



Native CDFIs: Driving Small Business Success in Indian Country



2024-25 IMPACT REPORT



To our members, supporters and collaborators,

Native CDFIs are typically structured as loan funds, but the truth is they transcend traditional lending — they're catalysts for transforming entire communities across Indian Country. When traditional banks say no, our 69 Native CDFIs in 27 states step forward with a different approach. We don't just look at credit scores; we recognize drive, determination and dreams that fuel entrepreneurial spirit, providing seed capital where others won't.

The impact extends far beyond individual loans. From a traditional food market in South Dakota to a commercial fishing business in Washington, from a Native tourism venture in Alaska to an RV repair company in Texas, Native CDFIs create ripple effects that strengthen entire communities. Every loan—whether \$500 to a Native artist or larger investments to expand businesses—generates jobs, builds wealth, and reinforces tribal sovereignty through economic self-sufficiency.

The pages of this 2024-25 Impact Report highlight the true power of Native CDFIs: we don't just fund small businesses, we fuel dreams and build the foundation for thriving Native economies. Each success story represents not only an entrepreneur's achievement, but a community's path toward greater prosperity and self-determination.

Weblaho,

Pete Upton, CEO



OUR MISSION

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

What is a Native CDFI?

Seeding Tribal Communities, One Small Business at a Time

Native Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) are Indigenous-led lenders that provide capital, coaching, and credit-building tools to underserved tribal communities. Certified by the U.S. Treasury, they help Native entrepreneurs start small businesses, purchase homes, and build financial security – especially in places where banks don't go.





By the Numbers

69 Certified Native CDFIs across the U.S.



\$8 Private investment for every CDFI dollar

25%

Higher demand surge vs non-Native CDFIs

50+ Many Native communities lack access to nearby banks 66 Native CDFIs aren't just lenders — they are catalysts for transforming Indian Country. They empower Native families and entrepreneurs to create wealth in their own communities. **77**

-Pete Upton, CEO, Native CDFI Network

Sources: U.S. Department of Treasury, Native CDFI Network, Oweesta Corporation, Center for Indian Country Development/Federal Reserve of Mpls.

Native CDFls by State

Source: The CDFI Fund (as of April 10, 2025)

ALASKA

Alaska Growth Capital BIDCO, Inc. Cook Inlet Lending Center, Inc. Haa Yakaawu Financial Corporation Spruce Root, Inc.

ARIZONA

CDFI of the Tohono O'odham Nation Hopi Credit Association Navajo CDFI Salt River Financial Services Institution San Carlos Apache Tribe Relending Enterprise

CALIFORNIA

Five Rivers Loan Fund, Inc. Westwater Financial, Inc. **COLORADO** Native American Bancorporation, Co. Native American Bank, N.A. Oweesta Corporation

HAWAII

Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement Hawaii Central Federal Credit Union Hawaii Community Lending Inc Hawaii First FCU Kauai Federal Credit Union Lei Hoolaha Molokai Community Federal Credit Union Hawaiian Lending & Investments (HLI)

IDAHO

Nimiipuu Community Development Fund

MAINE

Four Directions Development Corporation

MICHIGAN

Chi Ishobak, Inc. Lake Superior Community Development Corp. Northern Shores Community

Development, Inc.

MINNESOTA

Indian Land Capital Company LLC Mni Sota Fund White Earth Investment Initiative

MISSISSIPPI

Choctaw Federal Credit Union

MONTANA

Montana Homeownership Network, Inc. NACDC Financial Services Inc. Native American Development Corporation

NEBRASKA

Ho-Chunk Community Capital Inc. Native360 Loan Fund, Inc.

