, an important cultural mediator documented in the celebratory narratives of Pocahontas and Sacagawea.²

Scholars have noted that the recognition of Native women as “Princess” or “Drudge” has largely been defined by her relationship with (white) male figures (Green, 1975a).

These distortions of Native women in popular culture have prevented mainstream society (and even perhaps some segments of Native societies) from viewing Native women as significant leaders inside and outside of Native communities. Still today, literature by non-Native scholars and government agencies has focused on Native women as victims of violence and other kinds of traumatic events (Chester, Robin, Koss, Lopez, & Goldman, 1994; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Norton & Manson, 1995, 1995; Oetzel & Duran, 2004; Smyth, 2004; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). These kinds of traumatic narratives may shed light on very real and pressing social issues within and outside of Native communities. However, narratives that counter these images of Native women as merely victims of historical and contemporary violence remain scarce and have only recently began to emerge.

The role of Native women in Native communities has always varied from tribe to tribe and is dependent on a number of factors including culture, geography, economics and social and political institutions (Cook-Lynn, 2001; Meranto, 2011; Devon A Miheusah, 2000). Some Native nations organize lineage along matrilineal lines, where women held greater formal and informal power and decision-making authority. Other Native nations organize lineage through men, but this is not to suggest these tribes value women less than other tribes or cultures (Allen, 1986; Lajimodiere, 2013; Lawrence, 2003). Different organizational structures and belief systems conditioned very different kinds of social, cultural and political interactions and also reinforced different kinds of cultural and religious knowledge systems.

Only recently have we begun to see more literature illuminating the diverse roles and contributions of Native American women in sustaining local communities. Historically, most of this knowledge was preserved through diverse cultural or oral practices. But today we are starting to see more and more depictions of Native American women as community leaders and activists who have historically sustained Native traditions and communities. This shift has in part been facilitated by a rise in biographical and other empirical works unpacking Native

² Important to note, Native scholars have contested the celebratory narratives of Pocahontas and Sacagawea as inaccurate, ahistorical and Eurocentric. For some examples see Bird 2004; Cook-Lynn 2004; Fenelon & Defender-Wilson 2004; Green 1975b; Howe 2004.
American women’s historic and contemporary role in politics and policy change, education and community activism (Denetdale, 2006, 2007; Meranto, 2011; Devon Abbott Mihesuah, 2003; Prindeville, 2004; Prindeville & Gomez, 1999). This research has documented the contributions of women to the Native American empowerment movements of the 1970s and their work in the creation of new organizations aimed at improving opportunities for Native people and communities.

Beyond increasing stories highlighting the contributions of Native women, there has been increasing empirical data that tells a story of Native women as community leaders and drivers of Native economic and community development. Not only are Native women gaining college and advanced degrees at greater rates than Native men (Freeman & Fox, 2005), Native women are also leading the way in private-sector business development in Native communities. The 2016 State of Women Owned Business Report notes that there are now roughly 153,400 Native American and Alaska Native women-owned business firms nationally, employing roughly 57,000 workers and generating about $10.5 billion in annual revenues. From 2007 to 2016, the number of Native American Indian/Alaska Native owned firms increased by about 59 percent and today Native women-owned firms account for 51 percent of all Native American/Alaska Native-owned firms (Womenable 2016).3

There are pockets of disparate data that highlight the fact that women are leading the way in various aspects of sustaining and growing Native communities. But in many instances these positive developments are not framed in the context of Native women as leaders. Thus, we must critically examine the existing historical narratives of Native women and highlight the positive and continued contributions of Native women in growing healthy and strong Native communities and economies.

### The Native Nonprofit Sector

The nonprofit sector within Native communities is still young and emerging. The growth of the nonprofit sector in Native communities is directly correlated with the rise of self-governance and empowerment movements of the 1970s — movements that fought to increase Native control and governance of Native assets. These movements sought to eliminate government, religious and corporate control over local Native community development. Fundamentally, these movements sought to place Native people and nations themselves in the driver seat when it came to local development, decision-making and service delivery.

