



POTLATCH FUND

INSPIRING THE NATIVE TRADITION OF GIVING

PRESS RELEASE

August 25, 2016

Generation Indigenous: Raising Impact with Innovation and Proven Strategies Potlatch Fund a featured storyteller at the convening

Our mission, at Potlatch Fund, is to inspire and build upon the Native tradition of giving and to expand philanthropy within Tribal Nations and Native communities in the Pacific Northwest. We were founded in 2002 after a series of talking circles revealed the need to gather and redistribute more philanthropic resources. We started our initial grant programs in 2005 with two competitive grant cycles: Community Building and Native Arts. Over the past decade, we have grown in budget size and scope to meet the needs of our vast geographic area and array of culturally distinct Native people. We have grown from a budget of under \$100,000 to almost \$800,000 in our current fiscal year. We have also expanded our grant programs to support Native education, language preservation, and cultural activities.

But never one to rest on our laurels, in 2015 we conducted assessment of our grantmaking programs. Through interviews with our grantees, funders, and community stakeholders, we learned that there were major gaps in our funding. When asked to identify the challenges facing our communities, and particularly our Native youth, people talked about: 1) drug and alcohol abuse; 2) loss of language and cultural identity; 3) disconnection from family and community; 4) struggles with mental health, self-esteem, family violence and suicide; 5) living in poverty with little access to jobs.

While we did see some alignment within areas we were already funding, the disconnect was clear. What were we doing to invest more in culturally-based youth prevention activities? This realization set us off on path to figure out what approaches are working best for the Native communities in our region and to increase our investment in those strategies. When we listened to the stories of our grantees, we heard things like: 1) reconnection to tradition and culture as the core of prevention; 2) reconnecting to our histories and the stories of our people; 3) the importance of surrounding our youth with strong culturally-grounded adults and Elders who can serve as mentors; 4) acknowledging historical trauma AND historical resiliency and healing; and 5) recognizing our cultural assets.

While our learning journey is far from over, Potlatch Fund used these learnings to launch the Healthy Pathways for Native Youth grant program in January 2016. Through this initiative, Potlatch Fund seeks to provide grant support to projects that share our vision of investing in Native youth as our current and future leaders. We seek new or existing programs with the important goal of providing Native youth the leadership skills they need to balance cultural change and continuity in a world fraught with challenging issues. This initiative supports Native youth in their transformation from childhood to young adulthood by providing resources to their home communities as they equip them with cultural knowledge that builds resilience, strength, and health and wellness.

In our first year, we awarded 18 grants to Tribes and Native nonprofits in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. Along with our Native Student Success, Community Building, Language Preservation, and Native Arts grant programs, we estimate that nearly 70% of Potlatch Fund's grant dollars will go directly towards supporting Native youth programming.

Successful & Innovative Programs Supported by Potlatch Fund

While we have funded a variety of projects including culture camps, coming-of-age ceremonies, and youth leadership councils, one of the most incredible things that we are witnessing in the Pacific Northwest is the resurgence of traditional culture in the form of healing journeys. Below is a sampling of grantee stories, some of which were funded under this brand new grant initiative.

Tribal Canoe Journeys

Canoe Journeys is an annual gathering of Northwest Tribal nations. It was sparked by the Paddle to Seattle in 1989 as part of Washington State's Centennial celebration. Over the past 25 years, Canoe Journeys has grown to include over 100 canoes and the participation of Canoe Families from other Native canoe cultures, including Native American tribes, First Nations peoples, Alaska Natives, Inuit, Maori, Native Hawaiians, and other Indigenous peoples from across the world. Canoes travel from around the Salish Sea and up the coast of Oregon – retracing their traditional trade and fishing routes - to converge into one Tribal community that offers to host the landing and the week of camping, feasting, and cultural sharing that follows.

Since 2005, Potlatch Fund has helped to support traveling Canoe Families and the host Tribe. Most recently, we experienced the Paddle to Nisqually landing at the Port of Olympia. Before becoming the host this year, the Nisqually Tribe had participated in the annual canoe journey since 1994 and used the event to strengthen its culture, community, and families. Canoe culture, as practiced by Pacific Northwest Native tribes, had all but disappeared until Canoe Journeys began to grow in the 1990's. Canoe Journeys sparked a cultural renaissance or rebirth. Traditional practices such as dug-out canoe carving, cedar bark weaving, and regalia making have been revived and rediscovered. Ancestral songs have resurfaced to be shared during the closing ceremony of the journey.