NEW MEXICO

Native Community Capital Native Partnership for Housing, Inc. Tiwa Lending Services

NEW YORK

Seneca Nation of Indians Economic Development Company t

NORTH CAROLINA

Sequoyah Fund Inc., The

OREGON

Nixyaawii Community Financial Services

OKLAHOMA

Chickasaw Banc Holding Company Chickasaw Community Bank Choctaw Home Finance Corporation Citizen Potawatomi Community Development Corporation Local Bank Mvskoke Loan Fund Cherokee Nation Economic Development Trust Authority, Inc

SOUTH DAKOTA

Akiptan, Inc. Black Hills Community Loan Fund, Inc. Four Bands Community Fund, Incorporated Lakota Federal Credit Union Lakota Fund, Inc., The Mazaska Owecaso Otipi Financial, Inc Sisseton Wahpeton Federal Credit Union Lower Brule Community Development Enterprise. LLC

TEXAS

Tigua Community Development Corporation

WASHINGTON

Chehalis Tribal Loan Fund Jamestown S'Klallam Tribal Capital, Incorporated Northwest Native Development Fund Pacific Northwest Tribal Lending, a Community Development Financial Institution Taala Fund

WISCONSIN

Bay Bancorporation Bay Bank First American Capital Corporation, Inc. First Nations Community Financial Wisconsin Native Loan Fund, Inc. Woodland Financial Partners Inc

WYOMING

Wind River Development Fund

Why Native CDFIs Matter



Lance Morgan, Chief Executive Officer

Ho-Chunk Inc., Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska

"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."



Chairman John "Rocky" Barrett

Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Oklahoma

"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."

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

With MacKenzie Scott's \$103M gift, the secret is out about Native CDFIs

By Brian Edwards, Tribal Business News





Left: Philanthropist Mackenzie Scott. Above: (L-R) NCN Pete Upton interviews David Tam of tribally owned Grey Snow Management and Timothy Rhodd, chairman of the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska.

What makes Native CDFIs special isn't just the work they do—it's how they do it. These institutions combine cultural understanding with financial expertise, focusing on character and determination rather than just credit scores. The results speak for themselves: remarkably low delinquency rates while serving communities that mainstream financial institutions often overlook. Sarkozy-Banoczy, still serving on Four Bands' board after 25 years, marvels at the evolution: "The numbers, the sophistication, the depth, products, loan products, development services, scope and capacity across the country is just incredible at this point."

This investment could signal a turning point. Native communities have historically received less than 0.5% of funding from large U.S. foundations. As Upton notes: "CDFIs leverage federal funds eight to one. We're going to be able to leverage this capital tremendously, continue to grow the balance sheets of our Native CDFIs and keep building Native communities." One of Indian Country's best-kept secrets is finally getting the recognition—and resources—it deserves.

The Native CDFI industry has traveled an extraordinary journey—from a handful of organizations in the early 2000s whose founders were "rubbing sticks together" to make payroll, to receiving the largest single private investment in their history: more than \$103 million from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott's Yield Giving foundation. Stewart Sarkozy-Banoczy, founding executive director of Four Bands Community Fund, remembers the early skepticism well. "I can't tell you the number of tribal councils I talked to, who were like, 'Yeah, I don't know if that's going to work here.' Mainstream financial leaders and non-Native economic players were even more dismissive, believing Native lending institutions were 'crazy' and 'could not happen.'"

Fast-forward to today, and the transformation is undeniable. Ted Piccolo, founding executive director of Northwest Native Development Fund, captured the magnitude of Scott's investment: "There's never been anything like this — this much, this fast, this focused — it's amazing." The timing couldn't be better. Native CDFIs are on the brink of reshaping independence throughout Indian Country and will help in deploying more than \$530 million in federal small business capital to tribal communities.

Scott's unrestricted funding provides the foundation they need to scale up for this expanded impact. Pete Upton, CEO of Native CDFI Network, sees the strategic opportunity: "Native CDFIs operate on such razor-thin margins. This gives the Native CDFIs and their boards the opportunity to sit back and strategically plan the next three to five years for long-term impact and sustainability."



