



INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF INDIAN COUNTRY

2024 Annual Policy & Advocacy Report



The Native CDFI Network's mission is to be a national voice and advocate that strengthens and promotes Native community development financial institutions (CDFIs), creating and providing access to capital and resources for Native peoples.

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NATIVE CDFIs BY THE NUMBERS

\$400M

Amount awarded to Native CDFI Network through EPA's Clean Communities Investment Accelerator (CCIA)

63

Native CDFIs and community lenders united in NCN's CCIA coalition

\$2B

Total amount of Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund awards EPA says will be deployed in Indian Country over the next 5.5 years

3:1

Ratio of private capital to federal grant funds that CCIA grantees plan to mobilize

\$400K

Grant award to NCN through SBA's PRIME program for training and capacity building

5

New NCN team members added in 2024

\$47.2M

Total amount of Native American CDFI Assistance (NACA) funding awarded in 2024

25

Number of Native CDFIs that received NACA funding in 2024



TO OUR MEMBERS, SUPPORTERS, AND COLLABORATORS,

As I reflect on 2024, I'm reminded of something I heard many years ago:

“Submitting the grant application is the easy part of the process—being awarded the grant, that’s when the real work begins.” This year, the Native CDFI Network signed a transformative agreement—the \$400 million Clean Communities Investment Accelerator award from the EPA—and true to form, that’s when our real work kicked into high gear.

This historic funding represents far more than just dollars. It represents trust — trust in Native CDFIs to lead clean energy initiatives in our communities. It represents recognition — recognition that Native leaders know best how to serve Native communities. And it represents opportunity — not just for the 63 Native CDFIs and community lenders in our coalition, but for all of Indian Country.

While the CCIA award has garnered headlines, I want to be clear: NCN hasn’t forgotten our roots. We remain, first and foremost, advocates for Native CDFIs of all sizes. This year, we’ve continued pushing for increased NACA funding, now approaching \$50 million in House recommendations — up from \$16 million in 2019. We’ve fought for Native set-asides in

New Markets Tax Credits, advocated for permanent funding for Treasury’s Office of Tribal and Native Affairs, and worked to eliminate matching requirements that create barriers for smaller Native CDFIs.

We’re building from the bottom up, because that’s where lasting change begins. For NCN, this means strengthening our Native CDFI industry by starting with our emerging members — building their balance sheets, expanding their capacity, and ensuring they have the tools to grow and thrive. This year, NCN became an intermediary lender, committed to providing loans exclusively to Native CDFIs, in order to create an additional resource for bringing affordable, long-term capital to Indian Country. Through our capacity-building efforts and partnerships with NeighborWorks America, government agencies, and others, we’re advancing our vision for Native economic sovereignty.

Our team has delivered results while embracing new challenges. We’ve hosted dozens of webinars, convened regional meetings, and kept our boots on the ground in Native communities. You can’t truly advocate for a community until you’ve been there, listened to their stories, and understood their needs firsthand.

Looking ahead, we face both opportunities and challenges. The CCIA program will demand much from us and our partners over the next six years. We’re building the infrastructure, creating the handbooks, and developing the support systems our community lenders will need to succeed. At the same time, we’re pushing forward on critical policy priorities — from the Native American Entrepreneurial Opportunity Act to the Rural Housing Service Reform Act.

Our commitment to expanding Native CDFI capacity shows in two key achievements. In partnership with Wells Fargo, we’ve launched an initiative to address the critical shortage of Native CDFIs in California and Nevada. This work will help us develop new Native CDFIs in areas where they’re desperately needed. While we celebrate our 64 certified Native CDFIs, we estimate that 200-plus are needed to adequately serve our Native communities. Building this capacity isn’t just about numbers — it’s about

ensuring that emerging Native CDFIs have the support and resources they need to grow sustainably.

The \$400,000 award from the Small Business Administration’s PRIME strengthens our ability to provide comprehensive training programs, improve access to capital, and create crucial networking opportunities for Native CDFIs. This kind of capacity-building support is essential as our members take on new challenges in clean energy financing and community development. As we continue growing our team — welcoming Pamela Boivin as CCIA Program Manager, Luke Robinson and Jodi Fischer as Regional Coordinators, Alex Mendoza as CFO, and Stephanie Prater as Senior Financial Manager — we’re positioned to drive our members’ expansion into new opportunities.

None of this work happens in isolation. Our success relies on the relationships we’ve built — with the Treasury, USDA, EPA, SBA, and countless others in Washington who have become champions for Native communities. It relies on our partnerships with organizations like NeighborWorks, Wells Fargo, and the Federal Home Loan Banks. Most importantly, it relies on you — our members, supporters, and collaborators who share our vision of thriving, sustainable Native economies.

As we move into 2025, NCN remains committed to being your voice in Washington, your partner in building capacity, and your advocate for the resources Native communities need and deserve. Because while signing that CCIA agreement might have been the easy part — we’re ready to create lasting change in Indian Country.

Weblaho (thank you to all of you),



Pete Upton
Chief Executive Officer

WHY NATIVE CDFIs MATTER



Patrice
Kunesh

"Native CDFIs make the most important investments and achieve the most impressive impacts in Native communities. They are directly responsible for enhancing financial fluency, for creating access to capital, or building homes, entrepreneurs and business. So it's just phenomenal, the work Native CDFIs do and quite simply, I think Native CDFIs are the best champions of Indian Country investments."

Patrice Kunesh, Administration for Native Americans at the 2023 Native CDFI Network Summit in Washington, D.C.



John
"Rocky"
Barrett

"Our Native CDFI has really been a fantastic asset. We started it with \$250,000 in capital, and they have worked it up to the \$75 million in capital they have now. It is a really important aspect of our banking operation and a very important aspect of tribal development because the bank can only loan so much money to its ownership, which is the tribe. So if you do get into the banking business, get into Native CDFI business at the same time."

Chairman John "Rocky" Barrett of the Nation Potawatomi Nation during an interview at the Great Lakes Tribal Economic Summit in September 2024



Pilar
Thomas

"Native CDFI Network has a robust plan for deploying the (clean energy) funds through their Community Lender Network. They know Native CDFIs, and Native CDFIs know Indian Country. They're going to work with their Native CDFIs to get the money out the door and into tribal communities over the next few years."

Pilar Thomas, partner, Quarles & Brady LLP



Lance
Morgan

"Native CDFIs are doing the hard job, loaning to people with no business experience, no entrepreneurial experience, who have an idea or notion, but are in a highly restricted capital environment. I want to commend the work you're doing - it's not always thankful, it's not always successful, but it's determined, and that's why we're still here."

Lance Morgan, CEO of Ho-Chunk, Inc., at NCN's Clean Communities Investment Accelerator (CCIA) rollout event on October 10-11, 2024, in Omaha.



Michou
Kokodoko

"Even where traditional banks operate in or near Native communities, they may lack understanding of the local culture and complexities of providing financial services in Indian Country. Native Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) emerged to help address credit and capital challenges and provide Native communities and residents with an alternative to mainstream banks."