But most, if not all, Native nations have a long established history of philanthropy. From potlatches, to giveaways and feasts, Native nations across the United States have expressed acts of generosity and reciprocity for family and community development since time immemorial. But over the last 40 years, Native communities have witnessed a significant growth in the creation of formalized philanthropy — that is the growth of 501(c)(3) Native-led charitable organizations in Native communities (Berry & Adamson, 2000).

While the history of philanthropy among Native people predates the formation of the U.S, European immigrants arrived to the “new world” ready to create new networks of voluntary association to combat against tyranny and individualistic barbarianism (Cohen, 1999; Gamm & Putnam, 1999; Putnam, 2007; Salamon, 1987). This history of philanthropy in the U.S. no doubt had a direct impact on Native peoples and communities. For example, starting in the mid-1800s Eastern religious and charitable groups known as the “Friends of the Indians” sought to lift Indians from poverty and their perceived “backward ways” by removing Indian children from their homes and putting them in government and religious schools (Biolsi & Zimmerman, 1997; Deloria, 1969; Deloria & Lytle, 1984; Jones, 2006; Kelsey, 1917). These efforts

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3 As noted by Womenable, “on average, firms owned by women of color are smaller than Caucasian women-owned firms. Overall, women-owned firms average $143,431 in annual revenues per firm, with non-minority women-owned firms averaging $201,948 in annual revenues and minority women-owned firms averaging $68,982. Looking across all minority groups, average annual revenues are highest among Asian American women-owned firms ($184,669), followed by $75,170 among Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander women-owned firms, $68,141 among Native American/Alaska Native women-owned firms, $52,087 among Latina-owned firms, and $26,550 among African American women-owned firms” (Womenable 2016, 5).
by Protestant “do-gooders” initiated a national policy effort to assimilate and Christianize Native people, starting with their children (D. W. Adams, 1995; Cornell, 1988; Deloria, 1969; Ellis, 1996; Meranto, 2014). It would take nearly 100 years for Native people to break from the chains of these philanthropic and federal efforts aimed at disrupting traditional social and governing structures in Native communities and regain control of development paths in their communities.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Native communities began to examine alternative models for developing local communities and economies — models that put development agendas directly in the hands of Native people and nations. Available data collected by First Nations Development Institute identified that roughly 90% of Native nonprofits achieved tax exemption after 1977. Moreover, growth of the Native nonprofit sector since the 1970s has outpaced growth in the national nonprofit sector (Black, 2004; First Nations Development Institute, 2007, 2016; Salway Black, 1998). The development and creation of nonprofits in Native communities was seen as a means to bring essential goods and services to Native communities, provide mechanisms to diversify tribal economies beyond the governmental sector, create new jobs and career opportunities for Native people, and create strong local institutions that could bring millions of philanthropic dollars into Native economies.

Recent research on Native nonprofits has focused on the under-resourced nature of the sector. For example, Native Americans in Philanthropy has documented the decline of philanthropic investment in Native American organizations and causes (Mukai & Lawrence, 2011). This research has also pointed out that most philanthropic dollars that flow to Native causes flow to universities and museums or otherwise non-Native-controlled organizations and institutions for the perceived benefit of Native people. Other research has documented that the Native nonprofit sector is heavily dependent on public sector/government contracts, and largely serve education, arts/culture and other social service needs within Native communities. Research has also documented that Native organizations may be more under-resourced when compared to similar non-Native organizations in other rural communities (Black, 2004; First Nations Development Institute, 2016; Salway Black, 1998).

Beyond looking at resources, few studies exist that document other characteristics and trends of the Native nonprofit sector. Perhaps the most comprehensive descriptive analysis of the Native nonprofit sector was released by First Nations Development Institute almost 20 years ago based on a survey of 550 Native nonprofit organizations. This data highlighted that women made up nearly 65 percent of the labor force in Native nonprofits. Though this report did not touch on the dynamics of gender and top leadership positions at Native nonprofit organizations, it did note that men outnumbered women in the board room. The report documented that about 60% of Native nonprofit board seats were occupied by men (Salway Black, 1998).