DIFFERENCE MAKERS 2.0 small business series

Difference Makers 2.0 highlights how Native CDFIs work alongside small business clients to accelerate economic change in Native communities. This collaboration between the Native CDFI Network and *Tribal Business News* shines a spotlight on the entrepreneurs and lenders driving opportunity across Indian Country, showcasing impact that extends throughout the U.S.

The following pages bring you compelling stories from coast to coast—tales of determination, partnership, and transformation that are shared across digital platforms and major podcast networks.



"If it wasn't for them, I don't know where we would be today," Gary said. "They helped us, from the beginning until now."

A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Big Sky Cafe Finds Its Footing with NACDC Financial Services

When Gary and Sue Raccine set out to buy a small snack shop in Cut Bank, Montana, no bank would finance them—until they turned to NACDC Financial Services. With support from loan administrator Patty Gobert, the Blackfeet Nation couple secured funding to launch their first business in 2014.

Years later, when the historic Big Sky Cafe became available for purchase, they returned to NACDC for help. The CDFI backed them once again, providing financing for both the building and critical renovations. Though the cafe was a leap from their snack shop roots, NACDC stood by them with technical assistance, business planning, and continuous support.

Four years later, Big Sky Cafe is a vibrant community hub. From funding to menu consultation, NACDC has remained a key partner in their success.

Stories of Impact

FROM THE GROUND UP

Native CDFI Chi-Ishobak Helps Great Lakes Flooring Specialists Lay Foundation for Growth

After 35 years installing commercial flooring, Wayne Roberts (Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians) launched Great Lakes Flooring Specialists in 2015. His first contract—a hospital in southwest Michigan—trusted him so much they paid upfront for materials. That early opportunity sparked growth, turning the business into a true family operation with Wayne's wife and three children onboard.

But with each new job came cash flow challenges: the company had to buy materials upfront while waiting 40–60 days for payment. That's when the family turned to Chi–Ishobak, a Native CDFI serving Michigan's tribal citizens. Chi–Ishobak provided a \$50,000 line of credit and technical assistance that helped stabilize the business and build financial literacy.

In 2020, the CDFI issued a \$300,000 loan for the company to buy their warehouse—its largest commercial loan to date. Today, Great Lakes Flooring employs 10 people and services tribal and regional clients, including the Pokagon Health Center and tribal court.

"They gave us knowledge, not just capital," said Jordan Roberts. "We wouldn't have gotten far without them."



Photo: Katie Batdorff

Business: Great Lakes Flooring Specialists Inc. Location: Southwest Michigan Native CDFI: Chi-Ishobak Program: Commercial Lending & Technical Assistance Services Provided: Line of credit, commercial real estate loan, business coaching Impact: \$350,000 in financing; 10 employees; expanded tribal and regional client base

TRADITIONAL FOODS, MODERN BUSINESS

Nixyaawii Community Financial Services Prepares Iniim Coffee Shop for Success

When Umatilla citizen Sadie Mildenberger began dreaming of a business rooted in traditional foods, she turned to Nixyaawii Community Financial Services for guidance. Though she lacked formal business experience, Mildenberger found confidence through one-on-one counseling and classes offered by the Native CDFI.

With support from Nixyaawii, she began catering events featuring innovative dishes like elderberry muffins and bison meatloaf. The experience prepared her for the next leap: opening Iniim Cafe in 2023 at the Nixyaawii Governance Center. There, she introduced her community to bold new takes on ancestral foods and hired her first employee through a tribal workforce program.

As she refined her vision, Mildenberger realized a food truck model would allow her to gather traditional ingredients and reach more people. Now, with Nixyaawii's continued support, she's working toward that next goal—bringing traditional foods to the forefront of modern Indigenous cuisine.