In the words of one youth participant, "Our traditions were rather meaningless to me as a young boy, but now they are one of my strongest passions. I love to be out on the floor as our lead singer and drummer, leading our songs and performing for the crowds and feeling the pulse of the drums. I started to race canoes after journey was done and practiced every day in the summer and have learned to skipper our canoe. I love being able to tell some of the greatest stories I have gained because of the journey. I learned my Tribe's language to speak for our family, understand other speakers and most importantly to carry on our traditions."

Yellow Bird, An Affiliate of Seventh Generation Fund

Yellow Bird - a Native nonprofit based in Lame Deer, Montana – has been hosting the annual Fort Robinson Outbreak Spiritual Run for the past 20 years. The run was created to pay homage to those Northern Cheyenne ancestors that broke out of Fort Robinson in Crawford, Nebraska on January 9, 1879. They were fleeing from forced relocation when they were captured and held at the fort without rations or heat before they made their escape. Most of them were killed at this time, but a few survived and made it to their homeland, the Powder River country in Southeastern Montana. Because of this sacrifice, they now have the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

The runners that participate in the annual Fort Robinson Spiritual Run include 100 Northern Cheyenne youth from the reservation who range in age from 7 to young adults. Many of the participants are considered "at risk" youth and come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The runners make a commitment to undertake a five day journey across 400 miles that commemorates their ancestry by replicating their epic journey from Nebraska to their homeland in Montana. They run day and night enduring freezing temperatures and physical hardships, much like their ancestors of 130 years ago. They learn valuable lessons of unity, responsibility to self and others, and how to overcome adversities. They encourage one another through winter weather, the sand-hills of Nebraska, the sacred Black Hills of South Dakota, and the plains and mountains of Montana. They gain a strong connection to the sacrifice of their ancestors. The run instills in them a sense of pride, greater self-esteem, a deeper respect for their identity and sincere appreciation for their homeland. Today's youth participants completed the journey that their ancestors could not.

In the words of Yellow Bird founders Phillip Whiteman Jr. and Lynette Two Bulls, “We are now seeing the generational change because of our 20 years of existence. Our vision is to create a shift in thinking: a reconnection to the spirit of Resilience. Our vision is to see youth and families empowered and thriving and free from the trauma of the past. Today our Northern Cheyenne youth run not from gunfire, today they run for their future.”

Nez Perce Appaloosa Horse Club

Every August more than 100 people, including youth, will camp and ride horses together in an annual journey of 100 miles along the Nez Perce Trail through Idaho and into Montana. In doing so, the journey participants retrace the trail of their ancestors who resisted forced relocation and fought in the Nez Perce War of 1877. In their efforts to keep their families safe from conflict, they were driven from their homelands toward the Canadian border before being defeated in battle. This was where Chief Joseph eventually surrendered. The full length of the trail is 1,170 miles and the Nez Perce Appaloosa Horse Club has been undertaking 100 miles each year for the past 13 years. This past summer they completed the final stint of the journey to reach the Bear Paw Battlefield in Montana, where the final battle took place.

The Horse Club organizes this annual journey because they believe it is critically important for the Nez Perce people to reconnect and stay connected to the Nez Perce Trail. Until these healing journeys started, the Nez Perce people no longer traveled long stretches of the trail by horse. In addition to reclaiming their history, they are reclaiming their knowledge of the land.

In the words of Elder Rosa Yearout, “You’re thinking of what your ancestors and their horses went through. Every step is a sacred trail. When you’re growing up you don’t realize these things happened because it was hard for the elders to talk about. It took a long time for Nimiipuu to really connect to the old historical sites. It wasn’t till 100 years later, in 1977, that Nimiipuu people gradually went back to the Bear Paw.” The annual journey is a recognition of what their Nez Perce ancestors endured and a way of healing from the historical trauma that Tribal members still carry.

Impact on Native Youth

In sharing these grantee stories I’ve shared pieces of our Potlatch Fund history and pieces of a larger collective history you might not be familiar with. I’ve highlighted programs that work from a deep understanding that our youth can only seek to understand their purpose and identity as a Native person when they understand and respect the history of their Tribal people. While that history is at times painful, there are also stories of hope and resilience. It is critical we help our youth see their ancestral connection to Native peoples’ legacy of survival and cultural pride.