Michou Kokodoko, project director at the Center for Indian Country Development at the Minneapolis Fed, in a report titled "Native CDFIs connect Indian Country to credit and capital."

NCN POLICY & ADVOCACY UPDATE 2024

The Native CDFI Network achieved transformative progress this year across three critical areas: securing unprecedented federal funding, advancing key policy initiatives for Native communities, and expanding strategic partnerships to strengthen the Native CDFI industry. Through focused advocacy and leadership, NCN has successfully expanded access to capital, enhanced clean energy financing opportunities, and strengthened the capacity of Native CDFIs to serve their communities, while building a more robust infrastructure for sustainable economic development across Indian Country.



JANUARY

- ▶ Collaborated with 11 national Native-serving organizations to craft economic policy briefs for Congress and the Biden Administration, focusing on tangible steps to enhance Native economies and support Native-owned businesses.
- ▶ Hosted a webinar on the New Markets Tax Credit Native Initiative, attracting participants keen on increasing investment in tribal areas.
- ▶ Unveiled NCN's 2024 Policy Priorities, outlining key federal objectives to strengthen Native CDFIs and improve access to capital in Native communities.

FEBRUARY

- ▶ Conducted a webinar spotlighting the USDA Rural Development's Rural Business Development Grant Program
- ▶ Joined with NCN members and allies in advocating for the Scaling Community Lenders Act of 2023 (S. 1442) and the Community Development Investment Tax Credit Act of 2023 (S. 2963) through letters to Congressional leadership.
- ▶ Teamed up with 17 national Native-serving organizations to support the bipartisan Native American Entrepreneurial Opportunity Act (H.R. 7102) and its Senate counterpart (S. 1156).
- ▶ Joined hundreds of lending stakeholders in urging Congress to safeguard the EPA Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund against potential legislative threats.
- ▶ Launched Initiate Prosperity, a technical assistance platform aimed at enhancing small business success through Native CDFIs.
- ▶ Launched the 2024 NCN Leadership Institute sessions, featuring workshops led by Lisa Wagner of Bluestem Consulting Inc. on certification requirements.

MARCH

- ▶ Collaborated with University of New Hampshire and Inclusiv to offer a free solar lending training course tailored for Native CDFIs, empowering participants to leverage solar technology for cost and emissions reduction.

- ▶ Attended the 2024 National Interagency Community Reinvestment Conference, advocating for proactive engagement between CRA staff and NCN to enhance connections with Native CDFIs.
- ▶ Led panel discussions on clean-energy finance at the 2024 Reservation Economic Summit (RES), attracting over 4,500 tribal and business leaders.
- ▶ Endorsed the Tribal Rural Housing Access Act (S. 3906) to expand housing access for Native communities, including provisions benefiting Native CDFIs.
- ▶ Collaborated with Climate United on a climate finance event in Rapid City, S.D., engaging stakeholders on climate action and financial opportunities.
- ▶ Hosted an NCN Live webinar on the USDA-RD Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program, providing financing options for rural and Native communities.

APRIL 2024

- ▶ Selected for a historic \$400M grant under the EPA's Clean Communities Investment Accelerator (CCIA) program through the Biden administration's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF).
- ▶ Submitted a joint comment letter on the New Market Tax Credits (NMTC) program, advocating for a 10% set-aside for Native community development entities (CDEs) to enhance economic development on tribal lands and lower barriers.
- ▶ Launched the Difference Makers 2.0 story-and-podcast series, highlighting Native CDFIs and their role in the success of small-business clients.
- ▶ Introduced the 'Find a Native CDFI' map, an interactive tool that connects users with Native CDFIs by location and service type.
- ▶ Launched 2024 NCN Leadership Institute Training for members, with Jack Northrup leading a session on "How to Build Your Balance Sheet: Capitalization and Cash Flow."
- ▶ Joined other GGRF awardees at The National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on April 26 to emphasize the unique climate needs of Native and BIPOC communities. The event was hosted by the Center for Impact Finance, a program within the University of New Hampshire's Carsey School of Public Policy.

MAY 2024

- ▶ Sent a joint letter to Senate leaders, advocating for the Tribal Rural Housing Access Act (S. 3906) and highlighting the need for a 5% set-aside for Native housing programs due to the challenges Native communities face in accessing housing and homeownership opportunities.
- ▶ Attended Climate Resilience Solutions for Financial Health & Empowerment hosted by Inclusiv. The convening focused on the impacts of climate change on the economies of low-income/disadvantaged communities (LIDAC) and explored incorporating climate resilience into financial health efforts.
- ▶ Completed onboarding of the first NCN member Initiate Prosperity cohort and launched the second cohort. The free program for NCN members provides online tools and materials designed to support independent business owners.
- ▶ Continued NCN Leadership Institute trainings with Jack Northrup leading a session for NCN members on “Portfolio Analysis for Loan Sales and the Secondary Market.”
- ▶ Participated in Powering the Energy Transition event hosted by the Alliance for Saving Energy. A key takeaway was “Demand is the new supply.” CEO Pete Upton emphasized the importance of engaging with Native households and communities to understand their clean energy needs and raise awareness about the benefits of energy efficiency upgrades.
- ▶ Provided CDFI Fund Certification Assessment webinar for NCN members led by Lisa Wagner. Native CDFIs were provided with a checklist to help them prepare for certification and recertification.
- ▶ Joined GGRF selectees and private capital investors at a GGRF Private Capital Leverage convening hosted by RMI. Participants discussed clean energy investment priorities, shared objectives, and opportunities for private markets to contribute to climate equity.

JUNE 2024

- ▶ Announced NCN’s 2024 Eastern Regional Event in partnership with NeighborWorks America and Four Directions Development Corporation in the state of Maine.
- ▶ Initiated recruitment efforts to build out the NCN team for CCIA implementation, including a CCIA Program Manager and a team of Regional Coordinators.
- ▶ Participated in the Financial Innovations Roundtable (FIR) hosted by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and the University of New Hampshire – Center for Impact Finance in New York City, June 3-4. The FIR is a cross-sector partnership among conventional and non-traditional lenders, investors, and other market actors to provide low-income communities with increased access to capital and financial services.
- ▶ Participated in the 9th Annual Native CDFI Capital Access Convening hosted by Oweesta. CEO Pete Upton discussed the pivotal role of the Native CDFI Network’s CCIA program will play in creating a clean energy finance ecosystem that will support clean energy projects in Native communities.

- ▶ Launched a year-long initiative with Wells Fargo to enhance economic opportunities for Native American communities in California and Nevada. This program aims to strengthen existing Native CDFIs and support the development of new Native CDFIs, addressing the significant financial resource gap across these states. Key components of the initiative include a regional needs assessment, leader empowerment, capacity building, collaboration, technical assistance, funding support, and knowledge dissemination.