"Everything I know is because I started at zero, and they baby-stepped me through." – Sadie Mildenberger



"Because of that line of credit, we were able to get started." —Shannon Hill, Mi'kmaq Nation

HARVESTING TRADITION

How Four Directions Helped the Mi'kmaq Nation Expand a Fishery into an Enterprise

Faced with polluted waters and limited access to traditional fishing grounds, the Mi'kmaq Nation in northern Maine launched a sustainable brook trout hatchery in 2015. What began as a cultural and food sovereignty initiative is now growing into a major economic enterprise—thanks to key support from Four Directions Development Corporation.

With help from the Native CDFI, the tribe secured a line of credit to cover pre-construction costs for a major expansion, doubling the hatchery's capacity and quadrupling its annual yield. Four Directions also provided feasibility studies, market research, and business planning—ensuring the project was a sound investment.

This expansion will not only feed tribal families but also generate new jobs, open wholesale markets, and lay the groundwork for a Wabanaki-branded seafood line. For the Mi'kmaq Nation, the hatchery represents more than economic growth—it's a path toward self-sufficiency and sovereignty.

WÓYUTE

How Four Bands Community Fund Helped Launch a Traditional Foods Market on Cheyenne River Reservation

In South Dakota, Donita Fischer (Cheyenne River Lakota) is bringing traditional foods back to her community through Wóyute Natural Foods & Apothecary, housed in a business incubator run by Four Bands Community Fund Native CDFI.

Fischer's store, whose name means "groceries" in Lakota, provides foods like bison and wild rice alongside fresh produce. Her mission stems from watching family members develop diabetes due to Western diets. "Access to healthy foods is really important to me," Fischer explains.

Four Bands supports Wóyute with crucial infrastructure: affordable commercial space, free accounting services, and marketing assistance—allowing Fischer to establish her business while focusing on her community-centered vision.



Photo: Darrel Eagle Staff

Native Business: Wóyute Natural Foods & Apothecary
Location: Cheyenne River Lakota Reservation
Native CDFI: Four Bands Community Fund
Services Provided: Business incubator space, accounting services, utilities, marketing assistance
Products: Traditional Indigenous foods, bulk foods, fresh produce, meats
Future Vision: Building a cooperative of local suppliers, subsistence harvesters
Quote: "We learned from the pandemic how important it is to have a local economy and local food economy."



SINK OR SWIM

How a Native Cosmetologist Became a Salon Owner with Help from Sequoyah Fund

At just 25, Julie Painter (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) was finishing cosmetology school and working full-time when she faced a life-changing decision: take a job two hours away—or buy the salon where she worked. Despite having no business experience and a low credit score, Painter chose to take the plunge and buy Visage Salon in Sylva, North Carolina.

Traditional banks wouldn't back her, but the Cherokee-based Sequoyah Fund, Inc., a Native CDFI, saw her grit and potential. They provided her first business loan, helping her keep the salon alive and build a loyal clientele.

Over the years, Painter returned to Sequoyah Fund for funding to buy and remodel her building. She now employs five people and plans to teach advanced coloring techniques.

"They've been instrumental in every step," said Painter. "Without Sequoyah Fund, I don't know that we would have made it."

'ALWAYS A GOOD DAY ON THE SEA'

Native CDFI Helps Tulalip Fisherman Launch His Dream Business

Anthony Henry, a Tulalip citizen, spent his life fishing in Washington's Salish Sea—but dreamed of captaining his own commercial vessel. With the support of Pacific Northwest Tribal Lending, a Native CDFI, Henry turned that dream into reality.

Introduced through a community connection, Henry received financing and coaching to buy and build his boat. With a total of \$460,000 in capital from the Native CDFI, he purchased the 32-foot Juggernaut and now fishes commercially for crab and geoduck clams—boosting his income nearly fourfold.

The journey wasn't easy. "You need a lot of gear and money just to get started," Henry said. But with determination and support, he reached his goal while honoring his culture. "Even on the hard days, it's always a good day on the sea."



Photo: Mark Turner

His work doesn't just sustain his family—it sustains a tradition. "Tribal fishing protects treaty rights and culture," said Pacific Northwest Tribal Lending's executive director Nancy Jordan. "Anthony is teaching the next generation."

