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Native Community Development Group Joins National Week of Action, Advocates for Economic Opportunity for Native Americans

Rapid City, SD – January 25, 2016 – The Native CDFI Network, a national association of Native community development financial institutions (CDFIs) that work to increase access to capital in Native communities, has launched an intensive public awareness and advocacy campaign in conjunction with the Corporation for Enterprise Development’s (CFED’s) Assets & Opportunity National Week of Action. The goal of the campaign is to call attention to the issues of financial insecurity and inequality that Native American families across this country are facing, while highlighting successful solutions that create economic opportunity for all.

“Historically, there has been very little investment in Native communities, and that has left us behind in the ways of infrastructure, economic development, and asset creation. The good news is that there are many organizations out there working overtime to level the playing field,” says Tanya Fiddler, Executive Director of the Native CDFI Network.

The campaign, taking place from January 25-29, 2016, is anchored in the release of CFED’s annually-published *Assets & Opportunity Scorecard*, a powerful research and advocacy tool that helps paint a picture of household financial insecurity in the United States. The *Scorecard* revealed that in Montana and South Dakota – states with some of the highest number of Indian reservations – state policies are doing little to improve financial security for residents.

A deeper dig into CFED’s other data resources reveals even more economic disparity in counties with majority Native American populations. For example, in Oglala Lakota County (formerly Shannon County) located on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and comprised of 95% Native Americans, nearly half of all households do not have sufficient net worth to subsist at the poverty level for three months in the absence of income. That’s two and a half times higher than the state of South Dakota’s average. In Glacier County where Montana’s Blackfeet Reservation is located, the population is made up of 66% Native Americans and 17% of residents are unbanked, while the Montana’s overall unbanked population is less than 7%.

“Accurate data is the first step in making positive changes. We not only see the truth in our communities – the quality of life of our Native families – but now we see it in ink on paper. The next question is, ‘What policies can we implement that create systemic and sustainable change?’ And that is what the National Week of Action is about,” says Fiddler.

The Network’s weeklong campaign will highlight a myriad of proven strategies that are being implemented to decrease the economic gap between Native communities and mainstream America. Fiddler says the Network

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will be pushing out information on programs that help Native Americans build credit, reign in predatory lending, and teach children about saving. The last day of the campaign will take place on Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Awareness Day, and be dedicated to raising awareness of Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites and the EITC as strategies that help Native Americans build assets. There are 70 Native CDFIs across the nation that are currently delivering these types of programs to help Native American families increase financial capability and asset ownership.

“Our goal for this campaign is to let people know about the good work that is happening in Indian Country, and use our successes as models that can be adopted throughout the nation,” says Fiddler. She says the support of community stakeholders, partner organizations, tribes, and policymakers is needed to create systemic change that creates more economic opportunity. She adds, “When we unite together on these issues, we make progress.”

Fiddler says there are numerous examples of entities coming together from diverse backgrounds to make progress on these issues. Most recently, through their Financial Inclusion Policy Initiative, the Native CDFI Network has partnered with Native American Development Corporation (a Native CDFI) to move state and tribal policy efforts forward in Montana. Through this advocacy work, the Native American Collateral Support Program was developed to close gaps in equity and collateral that present challenges for Native American entrepreneurs.

“The Native community and economic development movement is gaining momentum. We’ve made some significant accomplishments, and we plan on more in the future,” says Fiddler.

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About the Native CDFI Network

The Native CDFI Network was formed in 2009 to unify Native community development financial institutions (CDFIs) serving Native trust land communities, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. Currently, over 70 certified Native CDFIs are located in 19 states across the country. The mission of the Native CDFI Network is to be a national voice and advocate that strengthens and promotes Native CDFIs, creating access to capital and resources for Native peoples. More information on the Native CDFI Network can be found at www.nativecdfi.net.

About CFED

CFED’s work makes it possible for millions of people to achieve financial security and contribute to an opportunity economy. We scale innovative practical solutions that empower low- and moderate-income people to build wealth. We drive responsive policy change at all levels of government. We support the efforts of community leaders across the country to advance economic opportunity for all. Established in 1979 as the Corporation for Enterprise Development, CFED works nationally and internationally through its offices in Washington, DC; Durham, North Carolina; and San Francisco, California.

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To improve policies and programs that promote financial security and opportunity, CFED is the backbone organization for a national Assets & Opportunity Network, which is comprised of nearly 2,000 advocates, service providers, researchers, financial institutions and others representing all 50 states and DC. To learn more about the Assets & Opportunity Network and to join, visit <http://assetsandopportunity.org/network>.

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