

Native American Rights Fund

Indigenous Peoples' Rights

<https://www.narf.org/about-us/>

Mission Statement

Since 1970, the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) has provided legal assistance to Native American tribes, organizations, and individuals nationwide who might otherwise have gone without adequate representation. NARF has successfully asserted and defended the most important rights of Indians and tribes in hundreds of major cases, and has achieved significant results in such critical areas as tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, natural resource protection, voting rights, and Indian education.

Since NARF's inception, Indian law has changed dramatically. It has become a recognized specialty with a well-documented body of statutes and case law. However, that has not made it a simpler field. In the 1970s and the early 1980s, courts were generally receptive to Indian rights cases. However, since the mid to late 1980s, an increasingly conservative federal bench has made Indian rights cases more difficult to win. Combined with the huge cost of litigation in time and in money this means NARF and its Indian clients are always attuned to opportunities for negotiation, consensus, and settlement.

With credibility built over more than 50 years of service, NARF has become a respected consultant to policy makers and others engaged in drafting legislation. As a consensus builder, NARF works with religious, civil rights, and other Native American organizations to shape the laws that will help assure the civil and religious rights of all Native Americans. NARF attorneys, many of whom are tribal citizens, use their understanding of Indian legal issues to assist tribes in negotiating with individuals, companies, and governmental agencies.

How NARF Has Helped

Throughout its history, NARF has impacted tens of thousands of Indian people in its work for more than 300 tribes. Some examples of the results include:

It is clear that our natural world is undergoing severe, catastrophic climate change that adversely impacts the lives of people and ecosystems worldwide. Native Americans and Alaska Natives are especially vulnerable and are experiencing disproportionate negative impacts on their cultures, health, and food systems. In response, NARF is committed to environmental sustainability through our mission, work, and organizational values. [Read more>>>](#)

As part of the war on poverty launched in the mid-1960s under the Office of Economic Opportunity, government funded legal services programs were established around the country to provide legal services to poor and disadvantaged people. Many of these programs were located on or near Indian reservations. As these programs began working with their Indian clients, a common realization soon developed among them that Indians had special legal problems which were, for the most part, governed and controlled by a specialized and little-known area of the law known as Indian Law a complex body of law composed of hundreds of Indian treaties and court decisions, and thousands of federal Indian statutes, regulations and administrative rulings. As legal services contended with this area of Indian law, they became more aware of its relevance and applicability to the problems of their Indian clients. This was especially so for legal services located on reservations where the presence of trust land, tribal resources and tribal government institutions necessarily involved the most basic tenets of Indian law. Soon, legal services lawyers became involved in various matters with national implications, and it was clear to those working in legal services and to others working for Indian rights that cases involving major national issues of Indian law needed to be handled with the greatest consideration. The idea began to form that a national organization was needed, staffed by Indian advocates with experience and expertise in Indian law and sufficiently funded in order that important Indian cases were not lost or abandoned for lack of funds.

In 1970 with funding from the Ford Foundation, California Indian Legal Services one of the federally-funded legal services programs serving California Indians implemented a pilot project to provide legal services to Indians on a national level. That project became known as the Native American Rights Fund .

In 1971, the Native American Rights Fund separated from California Indian Legal Services and relocated to Boulder, Colorado, to be more centrally located. NARF incorporated separately with an all-Native Board of Directors, and in a few short years, the Native American Rights Fund grew from a three-lawyer staff to a firm of forty full-time staff members, with fifteen attorneys. That same year, with start-up funding from the Carnegie Corporation, NARF established the [National Indian Law Library](#) located at NARF's main office in Boulder.

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