FROM SMALL LOANS TO BIG IMPACTS



Native CDFIs are transforming lives and communities by offering access to capital where traditional financing often falls short. Native CDFI Network CEO Pete Upton describes the growth and increasing influence of Native CDFIs across Indian Country: "We've made so much progress over the last five years—we now have a seat at the table when it comes to philanthropy and government."

Upton shares the story of a Native woman-owned concrete company in Nebraska, once earning under \$500,000 annually. Thanks to Native CDFI support, the company now secures federal contracts totaling \$8 to \$10 million a year. But impact isn't always about big numbers. Small loans—like \$500 to a Native artist—can create meaningful income and stability for families.

Podcast host Elyse Wild highlights another favorite: Big Sky Cafe, a small, Native-owned restaurant near the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. Supported by a Native CDFI, the cafe has become a beloved community hub—proof that with the right support, Native entrepreneurs are building both businesses and stronger communities.

Stories of Impact



MARKET TO MORTAR TO MOBILE

R-Eatz Grows on Winnebago Reservation with Native CDFI Help

Reggie Frazier, a citizen of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, turned his passion for cooking into a thriving business with the help of Ho-Chunk Community Capital (HCCC), a Native CDFI. Inspired by his father's home-cooked meals, Reggie and his wife, Irita, launched R-Eatz in 2022 at the Ho-Chunk Village Farmers Market, serving crowd favorites like birria pozole and Indian burgers.

Their popularity quickly grew, and HCCC saw potential. With a \$12,000 loan from HCCC—funded by the Native American Agriculture Fund—the Fraziers opened a brick-and-mortar restaurant in Ho-Chunk Plaza, becoming the only restaurant on the reservation outside of tribal casinos. The business now employs five staff members.

In 2024, a second HCCC loan of \$50,000 helped them expand into a food truck, allowing R-Eatz to serve customers across the tri-state area while staying rooted in Winnebago.

"The feedback I get from the community pushes me to keep going," Frazier said. "Everybody wants me to stay in Winnebago — that's why I wanted the food truck."

FROM PRE-MED TO SWEET SUCCESS

Native-Owned Bakery Rises in Alaska with Help from Cook Inlet Lending Center

Jamie Ann Bell (Ahtna Athabascan) never planned to become a baker—until she discovered that baking, like medicine, is a kind of chemistry. After leaving a pre-med path, Bell followed her passion, enrolling in culinary and business school. Alongside business partner Linnaea Ward–Develice, she launched Arctic Moon Bakery in Anchorage, Alaska.

The pair initially self-funded their dream but hit a roadblock in March 2020 when their small business loan with Cook Inlet Lending Center was derailed by the pandemic lockdown. Forced to take out a high-interest loan elsewhere, they struggled under mounting payments.

In 2022, they turned back to Cook Inlet Lending. This time, the Native CDFI refinanced their loan at a 5% fixed rate, cutting costs and providing financial breathing room.

Today, Arctic Moon supplies baked goods statewide and partners with Alaska's largest coffee producer.



Photo: J. Kunze

"With the new loan, we were able to breathe, relax, and look at where we wanted to take our company," said Bell. "We are thriving now."





"Grab onto your dream with all your heart," Hillman says, "and trust that organizations like Spruce Root are there to help you make it happen."

BEARS, BOATS, AND BUSINESS DREAMS

Alaska Native Entrepreneur Brings Tlingit Traditions to Tourism with Spruce Root's Support

John Hillman, a Tlingit entrepreneur from Hoonah, Alaska, built Wilderness Island Tours with one goal: to stay rooted in the land he loves while creating opportunities for his family and community. After careers in logging and mining kept him away from home, Hillman recognized the growing tourism industry in Hoonah and saw a chance to offer something unique—cultural tours led by Alaska Natives who deeply understand the land.

