

Reframing Philanthropy: Indigenous-Led Funds Governance Models



International Funders
IFIP
for Indigenous Peoples

*Facilitated and
documented by*





Purpose of Report

This report shares the distinct and effective ways Indigenous-Led Funds support Indigenous self-determination and guide capital directly into the hands of Indigenous communities around the world.

Constructed as a series of articles, it is hoped that readers will read and refer to the insights in each article as a source of dialogue and continued engagement with the network of entities dedicated to bringing Indigenous-led work to the attention of the world.

In sharing these insights, Indigenous-Led Funds offer this investment to all funders, allies and emerging funds as a resource to advance interest, alliance, networking and support for Indigenous knowledge, values and engagement for the growth and advancement of all philanthropy.

Message to Readers:

We ask readers to please cite this report and acknowledge the collective wisdom of the knowledge holders who contributed to this research. Please use the following full citation:

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This report contains insights shared by 23 Indigenous-Led Funds who participated in the 2024 Governance Scan, as well as recommendations of participants in the 4th Global Gathering of Indigenous-Led Funds just prior to the 2025 IFIP Global Indigenous Conference in Kenya. There are six sections to this report.



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The interview, facilitation and development team for this report is Indigenous Collaboration, a 100% Indigenous owned Public Benefit Corporation specializing in custom designed facilitation processes that activate the inherent wisdom of groups to effectively navigate and decision-make in the situations they're in.

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Reframing Philanthropy: Indigenous-Led Funds Governance Models 2025 would not be possible without the generous contributions of Indigenous-Led Funds who collectively invested more than 25 hours in our interviews to provide a glimpse into how they work with Indigenous communities throughout the world.

Geographic Focus of Fund	Indigenous-Led Fund	Web Address
Africa	NAAPU Indigenous Women Fund	Samburuwomentrust.org
Africa, East	Ereto Solidarity Fund for East Africa	Eretosolidarityfund.org
Africa, Kenya	Kipok Fund	impactkenya.org
Asia	Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund (IPAS)	ipasfund.org
Australia	First Nations Futures	firstnationsfutures.com
Australia	Spinifex Foundation	Spinifexfoundation.com.au
Australia, Victoria	Koondee Woonga-gat Toor-rong	kwtfund.org.au
Australia, Western	Noongar Charitable Trust	noongarcharitabletrust.com.au
Brazil	Fundo Rio Negro (FOIRN)	foirn.org.br
Brazil, Amazon	Podaali Fundo Indígena da Amazônia Brasileira	fundopodaali.org.br/
Canada, Atlantic	Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation	ulnoowegfoundation.ca
Canada, British Columbia	First Peoples Cultural Foundation	fpcf.ca
Global	Cultural Survival (Four Funds)	culturalsurvival.org
Global	FIMI / Ayni Fund	fimi-iiwf.org
Global	Pawanka Fund	pawankafund.org
Global	Seventh Generation Fund	7genfund.org
Inuit	Inuit Nunaat Fund	inuitnunaatfund.org
Mexico, Yucatan Peninsula	Fondo Agroecológico Península de Yucatán (FAPY)	agroecologyfund.org
New Zealand	Tapuwae Roa	tapuwaeroa.org
Saami	Saami Cultural Fund	saamicouncil.net
USA, Colorado Plateau	Colorado Plateau Foundation	coloradoplateaufoundation.org
USA, Hopi	Hopi Foundation	hopifoundation.org
USA, NW Turtle Island Arctic to Rockies	Na'ah Illahee Fund	naahillahee.org



4th Global Gathering of Indigenous-Led Funds: Reviewers

In February 17-18, 2025, the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples (IFIP) hosted the 4th Global Gathering of Indigenous-Led Funds and convened in February 18-20, 2025 their Global Conference in Naivasha, Kenya at the Enaishipai Resort. Many of the organizations who participated in the 2024 Governance Scan interviews had representatives in attendance at the 4th Global Gathering and IFIP Global Conference, some who had been interviewed as well as additional representatives who had not participated in the interviews directly.

On Monday, February 17, Indigenous Collaboration presented the highlevel parameters of the articles written for this report to the Indigenous-Led Funds in attendance. On Tuesday, February 18, approximately 42 representatives of 24 Indigenous-Led Funds attending also participated in a 3 hour 'deep dive' into the subjects of the five themes that emerged as the subject matter for the articles of this report. Dividing into teams, the entire group of participants reviewed one article assigned to their group, providing insights on the article.

Each small team consisted of 5 to 13 people. In these teams, the group reviewed the content of their one article and provide feedback, indicating:

- What content should stay as is
- What information should be softened
- What information should be strengthened, with specific recommendations on how
- What information should be added, with specific recommendations of what
- What information should be omitted

The insights provided by this global convening of Indigenous-Led Funds provided a critical beacon for the content of each article. We clearly heard the instruction: [“The tone of this report should be honest and truthful, but tell Philanthropy: Let us work with you to do philanthropy DIFFERENTLY and get capital into the hands of Indigenous communities.”](#)

We extend deep appreciation to all of the Indigenous-Led Funds who shared insights throughout the Global Conference. We are deeply grateful for your collective investment in our education. Gratitude to the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples for entrusting us with this project.

