

**Through Every Organ of Society:  
Funding Principles in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**  
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Beginning in the 1970s, Indigenous Peoples' rights advocates began to articulate their claims using human rights terms. Their claims and concerns were--and still are--about both the physical and cultural survival of Indigenous Peoples around the world. They were--and are--about the rights of both individuals and collectives. And they were and are about Indigenous Peoples' participation in the decision-making processes that affect them, placing them in a better position to defend their rights.

Those processes include grantmaking. Funders working with Indigenous communities can take lessons from the model used by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Over the decades in which UNDRIP was negotiated, Indigenous leaders and advocates from all over the world came together to share their perspectives. They explained to the world their cultures, legal systems, customs, languages, spirituality, world views, traditional knowledge systems, and concepts of economic, social, and political development that form the collective basis of their vision for their own future and well-being. Such a participatory model ensured an inclusive final product that reflected the needs, challenges, and voices of Indigenous communities themselves.



Indigenous Peoples are protected by the same human rights as all other peoples, yet they continue to suffer from the consequences of historical injustices including colonization, dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, oppression and discrimination, as well as the denial of their self-determination.

Rising above these many challenges, the strength of the global Indigenous Peoples' movement cannot be ignored. The Declaration stands as a victory for the movement, a statement to the power of these peoples and nations struggling for a more just, equitable and sustainable world.

Indigenous Peoples' visions of how these rights affirmed in the UNDRIP are fulfilled often differ from dominant society's. Efforts to articulate and protect Indigenous rights – even by funders with good intentions – often reflect dominant society's goals. UNDRIP elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to Indigenous Peoples' unique situations. It is a long-awaited statement of redress and a map of action for implementation of the rights it contains.

UNDRIP can be viewed as a remedial instrument of international law. It does not give Indigenous Peoples a set of rights that are unique to them; rather, it provides context and understanding for the particular characteristics and needs of Indigenous Peoples, offering corrective steps to confront the historical and current experiences of Indigenous Peoples regarding human rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights originally stated:

*[E]very individual and **every organ of society** shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these [human] rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance...*

The same is true regarding the implementation of UNDRIP. The funder is an organ of society and can play a critical role in the implementation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

### **Impacts on Funding Indigenous Peoples' organizations:**

International Funders for Indigenous Peoples is developing a toolkit to support and strengthen funders' implementation of the Declaration. Offering funders guidance and support on their role in implementing the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the toolkit includes case studies highlighting ways funders have engaged with Indigenous Peoples to promote their rights, practical tools for funders to develop their capacities to promote and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as discussions on the meanings and articulations of Indigenous Peoples' rights.

UNDRIP's applicability goes beyond the halls of the United Nations. It also offers practical guidance to funders engaging with Indigenous Peoples' communities and organizations, as well as those working to promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Here are two important ways grantmakers can integrate the principles of UNDRIP into their own funding practices:

- In respecting the right of self-determination held in UNDRIP, funders must recognize that when supporting Indigenous Peoples, they are building funding relationships and creating partnerships with peoples, nations, and governments. Funders need to develop different policies and protocols from those they use when working with other NGOs, just as it is different for them to work with states or federal governments.
- The right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) remains central to the fulfillment of many interconnected rights for Indigenous Peoples. While funders often support projects that will affect Indigenous Peoples through other allies or intermediaries, the FPIC of the Indigenous Peoples themselves should still be attained. To respect Indigenous Peoples' right to FPIC, funders can ensure that Indigenous Peoples are rights-holders and active goal-setters of the projects, rather than subjects or other stakeholders. This could lead to more funding of grassroots Indigenous Peoples' organizations.
- A critique Indigenous Peoples have of funders is that they do not speak with one another and coordinate their support. Oftentimes Indigenous Peoples' organizations are bogged down trying to fulfill the different reporting requirements and obligations from various funders. Coordination among funders can reduce duplication, free time, and resources, and limit competition, leaving more time for Indigenous Peoples' organizations--and other civil society organizations--to continue their tremendous work in pursuit of rights.

This groundbreaking and timely toolkit will foster a greater awareness of Indigenous rights among funders and help guide their commitment to support implementation of the Declaration.

*The toolkit will be released this summer. To order a copy, visit [International Funders for Indigenous Peoples' website](#). For more information, contact [Curtis Kline](#).*