When traditional banks turned him away, Spruce Root, a Native CDFI serving Southeast Alaska, stepped in. Through one-on-one coaching and personalized business planning, Spruce Root helped Hillman turn his dream into a thriving business.

Today, Hillman and his wife Marilyn guide guests through stunning landscapes and rich cultural histories—offering more than bear sightings and photo ops. They offer connection.

ROAD TO SUCCESS

From RV Troubles to Trusted Technician

After nearly two decades as a paralegal, Rudy Serrano of Ysleta del Sur Pueblo found new purpose—and freedom—on the open road. But when frequent RV breakdowns disrupted his travels, he saw an opportunity: become the solution. Rudy launched Roadhouse Mobile RV Repair and Inspection, a business inspired by his own experiences and made possible with support from the Tigua Community Development Corporation (TCDC).

Through TCDC's Native Pathways program, Rudy gained essential business skills, from financial literacy to website development. He also earned certification and insurance, which helped establish trust with customers. TCDC's holistic, tiered approach gave Rudy the confidence and structure to build a sustainable business.

Today, Rudy services two to four clients daily, helping fellow travelers stay on the move. His journey reflects the transformative power of culturally grounded business support.

"I'm not just repairing RVs," Rudy says. "I'm helping people keep going—and I get to live the life I dreamed of."





"We're creating both immediate and intergenerational economic impact," Fordham said

PROGRESS REPORT

Native CDFI Leaders Share Their Small Business Success Stories at Annual Summit

At the 5th annual Native CDFI Policy & Capacity Building Summit in Washington, D.C., leaders from across Indian Country shared powerful updates on how they're driving small business growth and community transformation.

Angie Main of NACDC Financial Services detailed the CDFI's strategic property purchases in Browning, Montana—including the future site of a small business incubator and NACDC's headquarters. "We're building the infrastructure Native entrepreneurs need," she said.

In Michigan, Chi-Ishobak's Sean Winters emphasized staying grounded in their mission while embracing opportunity, including the Clean Communities Investment Accelerator.

Jonelle Yearout of Nimiipuu Community Development celebrated the passage of a tribal commercial code and plans to launch a reservation-based business incubator.

Meanwhile, Kit Fordham of Mni Sota Fund shared that they've grown their loan fund by \$1.5 million and are planning a new headquarters on Minneapolis' American Indian Cultural Corridor.. Stories of Impact

FROM HER GRANDMA'S TABLE

How Citizen Potawatomi Community Development Corporation Helped Transform a Family Recipe into a Thriving Business

Kelly Price grew up in Medicine Park, Oklahoma, learning traditions at her grandmother's side—especially how to make frybread. That cherished recipe became the foundation of Redbone Indian Tacos, a business born out of a community fundraiser that sparked a bigger dream.

What started as a one-time act of kindness grew into a popular food truck, powered by Price's entrepreneurial spirit and support from the Citizen Potawatomi Community Development Corporation (CPCDC). With no formal business training, Price turned to CPCDC for guidance and capital. Through multiple loans—including pandemic relief—she expanded her business, added a frybread pizza trailer, and is now planning her first brick-and-mortar location in Lawton.

CPCDC's support, especially from loan officer Felicia Freeman, has been instrumental. "Felicia believed in me, and that's why I continue to grow," said Price.

Today, Redbone Indian Tacos is a family-run business that feeds more than just customers—it nourishes culture, community, and a grandmother's enduring legacy.





Stories of Impact

nativecdfi.net



HARVESTING SUCCESS

How Taala Fund's Cedar Root Business Center Helped a Quinault Elder Turn Storytelling and Art into a Thriving Business

In Washington, Quinault Nation elder Harvest Moon has built a successful business around basket weaving and storytelling with support from Cedar Root Business Center, a nonprofit initiative of TAALA Fund Native CDFI.

