

IN FOCUS

A New Paradigm of Collaboration with Indigenous Peoples

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Human Rights Funding News, IHRFG e-Newsletter, May 5, 2011

More than 370 million-strong in over 90 countries, Indigenous communities constitute the largest minority, yet the least understood, of the world's peoples. Indigenous peoples receive less support and fewer resources than any other population on the globe. To the extent that the world pays attention at all, Indigenous peoples are often valued as anthropological studies or raw material for patents without regard to their human rights. This marginalization persists in the world of philanthropy where as little as 2/100ths of one percent of giving is directed toward Indigenous communities.¹



It is true that Indigenous-focused philanthropy can present unfamiliar challenges. Industrialized practice, and even communication, is often inappropriate for small, often-isolated populations of culturally distinct peoples. Because Indigenous peoples have been under attack for so long, outsiders are frequently viewed with suspicion. This mutual lack of understanding between donor and Indigenous communities only exacerbates a dire situation.

Grantmakers can diminish this lack of understanding through better education on working with Indigenous communities. One educational tool is a guide from the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples (IFIP), *The Grantmaker's Guide: Strengthening International Indigenous Philanthropy*, which demonstrates how Indigenous peoples are worth the time, effort and investment, not only for the sake of human rights, but for the sake of the earth and its inhabitants. IFIP has gathered research, case studies and experiences of those who are building momentum toward a new paradigm of collaboration between funders and Indigenous peoples. In particular, human rights funders can gain insight into how this collaboration takes shape through "the Giving Principles of Indigenous Philanthropy" (Reciprocity, Respect, Responsibility, and Relationship) and international instruments, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). IFIP worked with Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) to create this set of shared "Giving Principles of Indigenous Philanthropy," which include the following:

Reciprocity: Foundations are committed to the Indigenous culture of reciprocity. They acknowledge and recognize that:

- Giving and receiving is interconnected and organic.
- We are a world family—the north and south hemispheres are connected.
- We are a holistic family that honors and connects with elders and spirituality.

¹ The Grantmaker's Guide: Strengthening International Indigenous Philanthropy: <http://www.internationalfunders.org/publications.html>

Respect: Foundations give dynamic and inclusive investments directly to Indigenous groups. They are based on processes of:

- Empowerment and courage;
- Transparency, access and open processes;
- Risk taking, flexibility and adaptability; and
- Investing more than money.

Responsibility: Foundations are committed, passionate and courageous champions of Indigenous needs. They work with:

- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP)
- Recognized Indigenous Peoples' Organizations

Relationships: Foundations seek long-term engagement through learning relationships. They seek:

- The meeting points of the 'conversation' on livelihood, security, empowerment and rights;
- Organizational Indigenous representation; and
- Shared relationships based on cultural respect, not power.

Some of the critical human rights issues for Indigenous peoples are: their right to land, territories, and resources; the conservation of traditional knowledge, culture and language; and the great impacts of climate change on the highly fragile ecosystems in which they live. The guide also provides Interviews with donors and Indigenous leaders that shed light on these and other issues. In one case, the Global Fund for Women describes its collaboration with Wayúu Indigenous women in Colombia to train human rights defenders. The Wayúu women sought negotiating power in the peace process to end a protracted civil war that has displaced entire Indigenous communities. As Indigenous women comprise the majority of displaced people in Colombia, the Wayúu created an organization to confront their isolation and lack of representation. The Fund supported the first women's community center that gathered testimonies of human rights abuses for litigation, along with the training of human rights defenders. As a result, Wayúu women built networks on the local, national and international levels, where they made their case before the UN Forum for Indigenous Peoples.

Additionally, there are lessons to be learned from the pitfalls of past experiences. One lesson highlighted in the guide is how strategic planning can enhance the capacity of Indigenous Peoples, increasing ownership of the results, and creating more meaningful, specialized programs.

Whether the issue is climate change, food security or human rights, Indigenous peoples are powerful partners with millennia of experience. They have expressed the presentiment that the world is at a "tipping point." There is no better time to encourage alternative and proven models of harmonious living. Grantmakers can seize this opportunity and explore new ways to collaborate and partner with Indigenous peoples.

Resources for funders:

- 1) The Grantmaker's Guide: Strengthening International Indigenous Philanthropy:
<http://www.internationalfunders.org/publications.html>
- 2) Visit the website of the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples:
<http://www.internationalfunders.org>
- 3) The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People:
<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html>
- 4) Contact Evelyn Arce, Executive Director, International Funders for Indigenous Peoples at
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