Definitions and Terminology

Indigenous Peoples: An official definition of “Indigenous” has not been adopted by any United Nations system body. Instead, the United Nations uses an understanding that intends to honor the diversity of Indigenous Peoples based upon the following: self-determination at the individual and community level; historical continuity; strong links to territory; distinct social, economic or political systems; and distinct language, culture, and beliefs. The most fruitful approach is to identify, rather than define, Indigenous Peoples. This is based on the fundamental criterion of self-identification as underlined in key human rights documents. (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. n.d.)

Indigenous-led Philanthropy: Giving by Indigenous-Led Funds and Indigenous Peoples’ Organizations informed and guided by Indigenous worldviews, values, and protocols, and led and managed by, for, and with Indigenous Peoples.

5Rs of Indigenous Philanthropy: IFIP envisions value-based partnerships that incorporate the “5Rs” to re-frame funding relationships and to shift to a new paradigm of giving based on Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Redistribution.

Indigenous-Led Funds: Indigenous-Led Funds are guided by Indigenous worldviews and led-by and for Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous-Led Funds strengthen self-determination and support a process that empowers the communities, at the local to the global level, to be able to change paradigms and shift power relations addressing the asymmetry of powers and resources to recognition and reciprocity.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP): Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on September 13, 2007, UNDRIP is a UN document that contains minimum standards for the recognition, promotion, and protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.





Executive Summary

This governance scan was developed by International Funders for Indigenous Peoples (IFIP), the only global philanthropy network dedicated to Indigenous Peoples worldwide, and Indigenous Collaboration, a 100% Indigenous owned Public Benefit Corporation. The scan explores the Governance structures, values, principles, and operational realities of 23 Indigenous-Led Funds (ILFs). These funds represent diverse Indigenous communities globally, yet share a collective commitment to Indigenous self-determination, cultural identity, and community-rooted systems of governance and care.

The purpose of this scan is to highlight the ILFs leadership, voices and practices, and to offer insight into how they are redefining governance, accountability, and impact in ways that are grounded in Indigenous worldviews and self-determination. ILFs interviewed for this study describe governance models that are deeply rooted in Indigenous values, culture, and leadership. Their governance structures range from formal boards and advisory bodies to consensus-based decision-making rooted in community protocols. Leadership is collective and relational, often emerging from the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples—their elders, leaders, knowledge holders, and community members. These models center community input and leadership in all aspects of program design, grantmaking, and evaluation.

“Indigenous-Led Funds balance accountability to donors with deep responsibility to their communities, navigating power dynamics with skill and clarity.”

They define success and impact in ways that reflect their communities’ own values. Evaluation and learning processes prioritize community needs and practices, rather than externally imposed metrics or rigid timelines of inflexible and overly complex evaluation. These practices honor the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge systems and affirm the importance of community ownership over narratives and outcomes.

Indigenous-Led Funds foster accountability through reciprocal relationships, open dialogue, and shared responsibilities. Trust is not just a guiding principle but a way of working that permeates all aspects of ILF governance—from resource stewardship to fund distribution. Community members are not seen as beneficiaries but as partners, knowledge holders and decision-makers who determine priorities and outcomes. Findings from this scan reveal that ILFs are redefining philanthropy on their own terms.

While many ILFs value support from institutional funders, many have in this scan described challenges with philanthropic processes that are misaligned with Indigenous priorities. The scan captures a collective call for philanthropy to evolve—moving from charitable giving to reparative action that includes wealth redistribution, recognition, and the transfer of power and decision-making to Indigenous communities.

Throughout this scan, ILFs assert their leadership not only as funders but as systems-changers building alternative models of philanthropy that prioritize justice, repair, and collective care. They are forging new paths forward—ones that show how funding can be governed in ways that uphold Indigenous self-determination, strengthen cultural foundations, and repair historic harms. Philanthropy that is committed to transformation must recognize ILFs as essential partners in this work. This means shifting how trust is built, how power is shared, and how relationships are nurtured. It requires humility, listening, and long-term commitment to the kind of change that honors Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

This scan affirms Indigenous-Led Funds as critical agents of change and that governance is not simply about structure—it is about values, relationships, and the deep responsibility we hold to one another, to the land, and to future generations. At the heart of these reflections are the 5Rs of Indigenous Philanthropy—Respect, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Relationships, and Redistribution—which are deeply embedded across all aspects of ILF governance and practice.





History and Philanthropy

Our future, our present and our past are in a reciprocal relationship with each other. Right now, we build what will become the history of grandchildren, their children and the children that follow them. How do we hold accountability for building a just future for the next generations, where Indigenous Peoples have the right to be self-determined? These are the conversations necessary for Indigenous and mainstream philanthropy to have today.