When Moon shifted from pursuing a career in midwifery to embracing her calling in traditional arts, she found that Cedar Root provided exactly what she needed to elevate her business. Program manager Cat Raya helped Moon with technical support like creating invoices and submitting audition materials, allowing her to focus on her craft.

"Being a successful artist is about overcoming obstacles," Moon explains. Her storytelling and basket weaving have now reached audiences at schools, community events, and major corporations including Microsoft and REI.

Photo: Sheri Mila Gerson

Pawnee Nation Behavioral Health Center | Pawnee, Oklahoma

PAWNEE NATION

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

HEALING CAPITAL

24

How Native American Bank Helped Pawnee Nation Build a Behavioral Health Solution

The Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma is advancing health sovereignty and economic development through a new behavioral health center offering culturally grounded addiction and mental health care. This milestone project was made possible by Native American Bank, a Denver-based Native CDFI owned by tribal governments and Alaska Native corporations, which provided critical financing expertise and capital access.

With only 3,600 enrolled members and modest assets, Pawnee Nation faced challenges financing this multi-million-dollar facility. Leveraging a strategic capital stack, the tribe combined federal grants, COVID relief funds, and the complex New Markets Tax Credits (NMTCs) program, expertly structured with guidance from Native American Bank. Unlike conventional lenders, the bank engaged early and continuously, advising on financing, construction, and regulatory compliance.

Brian Kirk, Pawnee Nation's executive affairs director, credits the bank as more than a lender—a partner and educator who gave the tribe confidence to move forward. The center will deliver residential treatment, detox, and outpatient care within a culturally tailored framework, proving that even smaller tribes can build sovereign health infrastructure with the right support.

Stories of Impact

INITIATING CHANGE

Building Native CDFI Power in California and Nevada

California and Nevada are home to nearly 800,000 Native Americans and 130 federally recognized tribes—but just one certified Native CDFI. A new partnership between the Native CDFI Network (NCN) and Wells Fargo is working to change that.

Through a year-long initiative, NCN and Wells Fargo aim to address the severe lack of access to culturally informed financial services in the region. The effort will include a robust needs assessment, the training of 20 Native community leaders, support for at least five Native communities, financial coaching for 100 individuals, and the creation of a \$5 million pool for emerging Native CDFIs.

"This is just the first-year kickoff," said NCN CEO Pete Upton. "We're going to remain there and nurture that area long-term."

By building awareness and capacity from the ground up, the initiative is laying the foundation for long-term economic development in communities that have historically been excluded from mainstream finance.



(L-R): Pete Upton, Native CDFI Network; Tim Rios, Wells Fargo

Native CDFI Development Initiative California and Nevada

Native CDFI Network & Wells Fargo Collaboration

Leadership training, technical assistance, financial coaching, capital access

Impact: 20 leaders trained, 5 Native communities supported, 100 individuals served, \$5M in funding created

What Makes the Difference

Key Findings from Native CDFI Small Business Stories

After a year of reporting these stories—talking to Native CDFI executives, their clients, tribal leaders, and policymakers who champion these ecosystems—we've discovered what truly sets these institutions apart as difference makers in Indian Country.

Relationship-first lending consistently emerged in our conversations. Native CDFIs prioritize character, community ties, and entrepreneurial "grit" over credit scores, building lasting partnerships rather than transactions.

Ecosystem creation surfaced as a defining mission across interviews. These CDFIs don't just fund businesses; they construct entire economic infrastructures, transforming informal "kitchen table" enterprises into thriving commercial ventures where none existed before.



Community gathering spaces became a recurring theme—restaurants like Big Sky Cafe, food trucks like R-Eatz, and salons like Visage create vital social hubs where neighbors connect after football games, share morning coffee, or celebrate special occasions.

Cultural entrepreneurship threaded through multiple stories, as businesses blend traditional foods and practices with modern commerce, preserving heritage while generating revenue.

Wraparound support extends far beyond capital, providing technical assistance and patient mentorship that guides Indigenous entrepreneurs from dreams to reality, ultimately advancing economic sovereignty.