The stories we collect in our grantees final reports, which I’ve shared with you today, are the most promising evidence that our youth are being positively impacted by the programs we fund. In addition to these stories, Potlatch Fund is designing a new program evaluation system that will utilize community based participatory research and an Indigenous evaluation framework. While we recognize the importance of collecting data and measuring impact, we ultimately want to grow a spirit of inquiry among our grantees. We ask our grantees to collect data that is meaningful in helping them understand the changes and challenges they see in their communities. This data should also assist them in gaining additional program support. Potlatch Fund staff – with input from our grantees – will continue working towards a theory of change that puts Native youth at the center of all of our grant investments. We will continue to advocate for and collaborate with all of you to direct funding and increase investments in our youth.

POTLATCH FUND STAFF

Dana Arviso, Diné, *Executive Director*

While primarily focused on the needs of Native Americans, Dana has dedicated her life to combating the social and economic disparities that affect all communities of color in the Pacific Northwest. Dana has served on the boards of Social Justice Fund Northwest and Native Americans in Philanthropy. Dana grew up on the Bishop Paiute-Shoshone Indian Reservation in California and earned her bachelor's degree from California State University, Sacramento, in Child Development. She earned her Masters of Education degree in 2006 from the University of Washington with an emphasis on Language, Literacy, and Culture. She is a graduate of First Nations Development Institute's Seattle LEAD Program and participated in Leadership Tomorrow's Class of 2011.

Lawrence Leake, *Managing Director*

Lawrence holds a Master in Teaching degree (Seattle University), a Bachelor of Arts degree in History (University of California – Santa Barbara), and extensive experience in a myriad of settings. Before joining Potlatch Fund in 2006, he spent 10 years in Toyohashi, Japan, which began with a four-year stint in the sales and marketing department of Amita Machines and concluded with over six years at Overseas English Academy where he served as Managing Director. Born and raised in Seattle, Lawrence has a passion for the outdoors and can be regularly found snowboarding in the winter and hiking in the summer.

Tachini Pete, Salish / Diné, *Program Director*

Tachini was raised with strong cultural values in Salish and Navajo from living on the Flathead and Navajo Reservations. His mother is Salish and his father Navajo. He is the father of four children. Tachini is a learner by nature. He is an avid learner and teacher of the Salish language. He completed education in Automotive Technology from Wyoming Technical Inst., from Salish Kootenai College Salish Cultural Leadership, an Associate's degrees in Native American Studies, and Bilingual Education, a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Elementary Education from the University of Montana Western, and a Master's Degree in Business Administration from Gonzaga University.

Maria Griffin, Spokane, *Program Coordinator (Spokane Office)*

Maria is a member of the Spokane Tribe of Indians and has worked and gone to school in the Spokane area. Maria focuses her organizational and management skills in the areas of community and economic development in urban and rural Native American communities. She provided training and technical assistance to over 200 native communities in the past 28 years in a variety of areas such as project planning and development, grant application writing, small business development, community outreach, and cultural competency. Maria sits on the board of the Spokane Tribal Network and holds a B.S. in Biology and Chemistry, and a M.A. in English from Eastern Washington University.

Damara Jacobs-Morris, Squamish, *Development & Communications Manager*

Damara carries the Ancestral names Cha7awtenaat iy Siyamiya. She is proud of her Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and African American ancestry. She was born and raised in the villages of Xwemelch'stn and Esla7han (Capilano and Mission Indian Reserves) located in Vancouver, British Columbia. Damara grew up surrounded by educators and artists, an aspect of her identity that lead her to choose a career in creative fields. She received a B.A. in Communications from Simon Fraser University and a M.A. with honors in Art and Visual Culture Education from the University of Arizona.

Mary Kummer, Makah, *Office Manager*

Mary is from the Makah Tribe and has spent her entire professional life working throughout the Olympic Peninsula building and connecting relationships that benefit Northwest Native communities. For more than two decades she has worked in Native country through Tribal, Federal, and Private entities. She brings a diverse mix of experience and perspective to Potlatch Fund and is proud to continue and expand the tradition of giving back to her community.