Though dated, what this data tells us is that Native nonprofits follow national trends in terms of the overrepresentation of women employed within the sector and gendered inequities in the board room. This data did not tap dynamics of gender and top leadership positions at Native nonprofits. Thus the empirical question remains: Do men outnumber women in CEO positions at Native nonprofit organizations?

The Data

To examine the dynamics of gender and leadership within the Native nonprofit sector, I utilize First Nations’ grantmaking data. First Nations is a 36-year-old Native American-controlled and operated national intermediary. First Nations has been making grants to reservation-based Native American nonprofit organizations since 1993. Since then, First Nations has made over 1,160 grants totaling almost $26 million in grant investments to Native American nonprofits. First Nations has a prestigious reputation as a national grantmaker to Native communities. On average. First Nations receives 500 requests per year totaling over $13 million in funding requests. Of these requests, First Nations is only able to meet roughly 15% of requests annually.
First Nations invests in Native-controlled nonprofits within Native American communities, defined as nonprofits within Native communities whose board of directors is greater than 50% Native American. **Utilizing First Nations data allows me to examine Native-controlled nonprofits defined as Native American 501(c)(3) organizations in Native communities that are governed by Native people.** In total, the parameters of First Nations’ data allow me to examine gender and leadership in 678 U.S. Native nonprofits. See the data appendix for further discussion of the dataset and descriptive statistics.

**Results**

Are there more male than female CEOs in the Native nonprofit sector? No. Overall, First Nations’ data shows that 61 percent of Native nonprofits are run by women, whereas 39 percent are run by men.

To get a fuller picture of gender and leadership within the Native nonprofit sector, I compare trends in Indian Country against national data trends taken from the 15th annual Nonprofit Compensation Report (McLean, 2015).

As noted in Table 1 below, within the national nonprofit sector there is some parity in gendered leadership in organizations that have budgets less than $500,000. But at almost every other budget level, men outnumber women in top leadership positions within the national nonprofit sector. The general trend is that as budget size increases, rates of male leadership also increase while rates of female leadership decline.

Looking at the Native American nonprofit sector, we see a trend reversal when compared to the national nonprofit sector. This data indicates that female CEOs outnumber men at every level when broken down by budget size. The one exception is at the largest Native nonprofits with budgets ranging from $10 million to $25 million. But the existence of Native nonprofits with budgets of this size are so small in the dataset (only 25), this result needs to be interpreted with some caution.

**Table 1: Percentage of Nonprofit Female CEOs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Size</th>
<th>National Nonprofit Sector</th>
<th>Native American Nonprofit Sector</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;$250K</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250K-$5000K</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500K-$1M</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1M-$2.5M</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2.5M-$5M</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5M-$10M</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10M-$25M</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all, what these data tell us is that women are unequivocally leading more nonprofits in Native communities when compared to the national nonprofit sector. At almost every budget level below $10 million, over 55 percent of nonprofits in Native communities are run by women.

**Native Women Leaders: Gender and the Nonprofit Sector**

In an effort to expand on the empirical data presented above, I interviewed Native women to get their perspectives on the data, their experiences and pathways to leadership. In all, I was able to interview nine Native women who represented a broad spectrum of the Native American nonprofit sector. With such a small sample of interviews it is hard to make generalizations about findings. But these interviews do provide some insight into why the
leadership trend outlined above exists; highlight challenges and experiences from Native women within the sector; and provide insights, learnings and understandings about the Native nonprofit sector. The discussion below is intended to highlight trends in interview responses, not an in-depth analysis of each individual interview. Responses to questions are not intended to be definitive answers or make sweeping generalizations. These are interview data that provide exploratory insight into these trends. For a discussion of the interview process and a list of Native women interviewed for this project, see data appendix.