JULY 2024

- ▶ Spotted a Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Native CDFI Relending Demonstration Program for FY 2024, aimed at enhancing homeownership for Native American Tribes, Alaska Native Communities, and Native Hawaiian Communities. The program offers a \$5 million funding allocation.
- ▶ NCN CEO Pete Upton was featured in Tribal Business News for his role in the clean energy finance transformation in Indian Country. The feature discusses the potential of \$2 billion in new funding to enhance Indigenous access to renewable energy and address the infrastructure gap, emphasizing NCN’s commitment to fostering energy independence and resilience in Native communities.
- ▶ Hosted a webinar on July 31, featuring USDA Rural Development representatives Tedd Buelow and Brian Hudson, who discussed the Native CDFI Relending Demonstration Program aimed at improving homeownership opportunities for Native communities in rural areas. The program offers mortgage lending capital to certified Native CDFIs.

AUGUST 2024

- ▶ Provided free technical assistance to members encountering challenges with CDFI Fund certification or recertification. Members were given access to a recorded overview and assessment checklist by Lisa Wagner of Bluestem Consulting.
- ▶ Received \$400,000 from the Small Business Administration’s 2024 Program for Investment in Microentrepreneurs (PRIME) to strengthen support for Native CDFIs. This funding will enhance capacity through training programs, access to capital, and in-person gatherings, enabling Native CDFIs to better support Native-owned businesses and drive economic growth in their communities.
- ▶ Released a statement advocating for a funding increase for the Native American CDFI Assistance (NACA) program in FY 2025 appropriations bills, highlighting a proposed \$35 million allocation. NCN is committed to securing \$50 million to meet the needs of nearly 100 Native CDFIs and encourages Native CDFI leaders to support this effort.
- ▶ Announced the appointment of Pamela Boivin (Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin) as NCN’s new CCIA Program Manager, where she will lead the CCIA Regional Coordinator team to enhance clean energy finance for Native CDFIs. Boivin brings 17 years of experience in the Native CDFI industry and a commitment to advancing cultural awareness in lending.



- ▶ Participated in the Nation Building Conference in Lewiston, Idaho, from August 21-23, where NCN CEO Pete Upton joined a panel on Tribal Energy and Climate Initiatives, featuring Janet Poitra, deputy executive director of Nimiipuu Energy; Jesse Leighton, executive director of Nimiipuu Energy; and Chrystel Cornelius, CEO of Oweesta Corporation. Upton also toured the Nez Perce Tribe's solar project, emphasizing the role of partnerships in advancing renewable energy projects within Native communities.
- ▶ Participated in the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) 2024 Community Partners Convening and 50th Anniversary Celebration from August 27-29, where NCN National Program Director Kristen Wagner joined a panel on "Native CDFIs: The Engine of Economic Development in Native Communities," featuring Jennifer Boyette, project director of Changemakers Community Economic Development Corp, and Dave Tovey, executive director of Nixyaawii Community Financial Services.

SEPTEMBER 2024

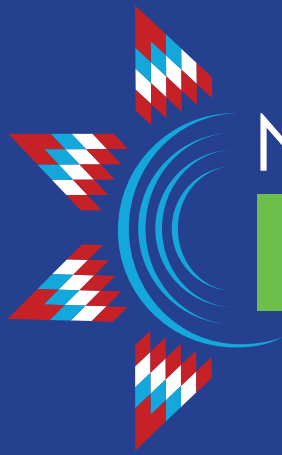
- ▶ Hosted an NCN Live event on September 4 featuring USDA officials discussing the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP). Participants learned about guaranteed loan financing and grant funding opportunities for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements specifically tailored for Native CDFIs.
- ▶ Invited participants to a webinar on September 18 to discuss proposed changes to CDFI ERP regulations and their implications for Native CDFIs. Lisa Wagner of Bluestem Consulting presented, and NCN gathered feedback from Native CDFI leaders to include in a formal comment letter to the CDFI Fund.
- ▶ Hired Jodi Fischer (Wyandotte Tribe of Oklahoma) and Luke Robinson (Northern Cheyenne Tribe of Montana) as new CCIA regional coordinators, where they will drive clean energy investments by coordinating regional initiatives with Native CDFIs and stakeholders.
- ▶ Congratulated Janie Hipp on her appointment to the Treasury's Community Development Advisory Board, recognizing her unwavering support for NCN and her commitment to community development. Her role on the board will help shape CDFI Fund policies, furthering the mission of advancing economic opportunities in underserved communities.
- ▶ Co-hosted the three-day "Building Sustainable Native Economies" event in northern Maine with NeighborWorks America and Four Directions Development Corporation. The event brought together tribal housing executives, Native CDFI leaders, and federal officials to explore housing, clean energy, and Native culture. Pete Upton outlined NCN's policy successes, including \$50 million for the NACA program and the \$400 million Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund grant.
- ▶ Participated in the third annual Great Lakes Tribal Economic Summit at Four Winds Casino in New Buffalo, Michigan. NCN CEO Pete Upton convened a panel discussion on the role that Native CDFIs play in Native communities, with Sean Winters, executive director of Chi Ishobak, and Fern Orie, interim CEO of Wisconsin Indigenous Housing & Economic Development

Corporation. Upton also spoke as part of a discussion on clean energy financing opportunities for Native communities, highlighting the role of Native CDFIs in leveraging federal programs and tax credits to fund tribal clean energy projects and drive economic growth.

- ▶ Attended the Clinton Global Initiative annual meeting in New York City, where NCN CEO Pete Upton joined discussions with philanthropy organizations and bank foundations on "Leveraging Catalytic Capital: The Future of Mission-Driven Financial Institutions." This strategic conversation, hosted at the JPB Foundation on September 23, 2024, and followed by a session on September 24, gathered key recipients of the EPA's National Clean Investment Fund (NCIF) and Clean Communities Investment Accelerator (CCIA) awards.
- ▶ Congratulated NCN member Alaska Growth Capital BIDCO, Inc. for receiving a \$40 million New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) award, recognizing their role in fostering economic development and supporting underserved Native communities through impactful investments.
- ▶ Participated in a public meeting of the U.S. Treasury's Advisory Board on September 19, 2024, where NCN CEO Pete Upton emphasized the critical role of Native CDFIs in deploying capital under the CCIA program to advance climate-focused initiatives in Indian Country.

OCTOBER 2024

- ▶ Hosted NCN Live webinar on October 17 featuring SBA Associate Administrator Katie Frost discussing the Community Advantage Small Business Lending Companies program. The session focused on helping Native CDFIs obtain CA SBLC licenses to increase small business lending capacity and leverage CCIA-based lending projects.
- ▶ Convened webinar on October 24 to develop NCN's 2025 policy priorities with Native CDFI leaders. The session reviewed current priorities and gathered input for advocacy strategy with incoming Administration and Congress, preparing for presentation at NCN's annual summit in December.
- ▶ Coordinated industry response to The CDFI Fund's proposed transaction level report changes for the Equitable Recovery Program (ERP). Drafted comment letter addressing key concerns about increased reporting burdens on Native CDFIs, gathering signatures from Native CDFIs and partner organizations.
- ▶ Hosted inaugural CCIA rollout event October 10-11 in Omaha, convening 63 Native CDFI community lenders. The two-day program featured EPA officials, tribal leaders, and industry experts discussing clean energy financing, project development, and resource deployment strategies. Introduced comprehensive CCIA handbook and regional support team.
- ▶ Announced Native CDFI Network's 5th Annual Policy & Capacity Building Summit scheduled for December 11-13 at Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill. The event will feature policy discussions, capacity-building workshops, and networking opportunities for Native CDFI leaders, including a special reception at the National Museum of the American Indian.