NATIVE CDFIs: Turning Dreams into Reality in Indian Country (Video)

The path to entrepreneurship in Indian Country has historically been marked by significant obstacles – from limited access to capital to complex bureaucratic challenges. But across Native communities, Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) are changing that narrative.

Through the voices of successful Native business owners and CDFI leaders, this video highlights how these vital organizations are doing more than just providing loans – they're building partnerships that transform lives and strengthen tribal economies.

Featured in the video are compelling stories from entrepreneurs like Julie Turner, Jon Hillman, and Reggie Frazier, whose businesses flourished with support from Native CDFIs. Their experiences, captured in the Difference Makers 2.0 series produced by the Native CDFI Network and Tribal Business News, demonstrate how these institutions look beyond traditional lending metrics to recognize determination and potential in Native business owners.



Scan the QR code or <u>click here</u> to watch



Native CDFIs: Relationship-Based & Character-Focused Lending



Sean Winters Chi-Ishobak Executive Director

"Our whole mission includes responsible lending, and we also want to create an enjoyable experience for our tribal citizens. That willingness component has allowed us to be a little bit more alert when we are going through our applications."



Russ Seagle

Sequoyah Fund CEO

"When we look to lend money to somebody, we're not looking for a perfect credit score — we're looking for somebody who has what I would call the 'gotta wanna.' You gotta want it more than anything, you gotta be willing to put in the hours, you gotta be willing to put in the work, and you gotta be willing to adapt and overcome, and make things happen when things don't go your way."



Nancy Jordan

Pacific Northwest Tribal Lending

"In the community, we relay information. We know that this is about our relationships. It's our connection to the community that makes this work."

Native CDFIs: Building Economic Ecosystems & Infrastructure



Jacob Wallis

Nixyaawii Community Financial Services

"What has never existed on our reservation is a small-business ecosystem. 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."



Lakota Vogel

Four Bands Community Fund Executive Director

"Markets like the Cheyenne River Sioux reservation have been left behind for decades, if not centuries, for infrastructure development. So often, we have really informal economies. For Four Bands, we felt we needed to create physical space for our small businesses to test their ideas with a lower risk."

Tony Wood Ho-Chunk Community Capital

"We are in a food desert, and at that point in time, we had no restaurant in Winnebago besides the casino, nothing local ... You know you can't have a community without small businesses."

Native CDFIs: Client Impact & Transformation



Julie Painter

Salon owner/Sequoyah Fund client

"They've been instrumental in every step of our business and every pivot of my business. Without the Sequoyah Fund, I don't know that we really would have made it through all of the things that we did make it through ... the housing crisis, COVID, and all of those things that we had to pivot from."



Sadie Mildenberger

Iniim Cafe owner/Nixyaawii client

"Everything I know is because I started at zero, and they baby-stepped me through. I was able to wrap my head around this daydream I was having by walking through all these steps they set out for me."



Jamie Bell

Arctic Moon Bakery owner/Cook Inlet Lending client

"With the new (loan), we were able to breathe, relax, and look at where we wanted to take our company. We are thriving now."



Sue Raccine

Big Sky Cafe owner/NACDC client

"We went to NACDC again to talk to them about it. We didn't talk for very long when they said, 'We're going to back you.'"



The Native CDFI Network (NCN) was established in 2009 to unify and strengthen Native community development financial institutions (CDFIs) serving Native trust land communities, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. As a national voice for Native CDFIs, NCN works to:

- <u>Amplify Native-led solutions</u> by sharing stories and highlighting innovations from across Indian Country
- <u>Advocate for equitable policy</u> to ensure Native perspectives are included in national financial and economic conversations
- <u>Strengthen our collective impact</u> by connecting members, advancing shared priorities, and building a more resilient Native economy

The Difference Makers 2.0 series is a collaboration between NCN and Tribal Business News.

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