Should the Native nonprofit sector be concerned about issues of gender equity? Why or why not?

All Native female leaders who were interviewed noted that conversations around gender do not happen enough in Indian Country. This is not because individuals do not see this as a significant issue, but rather issues of gender tend to get pushed to the side in favor of other pressing social and community issues that require attention. Most women noted we need to continue to have conversations around gender and equity at all levels in tribal communities. This includes discussing issues of gender and the gendered continuum when it comes to family dynamics, tribal government leadership, private-sector development and nonprofit sector development.

Research on the gendered pay gap nationally notes that women earn 20 percent less than men, or 80 cents for every white male’s dollar. For Native women, research notes that they earn 41 percent less or 58 cents for every white male’s dollar. When compared to Native men, this pay gap persists. Native women earn 15 percent less than Native men or 85 cents to a Native man’s dollar (AAUW, 2016). While the national gendered pay gap has narrowed over the years, the pay gap has actually increased for Native women. Women interviewed noted these are the conversations we need to be having in Native communities and we need to try to get at the causes of these inequities. One woman noted, “The bias and prejudice against Native women in and outside her homeland is apparent, and this needs to be recognized and we need to have more conversations about this where we live and work.”

Moreover, most women noted that the issue of gender and equity is important because we need to have critical conversations about what we mean by leadership and how we define it. Most women noted that leadership in the nonprofit sector is not necessarily valued when compared to other sectors in Native communities. Nonprofit institutions in Native communities bring millions of dollars into local economies to provide goods and services to Native people that otherwise might not be provided or the expense for which might fall into the hands of tribal government. Many of the Native women noted Native communities need to engage in cross-sector conversations of leadership, gender equity and community development.

Finally, almost all women noted that conversations of gender and equality are needed because we need to ask: Where are the Native men? It may be that Native men are employed in other sectors within Native communities. But the lack of Native men in the nonprofit sector raises the question of what are the career trajectories being created for Native men in Native communities? And where are those points of engagement and recruitment into the nonprofit sector for Native men? All women acknowledged that gender balance within organizations is ideal, so there is a demand and a place for men in the nonprofit sector. But finding out why they may choose other career paths or otherwise not enter the sector are critical questions that need to be asked.

What are some possible explanations for the Native nonprofit sector having more female CEOs than men?

Education: Since the mid-1970s, Native women have outpaced Native men in higher education attendance and attainment (a trend that mirrors national education statistics). For example,
from 1976 and 2006, enrollment in colleges and universities by Native women increased by nearly 200 percent. Still today, roughly 60 percent of Native Americans enrolled in college are women (Freeman & Fox, 2005; National Congress of American Indians, 2015). Moreover, when looking at education data by college major, these data note that business-related fields are the top undergraduate majors for Native women (followed by health and education related fields) (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Collectively, what these data suggest is that Native women are earning degrees at faster rates than Native men and, as a result, have more options for employment and are also sought after in local reservation communities.

Reservation Household Economics: Over 30 percent of all family households in Native communities are female-headed households and roughly six percent of Native households are multigenerational (Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013). What these statistics suggest is that in Native communities, the burden of rearing children and also caring for other family members falls on women. As a result, women must enter the workforce and be breadwinners for their families. One outlet for employment in Native communities is the young and emerging nonprofit sector. Over time, the young and emerging nonprofit sector offers a career path for Native women who then either rise through the ranks of existing organizations or create their own organizations.

History and Cultural Beliefs: Many of the women interviewed connected leadership within the Native nonprofit sector to the history of Native women as caretakers of land, culture, family and communities. Many interviewees noted that women have always been concerned with sustaining Native nations and communities and, today, the nonprofit sector may be an additional outlet for continuing this important work of Native nation survival. One interviewee noted that Native women have always been entrepreneurial. They have always looked for new and creative ways to sustain Native people, families and communities. Therefore we should not be surprised that the nonprofit sector is another tool or weapon in that arsenal of community survival.