Native CDFI Network

2025 Policy Priorities

The following are NCN's top-line policy priorities for 2025 based on the input of Native CDFI leaders from across Indian Country. These priorities will be finalized for release at NCN's Annual Policy & Capacity Building Summit in December 2024. To view these priorities online once they are released, please visit: <https://nativecdfi.net/policy/> or scan the QR code on the following page.

1. Environmental Protection Agency – EPA:

- ▶ Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund: Engage with other Clean Communities Investment Accelerator (CCIA), National Clean Investment Fund, and Solar for All awardees to close Indian Country clean energy financing gaps and ensure NCN's 63 CCIA Community Lenders receive the full \$10 million investment for financial assistance and \$1 million for technical assistance per EPA guidelines.

2. U.S. Treasury:

- ▶ Advocate for passage of the Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act, which permanently waives the matching requirements for the Native American CDFI Assistance (NACA) program and raises the annual NACA funding level to \$55 million for FY 2025, with an incremental increase of \$5 million each year thereafter (annual NACA funding should be increased to a minimum of \$50 million to address the significant unmet capital needs of Native CDFIs).
- ▶ Advocate for passage of the Tribal Tax and Investment Reform Act with specific changes made to Section 8 of the legislation governing the CDFI Fund's New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) Program, as follows: (1) establish a 10% set-aside of NMTC allocations to be awarded to Native Community Development Entities (CDEs), (2) revise the NMTC program to be fully inclusive of Alaska Native Statistical Areas, and (3) provide Native CDEs with technical assistance funding to support their development of competitive NMTC applications.
- ▶ Engage the CDFI Fund to: (1) grow the number of Native Community Development Entities (CDEs), and (2) amend the New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) Program application regulations to enhance the ability of Native CDEs to successfully compete for NMTC allocations.
- ▶ Push the Department to adopt its proposed Treasury rule recognizing the tax-exempt status of wholly tribally owned businesses.
- ▶ Provide permanent, dedicated Funding to Treasury's Office of Tribal and Native Affairs to ensure the needs of Native CDFIs and Native communities are met.
- ▶ Forge cooperative agreement between Native CDFI Network and CDFI Fund to provide Native CDFIs with targeted technical assistance and other support to ensure they achieve and retain certification in accordance with the new Treasury regulations for CDFI certification.
- ▶ Continue to educate the CDFI Fund to ensure the final Equitable Recovery Program (ERP) Transaction Level Report (TLR) changes don't overburden the already-stretched capacity of participating Native CDFIs.
- ▶ Advocate with Congress to pass legislation establishing a 10% set-aside for Indian Country for the CDFI Fund's Capital Magnet Fund.
- ▶ Push the CDFI Fund to track and publicly share the number and total amount of Capital Magnet Fund (CMF) subawards provided to Native housing organizations and tribal housing projects to ensure Indian Country is receiving its fair share of CMF dollars.



3. U.S. Department of Agriculture – USDA:

- ▶ Pass the Rural Housing Service Reform Act of 2023 to make the USDA Section 502 relending demonstration program permanent, extend it across Indian Country, and authorize \$50 million to finance Native homeowners.
- ▶ Make technical amendment to the Highly Fractionated Indian Land (HFIL) Loan Program to loosen or eliminate the borrowing requirement governing majority ownership to allow tribal and individual Native agriculture producers to access the HFIL fund without having to secure mutually contingent loans for multiple land interest purchases simultaneously to achieve majority ownership.
- ▶ Establish a subcommittee of the USDA Tribal Advisory Committee composed of leaders of Native CDFIs and other Native-led financing institutions to advise and strengthen USDA's loan and related technical assistance programs for tribal and individual Native agricultural producers.

4. Housing and Urban Development – HUD:

- ▶ Increase annual HUD Section 4 Program funding to \$50 million.
- ▶ Create a 10% set-aside for Native communities for the HUD Section 4 Program to ensure the program equitably serves low-income communities across the United States based on their affordable housing needs.

5. Department of Interior – DOI:

- ▶ Increase Department of Interior (DOI) Indian Loan Guarantee and Insurance Program annual funding to at least \$25 million.

6. Small Business Administration – SBA:

- ▶ Pass the Native American Entrepreneurial Opportunity Act to authorize ample, stable funding for SBA's Office of Native American Affairs.

7. Department of Veteran Affairs – VA:

- ▶ Pass the Native American Direct Loan (NADL) Improvement Act of 2023 to create a \$5 million relending program enabling Native CDFIs to provide low-interest mortgage loans to qualified Native veterans.

8. Other NCN Policy and Capacity-Building Priorities:

- ▶ Hold banks accountable to new Community Reinvestment Act regulations to increase access to capital and credit on tribal lands, including by ensuring the Administration continues to defend against litigation brought by banking and business trade groups contesting those regulations.

For more information about NCN's Policy Priorities, please scan the QR code to the right. To learn more about NCN and to get involved, please contact NCN CEO Pete Upton at pete@nativecdfi.net or 308-850-0303

NCN is the only national member-based coalition representing the interests of the Native CDFI Industry. NCDFIs are located in 38 of the 50 states serving Native peoples in rural and urban areas.



POLICY PROGRESS & HIGHLIGHTS

In 2024, the Native CDFI Network led multiple high-impact policy initiatives to expand access to capital and strengthen support for Native communities through federal programs, regulatory improvements, and dedicated funding set-asides. Through strategic coalition-building and focused advocacy, NCN has helped secure historic investments while championing legislation and policy reforms that will enhance Native CDFIs' ability to serve their communities more effectively.



GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTION FUND

Funded at \$27 billion, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) is a historic, once-in-a-generation opportunity to fund tens of thousands of clean energy projects across the country — from residential rooftop solar panels and electric vehicle charging stations, to small-business and large-scale energy projects.

Funded by President Joseph R. Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, the GGRF will invest at least 70% of its funds in low-income and disadvantaged communities, including native communities.

As part of its mission to strengthen Native CDFIs and provide them with resources, the Native CDFI Network mobilized 63 of its members and numerous other allies to submit a Native-led and Native-serving application for the GGRF's Clean Communities Investment Accelerator (CCIA), a \$6 billion program to foster clean energy financing in native communities.

Why it matters: On April 4, the Native CDFI Network application was announced as one of five selected to receive grant funding under the CCIA program. NCN will receive \$400 million that will be deployed throughout Indian Country in the form of clean energy loans for homeowners, small-business owners, and tribal community organizations. The grants will also allow NCN to issue subgrants to Native CDFIs for technical assistance and capacity building.

Additional funding will flow into Indian Country through the GGRF's National Clean Investment Fund (NCIF), which awarded \$14 billion to three national

nonprofit organizations. In total, nearly \$1.5 billion is expected to flow into Indian Country under the CCIA and NCIF programs, according to the EPA, transforming tribal communities for future generations.

This historic funding is a substantial infusion of capital directed toward Native CDFIs, and will enable the Native CDFI Network to lead clean energy initiatives in Indian Country, advancing sustainability and environmental equity.



NEW MARKETS TAX CREDIT

The New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC) program is a federal initiative designed to stimulate investment in low-income and economically distressed communities by offering tax incentives to investors. Administered by the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund, the NMTC program provides tax credits to investors who make equity investments in designated Community Development Entities (CDEs). These CDEs then use the capital to fund projects that spur economic growth, create jobs, and enhance services in underserved areas.

In Indian Country, the NMTC program could be especially valuable. Native communities often face significant economic challenges, including high poverty rates and limited access to capital. By leveraging NMTCs, tribes and Native-owned businesses can attract private investment for projects such as healthcare facilities, renewable energy initiatives, and small business development. These investments promote economic self-sufficiency and community development, addressing critical needs while honoring cultural and environmental values.

Why it matters: On April 3, 2024, the Native CDFI Network joined the Native American Finance Officers Association (NAFOA) and 43 other Native CDFIs and Native-serving organizations to advocate for Indian Country through a formal comment letter to the CDFI Fund regarding the NMTC Program Allocation Application for 2024-2026.

In the joint letter, we pressed for a 10% set-aside of NMTCs for Native community development entities (CDEs) to increase investment in Native communities. The letter also highlighted challenges faced by Native CDEs, such as limited participation and track record obstacles, proposing solutions like prioritizing Native CDEs in the application process, aligning federal funding programs with NMTCs, and providing technical assistance.

We emphasized the need to incorporate the unique circumstances of Native communities in NMTC selection criteria, expand the definition of "Targeted Population" to include Native populations, and offer training programs to enhance stakeholders' understanding of project development in Indian Country.



NATIVE AMERICAN CDFI ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (NACA)

The Native American CDFI Assistance (NACA) Program is a targeted initiative within the U.S. Treasury's CDFI Fund designed to support and grow Native CDFIs. NACA grants provide Native CDFIs with financial and technical assistance to enhance their capacity to deliver financial products and services, as well as to support their development and growth. This funding is vital for fostering economic opportunity, creating jobs, and improving the quality of life

in Native communities across the United States. It's especially important for new and emerging Native CDFIs because it helps make them more "investable" by boosting their balance sheets and demonstrating financial strength, he said. That can help attract more investment, grants and low-interest loans from foundations, banks and other sources.

Why it matters: In late September 2024, the CDFI Fund awarded \$47 million in NACA financial assistance grants to 25 Native CDFIs across 13 states, from Alaska to Maine. This funding allocation, which covers a two-year period, represents a substantive increase in NACA funding over past years, a direct result of the Native CDFI Network's long-standing advocacy efforts. NCN views this progress as a good step forward and continues to advocate for \$50 million in annual NACA funding for Native CDFIs. Overall, this year's funding success not only provides critical resources to Native CDFIs, but also reinforces NCN's role as the most representative voice for Native CDFIs in public policy and advocacy.



CDFI EQUITABLE RECOVERY PROGRAM (ERP)

The CDFI Fund collects data and information from certified CDFIs through various reporting mechanisms, including the Transaction Level Report (TLR) and new reporting requirements for the CDFI Equitable Recovery Program (ERP). These reports help the Fund track the impact and performance of CDFIs serving underserved communities, including Native communities.

Why it matters: On October 17, NCN submitted a formal comment letter to the CDFI Fund regarding proposed changes to ERP reporting requirements, representing 64 certified Native CDFIs across 27 states. The letter raised five key concerns: the burden of retroactive reporting, census tract data complications, underestimated reporting burdens, unclear utility of additional data collection, and cumulative impact of expanding reporting requirements on smaller Native CDFIs. NCN emphasized that while some changes were welcome, others could strain already-limited Native CDFI resources and potentially risk their certification status.

NCN PROGRAMMING

Native CDFI Network has worked with hundreds of individuals, federal agencies, nonprofits and Native-serving organizations over the past year through its events, webinar series, training institutes, outreach, and collaborative efforts to strengthen economic opportunity and access to capital in Native communities. These partnerships include the following:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Community Development Venture Capital Alliance
U.S. Department of Commerce	Community Reinvestment Fund
U.S. Department of Justice	Fahe
U.S. Department of the Interior	Fannie Mae
U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development	Farm Credit Administration
U.S. Department of Energy	Farm Credit Council
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development	Farmer Mac
U.S. Department of the Treasury CDFI Fund	Federal Home Loan Bank of New York
U.S. Department of the Treasury Office of the Treasurer	First People's Fund
U.S. Department of the Treasury Office of Tribal and Native Affairs	Four Directions Development Corporation
U.S. Department of Transportation	Greentech Renewables
U.S. Senate Committee on Banking	Grey Snow Management Solutions LLC
U.S. Small Business Administration	GRID Alternatives
Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis	Ho-Chunk Inc.
Federal Reserve Bank of New York	Ian Record Consulting, Inc.
U.S. Senator Tina Smith (D-MN)	ICAST
U.S. Senator Cynthia Lummis (R-WY)	Inclusiv
U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids (D-KS)	Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska
Administration for Native Americans	Lakota Funds
Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians Economic Development Corporation (ATNI-EDC)	Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
African American Alliance of CDFI CEOs	Maine Governor's Energy Office
Afton Energy	Midwest Tribal Energy Resources Association
Agribank	NACDC Financial Services
Alaska Growth Capital	National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders
Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy	National Bankers Association
American Bankers Association	National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development
Appalachian Community Capital	National Community Reinvestment Coalition
Aspen Institute Business Ownership Initiative	National Press Club
Bay Bank	Native American Bank
Big Water Consulting	Native American Financial Services
Blue Lake Rancheria	NDN Fund
Bluestem Consulting Inc.	NeighborWorks America
Calvert Impact	New England Market Research
cdcb (come dream. come build.)	Nimiipuu Energy
CDFI Coalition	Nixiyáawii Community Financial Services
Center for Impact Finance	Opportunity Finance Network
Center for Indian Country Development	Oweesta Corporation
Citizen Potawatomi Community Development Corporation	Quarles & Brady LLP
Clearinghouse CDFI	Rio Grande Valley Multibank
Climate United	TiLeaf Group
Clinton Global Initiative	Tribal Business News
Community Development Bankers Association	University of New Hampshire Carsey School of Public Policy
	Urban Institute
	Wells Fargo

NATIVE CDFI NETWORK'S BOLD MOVE LEADS TO HISTORIC \$400M CLEAN ENERGY AWARD

When federal officials announced the \$27 billion Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund in spring 2023, Native CDFI Network (NCN) CEO Pete Upton faced a crucial decision. Join a broader BI-POC coalition seeking funding, or submit a Native-led, Native-serving application.