Similarly, some Native women interviewed recalled histories of American Indian activists and the role women played within those movements. Many of the women interviewed noted that many female activists of the 1970s entered the nonprofit sector and also served as important recruiters and role models for current generations of nonprofit leaders.

Did you participate in any formal leadership development programs? How did you grow leadership skills and capacity?

None of the Native women interviewed had participated in any formal leadership program before entering their leadership role. Only one of the women interviewed had participated in a formal leadership program after assuming her leadership role. Each of the women, who have varying degrees of tenure at their organizations, could recount some programs that foundations created or supported targeting different sectors, but most noted that these program interventions were not sustained investments, so they were not able to capitalize on these leadership program investments.

When asked to recall their own leadership paths, a few common themes emerged:

- Seizing leadership opportunities at a young age and in diverse environments. A few of the women interviewed commented on how their leadership ambitions emerged in college and this experience served as a breeding ground for them to explore new ideas, take risks and engage community. These women noted that college has different opportunities for women to explore leadership, be it in activism, college clubs or other activities, and these experiences helped them later in their careers. Similarly, other women noted that they took advantage of creating leadership opportunities early in their careers. Many of the women interviewed served in various positions at their current or other nonprofit organizations. These women commented
that the under-resourced nature of the Native nonprofit sector allowed them to really take initiative and lead new ideas, projects and teams — experience they may not have gained in other sectors. Many women noted that early in their careers, their ambitions to take on more and varied work were rewarded by both men and women leaders, and these leaders served as mentors in helping them develop new skills and pursue new opportunities.

• Informal Mentoring: In the absence of formal leadership programs, where peer networks can be developed and last over a lifetime, many of the women interviewed noted that they had to create their own informal networks for mentoring. One woman noted that developing these informal mentoring networks occurred at conferences and other professional events. She noted, “I would target women that I thought were doing exceptional work or leading exceptional organizations. I would talk to them professionally, collegially and then friendships developed.” Almost all the women mentioned how these self-developed mentoring networks have helped them to call other women within the sector and ask them questions about challenges or opportunities that they may face, or seek direction and advice in their own setting.

While this data suggests that women outnumber men in terms of CEO positions within the Native nonprofit sector, there is some limited data that suggests this trend is not true for Native nonprofit boards of directors. In other words, board rooms tend to be dominated by men. What are some factors that influence this trend?

Many of the women noted that there is more work to be done in terms of how we conceptualize leadership in Native communities. Many of the women interviewed noted that when we think of leadership in Native communities, we typically associate leadership with tribal leadership and tribal government. But many questioned if this was a construct of leadership that was defined by Native people themselves or rather imposed by outsiders (perhaps infiltrated as a result of interactions between Native nations and the U.S. government). Thus, many women noted that the overrepresentation of men may be influenced by how we as Native communities conceptualize leadership.

This suggests that Native women who run Native nonprofit organizations must make valuable and strategic partnerships with various community constituents and stakeholders within Native communities. For example, many women noted that one reality of developing and sustaining nonprofit organizations in Native communities is engagement with tribal governments. While there is an increasing presence of Native women in tribal governments, the women interviewed agree that men tend to dominate tribal government positions. This can be extended to other community based cultural or business leaders.

What can mainstream philanthropy and the larger nonprofit sector learn from this gendered leadership trend in Indian Country?

There is value to investing in women and women-led organizations. The women I interviewed noted that people should know that Indian Country is really a model for how women can and do lead the way in terms of community development. Women in Native communities have created and are leading nonprofit organizations that are thriving — in communities that otherwise have other negative economic and social statistics. Thus, when we invest in women, we really invest in prosperity and growth.

We need to invest more in trying to understand why national gendered leadership trends do not travel to the nonprofit sector in Indian Country. Many of the women interviewed noted that we need to disaggregate national trends and data. When thinking about gender and leadership, understanding where equity is happening and not happening may help understand various programmatic supports or interventions that may be needed to lift up gender equity within the broader sector. If Indian
Country seems to reverse national trends, we need to investigate why women enter the sector, when they enter the sector, and examine support systems that nature their development and growth.