"I get this feeling sometimes when I'm in the room," Upton recalls. "I had a feeling that things weren't going to be equal." After pressing coalition leaders about how much funding would reach Native communities and

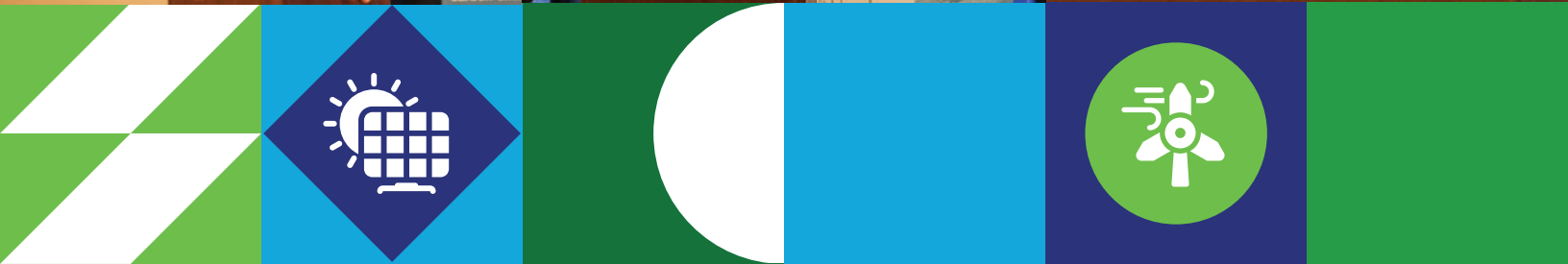
receiving vague responses, NCN made its bold move – submitting the only Native-led application for the EPA's Clean Communities Investment Accelerator (CCIA) program.

That decision led to a memorable Easter Sunday in 2024. After spending the day working in his garden, convinced the award had passed them by, Upton checked his email one last time at 9:45 p.m. "Congratulations, you've been awarded \$400 million," the message read.

"It was very emotional," Upton says. "Anyone in the Native world, you have just a sense

of gratitude for people who came before you. This CCIA award is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to impact so many communities."

The award represents the largest single investment ever directed toward Native CDFIs and recognizes an urgent need. Climate change disproportionately affects Native communities, while chronic underinvestment has prevented many from transitioning to clean energy. On the Navajo reservation alone, approximately 10,000 residents lack electricity, with connection costs reaching \$40,000 per home.



Through the CCIA program, NCN will provide up to \$5 million in lending capital and \$500,000 in technical assistance to each of its 63 Native CDFIs and community lenders. These funds will support projects ranging from rooftop solar and microgrids to building electrification and EV charging stations across all ten EPA regions.

Speaking at the Great Lakes Tribal Economic Summit in Michigan this September, Pilar Thomas, partner at Quarles & Brady LLP, highlighted the unprecedented financial opportunity: “The stacking of grants, tax credits combined with cheap loans, philanthropy to fill some of those gaps really now creates a perfect storm for our ability to do way more clean energy projects across every Indian tribe in the country.”

The implementation process has brought both opportunities and challenges. After months of negotiations with EPA, NCN received its signed award agreement in September 2024, officially starting the program’s 6-year timeline. The organization has expanded its team, hiring Pamela Boivin (Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin) as CCIA program manager and bringing on two regional CCIA coordinators with plans to hire two more.

To support its network, NCN is establishing a comprehensive technical assistance hub with coalition partners who have

expertise in clean energy finance, project development, tribal codes, and workforce development. Each lender can access up to \$500,000 in technical assistance funds, plus free services through the hub. “We know it’s going to take a lot,” explains NCN National Program Director Kristen Wagner. “We’re hoping to balance customized support with high-level services that everyone can access.”

While there’s external pressure to deploy funds quickly, Wagner emphasizes NCN will “go at the speed of community” to ensure successful implementation. The organization has developed a 90-page handbook to guide lenders through program requirements and is planning regional training sessions beginning this fall.

A significant challenge has been educating federal partners about basic tribal concepts, including federally designated service counties and non-land-based tribes. NCN must also help community lenders convince low-income Native Americans about the benefits of energy efficiency upgrades. “How are we going to convince low-income Native Americans that they need energy efficiency?” Upton asks. “I lived in poverty growing up. I know what it’s like.”

The historic funding represents “far more than just dollars,” Upton explains. “It represents trust – trust in Native CDFIs to

“It was very emotional. In the Native world, you have just a sense of gratitude for people who came before you. This CCIA award is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to impact so many communities.

NCN CEO Pete Upton on learning about the CCIA award.

lead clean energy initiatives in our communities. It represents recognition that Native communities know best how to serve Native communities.”

For NCN, this historic opportunity starts with putting Native communities in charge of their own clean energy future. As Upton puts it, “No one can make decisions better for their community than Natives themselves, because that’s where we reside, it’s where we live.”





Q+A



KRISTEN WAGNER ON TRANSFORMING NATIVE COMMUNITIES THROUGH CLEAN ENERGY

As the Native CDFI Network's National Program Director, Kristen Wagner leads the NCN CCIA team in implementing new federal clean energy funding, seeing this as a historic opportunity to transform Native communities. In this Q&A, she explains how a new \$400 million program under EPA's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund will help Native CDFIs accelerate clean energy development while building lasting community capacity.

What exactly is the CCIA program and how much funding is involved?

The Clean Communities Investment Accelerator (CCIA) is one of three programs under the EPA's \$27 billion Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund. The Native CDFI Network received a \$400 million award to administer CCIA funds, with \$360 million of that going out as loan capital to Native lenders serving Native communities.

How will the money be distributed?

We've allocated up to \$5 million for each participating Native CDFI lender. The funds will be distributed across Native CDFIs serving Native communities in all 10 EPA regions and approximately 27-35 states.

Is there technical assistance available?

Yes. Each lender will receive both an allocation of capital dollars and technical assistance funds up to \$500,000 over approximately 5.5 years. We're also creating a technical assistance hub with coalition partners providing free services in areas like clean energy finance, project development, understanding tribal codes, and workforce development.

What's the timeline for implementation?

We're in the early stages, having just received signed award agreements in October 2024. We'll move at the speed of our lenders and communities. While we're ready to support those who want to move quickly, we understand some will need more time and we'll accommodate different timelines.

What do community lenders need to know about loan terms?

EPA has given lenders significant flexibility. You can choose your own terms and the types of loans you want to add to your portfolio. The main requirement is that the funds must be used as loans rather than grants once they reach the lender level.

What's the first step for communities interested in participating?

Start planning now and engage with your Native CDFI partners. We've designed the program to allow time for capacity building, partnership development, and determining community needs. We're in very early stages and implementation is just beginning.

How does this connect to other federal funding opportunities?

The CCIA program can work in conjunction with other federal funding sources, particularly USDA Rural Utilities programs. These programs align well with Solar for All and CCIA initiatives. While it takes some work to figure out how to stack the funding appropriately, the programs are designed to complement each other.

Why is this program particularly important for Native communities?

This represents a truly historic opportunity - \$400 million specifically directed to Native CDFIs to drive clean energy development. With 63 Native CDFIs already committed to participate, we have the potential to create lasting change in Native communities across the country.

This isn't just about installing solar panels or improving energy efficiency - it's about job creation, strengthening Native financial institutions, building community capacity, and helping tribes achieve energy sovereignty.

We know grant writing and federal programs can feel overwhelming, but we've structured this program to provide both capital and comprehensive support. Our goal is to ensure these funds create sustainable, community-driven impact that will benefit Native communities for generations to come.

NCN EXPANDS TEAM TO CHAMPION NATIVE CDFIS, CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

Native CDFI Network (NCN) more than doubled its team in 2024, building capacity to support both its historic \$400 million Clean Communities Investment Accelerator (CCIA) program and its expanding role as the leading voice for Native CDFIs in Washington.

"This expansion isn't just about managing the CCIA program – it's about building Native CDFIs' capacity from the ground up," said NCN CEO Pete Upton. "We're strengthening our ability to advocate, to serve, and to bring more resources into Indian Country."

Leading NCN's CCIA implementation is Pamela Boivin (Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin), who was brought on board in August as program manager. Boivin brings 17 years of Native CDFI industry experience, most recently leading Woodland Financial Partners in Wisconsin. She holds an MBA from Marquette University and was recognized with the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development 40 Under 40 Award in 2022.

Two regional coordinators will work alongside Boivin to implement the CCIA program. Luke Robinson (Northern Cheyenne Tribe of Montana), who holds an MBA from the

University of Montana, brings significant experience in nonprofit economic development and commercial lending. Jodi Fischer (Wyandotte Tribe of Oklahoma) contributes nearly a decade of education and customer service expertise, along with extensive experience supporting Native CDFIs and communities.

To strengthen its financial operations as NCN becomes an intermediary lender and expands its programs, the organization has added Alex Mendoza (Makah Tribe of Washington) as chief financial officer and Stephanie Prater as senior financial manager. Mendoza brings over 16 years of experience in public and private sectors, most recently serving as director of structured finance at IFF, a certified CDFI. He holds a master's degree in accountancy from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Prater joins with extensive financial expertise as a senior accountant and holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from National University.

"This team knows what it takes to make real change in Indian Country," Upton said. "You can't truly advocate for a community until you've been there, listened to their stories, and understood their needs first hand. That's exactly what these new team members will help us do."



Pamela Boivin
(Menominee)
CCIA program manager



Luke Robinson
(Cheyenne)
CCIA regional coordinator



Jodi Fischer
(Wyandotte)
CCIA regional coordinator



Alex Mendoza
(Makah)
Chief financial officer



Stephanie Prater
Senior financial manager



BUILDING CAPACITY

NCN Expands Support and Resources for Native CDFIs



Native CDFIs are more than financial institutions – they are engines of economic sovereignty and community transformation.

As the national voice and advocate for Native CDFIs, the Native CDFI Network unites and strengthens these vital organizations through collective action, professional development, and powerful advocacy. Through targeted support, shared resources, and amplified influence, we’re helping these institutions expand their reach and deepen their impact. From small business loans to homeownership programs, Native CDFIs are building lasting pathways to prosperity in Indian Country.

In a landmark year of growth and innovation, the Native CDFI Network (NCN) significantly expanded its support for Native CDFIs, combining robust training programs, historic funding opportunities, and enhanced member services to strengthen the capacity of its members across Indian Country.

"We've delivered real results for our members while embracing new challenges. While the CCIA award has garnered headlines, NCN remains first and foremost an advocate for Native CDFIs of all sizes. We're building capacity from the bottom up, because that's where lasting change begins," NCN CEO Pete Upton said.

STRENGTHENING MEMBER SERVICES

NCN continued to build its role as the leading voice for Native CDFIs, offering members access to exclusive training, pol-

icy updates, and networking opportunities. The organization launched Initiate Prosperity, a comprehensive online platform providing Native CDFI members with tools to support their small business clients. The platform includes approximately 150 videos, tools, and resources covering crucial topics such as marketing, web design, e-commerce, finance, and management.

Members also benefited from expanded policy advocacy efforts, with NCN successfully pushing for increased NACA funding, Native set-asides in New Markets Tax Credits, and the elimination of matching requirements that create barriers for smaller Native CDFIs. Regular policy updates and action alerts kept members informed of legislative developments, while NCN's growing relationships with federal agencies helped create new channels for bringing affordable, long-term capital into Indian Country.



COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING PROGRAMS

Throughout 2024, NCN delivered an extensive calendar of training opportunities designed to meet evolving member needs. The organization hosted specialized sessions on critical topics including new CDFI certification requirements, portfolio analysis, and capitalization strategies. A highlight was the launch of an innovative eight-week Native Green Lending Course in partnership with the University of New Hampshire Carsey School and Inclusiv, designed exclusively for Native-led and Native-serving community lenders.

Monthly "NCN Live" webinars connected members with federal agencies and industry experts, covering everything from USDA rural development programs to clean energy financing opportunities. These sessions provided practical guidance while fostering relationships between Native CDFIs and key federal partners.

HISTORIC EVENTS AND GATHERINGS

NCN's fourth annual Policy and Capacity Building Summit in December 2023 marked a watershed moment, drawing a record 220 attendees and featuring more than 50 speakers from 18 federal agencies, Congress, impact investors, and philanthropic organizations. The summit highlighted emerging opportunities in clean energy financing and strengthened relationships with key policy makers, including discus-

sions with U.S. Treasurer Lynn Malerba, Senators Tina Smith (D-MN) and Cynthia Lummis (R-WY), U.S. Rep Sharice Davids (D-KS) and multiple federal officials.

Building on this momentum, NCN organized two strategic regional events in 2024. A three-day gathering in Maine focused on building sustainable Native economies, bringing together tribal housing executives, Native CDFI leaders, and federal officials to explore the intersection of housing, clean energy, and Native culture.

Most significantly, NCN hosted its inaugural Clean Communities Investment Accelerator (CCIA) rollout event in Omaha, following the historic \$400 million award from the EPA's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund. The event united 63 Native CDFI CCIA Community Lenders from across Indian Country to prepare them for deploying clean energy financing in their communities.

LOOKING FORWARD: CLEAN ENERGY AND BEYOND

The successful EPA award positions Native CDFIs at the forefront of the clean energy transition in Indian Country. "This convening is a critical first step in our journey to ensure Native CDFIs are equipped to lead their communities in developing sustainable, clean energy projects that both honor our lands and provide economic growth," Upton noted during the Omaha gathering.