Previous research has documented that three-tenths of one percent of foundation philanthropic investments go to Native organizations and causes (Mukai & Lawrence, 2011). Do you think that gender affects funding for the Native nonprofit sector? Do women face different challenges than men when raising funds for their organizations?

All women interviewed noted that they thought gender did have both intentional and unintentional effects on funding. Most did not discuss specific instances where they felt that gender affected funding. However, many did note that at different times in their careers funders were captivated by their passion and dedication, but they often felt that funders treated their organizational work as “cute” community based projects — not projects looking to transform Native people and communities. All interviewees acknowledged that other factors may influence this kind of interaction, including communication with funders, project and organizational readiness, etc. But interviewees also noted that with relationship-based funders, you always have to raise the question of how things like gender, race and class may influence interactions, reinforce or challenge assumptions, and also further or stall relationships.

Most noted that the effect of gender on fundraising may vary by type of funder or who they interact with at a funding organization/agency. For example, most women felt that gender mattered the least with federal grant agencies and individual donors. Most noted that with federal agencies and individuals, grantor and grantee relationships are formed around the organizational work or program goals. In many instances these relationships are also formed in advance of meetings with individual donors who tend to support organizations because of other forms of interaction and communication (e.g. mail as a touch point). Moreover, federal grant decisions are often formulated by committees that make recommendations for funding. All women felt that this question is one that needs further exploration.

Conclusion

This report is but one attempt to disaggregate national trends and examine the relationship between gender and leadership within one specific nonprofit subsector — the Native American nonprofit sector. While data on the national nonprofit sector notes that men occupy top leadership positions at greater rates then women, the Native nonprofit sector offers hope for gender parity within the sector. What data in this report notes is that scholars and practitioners need to further disaggregate national data trends to further understand variation of leadership within the sector. Understanding nuance can help the sector tease out where gender parity occurs and where subsectors struggle. This will not only help understand programmatic or other community dynamics that facilitate leadership inclusivity, but also where structural and institutional barriers persist for issues of equity.

This research also suggests that we need to further understand the historical evolution of patriarchy. The infiltration of patriarchal systems varied over time and understanding variation in this historical evolution may help further understand contemporary behaviors and outcomes in different communities.

Examining the Native nonprofit subsector demonstrates that while women may rise to top leadership positions at greater rates than the national sector, other issues around issues of gender equality remain. As the female leaders noted in interviews, we need more conversations to occur in Native communities around gender and how gender issues affect different community dynamics. Moreover, Native communities may need to question how they define and talk about contemporary notions of leadership (and ask if current conceptions of leadership exclude or
diminish the contributions of women). The Native nonprofit sector may also have to examine the tendency of men to dominate Native nonprofit boardrooms. Finally, there is also opportunity to further explore how and why women enter and thrive in the Native nonprofit sector.

Data Appendix

First Nations funds Native community-led and developed initiatives focused on Native financial empowerment, asset-based development strategies, Native youth, food systems and institutional development. First Nations funds Native-led 501(c)(3) organization, Native nations and grassroots community organizations without 501(c)(3) status. For this analysis, only Native-controlled 501(c)(3) organizations were included, and Native nations and community groups were excluded. I also did a check to exclude groups that were not Native controlled but may have applied for First Nations funding. First Nations defines Native-controlled organizations as an organization serving Native communities where over 50% of its board of directors identify as Native American with a tribal affiliation.