To support this transition, NCN developed comprehensive resources including the NCN CCIA Handbook and expanded

technical assistance programs. The organization also strengthened partnerships with industry experts and technical service providers to ensure members have access to the expertise needed for successful clean energy project deployment.

A GROWING NETWORK

As NCN's membership continues to grow, the organization has maintained its commitment to being member-driven while expanding services to meet evolving needs. Regular member engagement through webinars, training sessions, and events has fostered a strong community of practice among Native CDFIs.

"Everything we do is with the intention to support our Native CDFI members... to make their jobs a little bit easier, to make their life a little bit easier and to get that capital flowing so you can do the important work that you do," said Kristen Wagner, NCN's National Program Director.

Looking ahead, NCN continues to strengthen its role as both an advocate and capacity builder for Native CDFIs. With expanded training programs, new resources, and historic funding opportunities, the organization is helping members build their capacity to create lasting economic impact in Native communities across the country.

The journey continues at NCN's fifth annual Policy and Capacity Building Summit in December 2024, where members will gather in Washington, D.C. to further advance the mission of creating thriving economies across Indian Country.



MORE THAN MONEY

'DIFFERENCE MAKERS 2.0' SHOWS HOW NATIVE CDFIS DRIVE SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS IN INDIAN COUNTRY

From a bakery in Alaska to a salon in North Carolina, small businesses are the backbone of economic development in Native communities. Behind many of these success stories stands a Native community development financial institution (CDFI) providing crucial support through access to capital, technical assistance, and business coaching.

The Difference Makers 2.0 series, a collaboration between the Native CDFI Network and Tribal Business News, spotlights these vital relationships between Native CDFIs and the entrepreneurs they serve, showcasing how these partnerships drive economic growth and opportunity across Indian Country.

"Small businesses are crucial for building sustainable Native economies," says Pete Upton, CEO of Native CDFI Network. "When we support Native entrepreneurs, we're supporting job creation, wealth building, and economic sovereignty for Native communities."

Based on the stories collected in the Difference Makers 2.0 series, small businesses in Native communities represent far more than just economic ventures — they are powerful expressions of cultural preservation, community strength, and indigenous resilience. When Jamie Ann Bell incorporates traditional Ahtna Athabascan elements at her Alaska-based bakery, Arctic Moon, and Sadie Mildenerger serves traditional ingredients at Iniim Cafe, these entrepreneurs weave cultural preservation into economic development.

The businesses frequently become community gathering spaces, like the Big Sky Cafe in Montana or R-Eatz on the Winnebago Reservation in Nebraska, where people connect over shared meals and shared heritage. Each success story demonstrates the remarkable resilience of Native entrepreneurs who are finding innovative ways to build sustainable businesses while honoring traditional values, creating spaces where tradition and innovation coexist to strengthen Native communities.

"What has never existed on our reservation is a small-business ecosystem," said Jacob Wallis at Nixyaawii Community Financial Services, which financed Iniim Cafe. "Our entire intent is to build that ecosystem. We have entrepreneurs in our community, they are just doing it at their kitchen tables, as opposed to in a brick-and-mortar building."

The support extends far beyond lending. Native CDFIs help entrepreneurs analyze costs and pricing, develop business plans, conduct feasibility studies, write grants, and provide ongoing coaching. This comprehensive approach helps businesses not just start, but thrive and grow.

The series reveals common threads across diverse businesses and regions: Native CDFIs taking chances on entrepreneurs when traditional banks wouldn't, providing patient capital alongside technical assistance, and maintaining supportive relationships long after the initial loan closes.

Through companion podcast episodes, the series digs deeper into how Native CD-

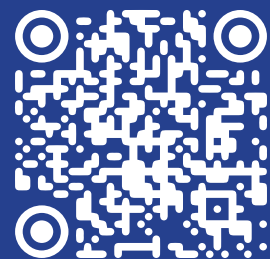
FIs evaluate potential borrowers differently than mainstream financial institutions, often considering factors like community impact and cultural preservation alongside traditional metrics.

"These stories show that successful lending in Indian Country isn't just about credit scores," Upton said. "It's about understanding the unique challenges and opportunities in Native communities and providing culturally appropriate support."

As the series continues to unfold, it paints a powerful picture of how Native CDFIs serve as crucial engines of economic development, helping tribal citizens build businesses that strengthen their communities while preserving cultural values.

"Every story in this series represents a dream realized," Elyse Wild, host of the Difference Makers 2.0 podcast, said. "But more importantly, each success creates ripple effects — jobs created, wealth built, and communities strengthened. That's the true power of Native CDFIs."

**SCAN HERE
TO LISTEN**



Board of Directors



Pete Upton (Ponca)
Chairperson

Pete is the CEO of Native CDFI Network and executive director of Native360 Loan Fund, which serves Native communities in three states. He's been involved with NCN since it was a grassroots movement and is known nationally as a powerful advocate for equal access to capital.



Cindy Mittlestadt
Secretary

Cindy serves as the general manager of Native Edge Finance — an emerging Native CDFI and an affiliated entity of National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED). She has a long history of working with Native CDFIs, nonprofit entities and the corporate banking community on social and economic development in Indian Country.



Cindy Logsdon
Treasurer

Cindy is CEO of Citizen Potawatomi Community Development Corporation, one of Indian Country's largest Native CDFIs. Over two decades, Cindy has created innovative and much-needed financial products and made nearly \$50 million in loans to Native entrepreneurs.



Russ Seagle
Board Member

Russ is the executive director of The Sequoyah Fund, a North Carolina based Native CDFI that specializes in working with Native businesses and entrepreneurs. He has an extensive background as an entrepreneur, business owner and a small-business advisor.



Dave Tovey (Umatilla)
Board Member

Dave is executive director of Nixyáawii Community Financial Services, a developing Native CDFI. Dave has extensive experience as both a tribal executive and corporate executive, as well as expertise in economic development.



Rolina Faagai (Native Hawaiian)
Board Member

Rolina is the Deputy Director of Economic Development at the Homestead Community Development Corporation. She has considerable experience in policy research, strategic planning, operational excellence and finance, working with firms AIG and Pacific Financial Partners.



Rollin Wood (Cherokee)
Board Member

Rollin is the executive director of the Native Partnership for Housing, a Native CDFI that serves the housing and home ownership needs of Native and non-Native clients in rural and urban areas of the Four Corners region. He has a diverse background across a variety of industries including broadcasting, mining, natural resources and work with startups.

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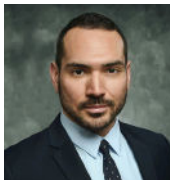
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Chief financial officer



Stephanie Prater
Senior Financial Manager



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National Program Director



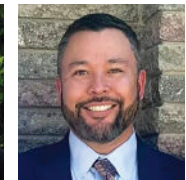
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Luke Robinson
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CCIA Regional Coordinator

THANK YOU

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