First Nations provided data on all Native controlled 501(c)(3) organizations that have applied for a First Nations grant since 2012. This included information on organization name, executive director name and self-selected prefix (Mrs., Ms., Mr. or Dr.) and organizational budget. This yielded 1,207 organization observations. The yearly data really allow for two research strategies: 1) I could examine the data year by year and examine gendered leadership and organizational budget; or 2) I could combine the data from 2012-2015 and examine trends as it relates to gendered leadership and organizational budget within the Native nonprofit sector. For ease of interpretation, the results herein are combined data from 2012-2015. For each year, duplicate organizational observations were deleted. However, if there was a change in executive director identification, I did keep the most recent data record in the data set (this occurred less than five times). This strategy cut the data set in half, leaving a total of 678 unique organization observations.

Limitations of First Nations Data: Existing literature has documented the extreme difficulties in collecting data within American Indian communities (Mihesuah, 1998; National Congress of American Indians, 2010; United Nations, 2004). This persistent problem is not only an issue of access given the rural and ultra-rural nature of Native American life, but also an issue of capacity, infrastructure and technology. Moreover, complicating data issues in reservation communities is the increasing movement of Native tribes and organizations exerting sovereignty rights over ownership of data, especially when it comes to individual data and data examining culturally-specific contexts within Native communities. All this is to say that data access to this sector is difficult.

There are other data sets that may allow for exploring these dynamics, like the charitable statistics data form the IRS. But these data may lead to some biased results. Within the Native nonprofit sector, Native community-based organizations make distinctions between Native service organizations and Native-controlled nonprofits. Native service organizations are organizations that provide services to Native communities but are not Native controlled or operated. As previously discussed, the nonprofit sector in Native communities emerged after the 1970s and the need to develop culturally-appropriate models for community and economic development that was led and controlled by Native people. But within Native communities, nonprofits controlled by (perhaps) well-intentioned do-gooders still exist, but these nonprofits do not necessarily reflect Native goals, needs and intentions when it comes

4 In many ways this movement for data sovereignty is a reaction to the highly-publicized case Havasupai Tribe of the Havasupai Reservation v. Arizona Board of Regents and Therese Ann Markow, 2004. In 1989, researchers from Arizona State University (ASU) and the Havasupai Tribe collaborated on The Diabetes Project, a project that would collect and test blood samples and genetic association to search for links between genes and diabetes risk among Havasupai tribal members. No links were found, but in 2003 a member of the Havasupai Tribe and a participant in The Diabetes Project attended a lecture at ASU where it was discovered that collected blood samples were used for later studies on unrelated research topics, including schizophrenia, migration and inbreeding – all without informed consent of project participants. The tribe successfully filed and won a suit against ASU and researchers in 2004 for misuse of DNA samples, violating the informed-consent research clause and unapproved use of data, violating medical confidentiality and violating the civil rights of project participants (Madsen, 2008; Rubin, 2004; Santos, 2008).
to local development. These groups include religiously-affiliated organizations, organizations that do not have a majority of Native board members, organizations not located within Native communities, or with limited Native staff members and leadership. Moreover, many of these groups have been criticized for raising money in the name of Native people and communities but not investing in community needs and community capacity. Thus, other data would not make Native service and Native-led organizations distinguishable and would bias the data and results.

**Interviews**

One-hour interviews were conducted with the female Native leaders below. Each individual was contacted via email and given the list of questions in advance. All interviews were semi-structured.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title and Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl Crazy Bull</td>
<td>President &amp; CEO, American Indian College Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrine Sanchez</td>
<td>Executive Director, Tewa Women United</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystal Echo Hawk</td>
<td>President &amp; CEO, Echo Hawk Consulting, and Former Executive Director, Notah Begay III Foundation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie Garreau</td>
<td>Executive Director, Cheyenne River Youth Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary LaGarde</td>
<td>Executive Director, Minneapolis American Indian Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah Echohawk</td>
<td>President &amp; CEO, American Indian Science and Engineering Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Kastelic</td>
<td>Executive Director, National Indian Child Welfare Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sherry Salway Black</td>
<td>Retired, Former Director of the Partnership for Tribal Governance at the National Congress of American Indians, and Former Vice President, First Nations Development Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trisha Moquino</td>
<td>Co-Founder, Keres Children’s Learning Center</td>
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Bibliography


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