Indigenous Philanthropy

Indigenous Peoples have sustained life and livelihoods in every environment on the earth for millennia. Structures over 9000 years old signal the presence of Indigenous Peoples living so

Indigenous origin stories convey fundamental understanding of the relationship between wealth and responsibility in Indigenous cultures. These understandings teach that wealth goes beyond the material and includes knowledge, social bonds, and the health of the land.

Wealth is viewed as a shared resource, meant to be circulated within the community to support growth, survival, and balance. This understanding directly challenges Western economic models that prioritize accumulation over distribution in its definition of wealth.

These Indigenous ways are as old as Indigenous people themselves, giving form to how Indigenous Peoples contribute to and interact with their lands, places and communities.

Indigenous-Led Funds are first responders for Indigenous communities; familiar with on-the-ground conditions, they know the arteries that reliably deliver resources where needed.

In the past half century, when Indigenous Peoples took steps to formally enter what is known as the field of philanthropy, it was an act of self-determination and allegiance to the intelligence, values and lifeways of Indigenous people.

Carrying forward the social justice and civil rights movements around the world in the 1970's Indigenous led organizations began to establish their own vehicles to conduct philanthropy.

Indigenous-Led Funds serve as a critical bridge that Indigenous-Led Funds serve as a critical bridge that spans the chasm between Indigenous communities and mainstream philanthropy. Some Indigenous-Led Funds have their own nucleus of capital from which they make grants; others offer a hybrid of programming alongside regranteeing, while other Indigenous-Led Funds focus on fundraising and regranteeing. Indigenous-Led Funds are first responders for Indigenous communities; familiar with on-the-ground conditions, they know the arteries that reliably deliver resources where needed.

As Indigenous-Led Funds increase in number, the movement to secure and deliver capital directly into the hands of Indigenous Peoples working in their own communities grows.

Indigenous-Led Funds are also important allies in helping Indigenous communities navigate challenges communities encounter in their work.

The 5 Rs of Indigenous Philanthropy: Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, Reciprocity and Redistribution drive the work of IFIP and Indigenous-Led Funds

In 1999, the International Funders of Indigenous Peoples (IFIP) was established to mobilize resources and build partnerships between the funding community and

Indigenous Peoples. The 5 Rs of Indigenous Philanthropy: Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, Reciprocity and Redistribution drive the work of IFIP and Indigenous-Led Funds.

Sources of Global Wealth & Philanthropy

Global exploitation of Indigenous lands and resources created massive wealth for individuals and corporations historically.

Indigenous lands and resources were occupied and appropriated by colonizers to establish and maintain their own communities, economies and practices in lands they did not originate from; these are the facts of our global history.

Global exploitation of Indigenous lands and resources created massive wealth for individuals and corporations historically.

Colonization, in its most aggressive as well as its most subtle forms, isn't over.

The expansionist landscape that enabled exploitation of Indigenous lands and resources relied on the growth of commerce and capitalism throughout the world as its driving rationale.

Colonization, in its most aggressive as well as its most subtle forms, isn't over. Modern expressions of colonization exist in biased policies that override rights of Indigenous people; it exists in publicly and privately supported movements and actions against Indigenous Peoples defending their rights, lands and authority to govern and manage resources.

Tax rules for private philanthropy created the mechanism for wealthy individuals and corporations to withhold significant portions of

capital from becoming taxable revenue, while allowing them to maintain control over where and how these funds would be distributed. As a result, private foundation capital exists outside public control, in perpetuity, with the requirement that a small portion be redistributed, at the discretion of those presiding over the wealth.

In contrast, public foundations derive their revenues from a wide donor base that collectively buys into the mission and purposes of the public foundation.

Focus of Philanthropy

Early philanthropy of the late 1800s and early 1900's focused on direct community charity responding to poverty, social ills and human suffering. This early philanthropy was largely managed by women but transitioned to being managed by men.

Philanthropy became oriented to large scale social problem solving

The industrial age redirected, massive volumes of wealth into philanthropy, creating another dimension of the economy that men took over, creating 'the business of philanthropy'. Philanthropy became oriented to large scale social problem solving.

Modest generational change in private philanthropy saw language shifts in grantmaking from "giving" to "social impact investing". As the language of philanthropy changed, so did the processes intended to measure results, impacts and benefits.

With a business-like lens, private foundations sought planning, results projections, evaluations, assessments and data to demonstrate both compliance with the plan and prove levels of impact.

These efforts added more complexity to the granting process, narrowing the field of eligibility to those with the capacity to produce the plans, outline the projects, wait for the results, wait for the money, deliver the projects, collect the data then bundle the data and report back – in a prescribed timeline.

As Indigenous Led Funders observed: “Thirty years in, we’re still getting the same questions we did 30 years ago,” indicating that the learning curve of private philanthropy has been long and slow in understanding or connecting to the work of Indigenous Peoples’ organizations. Consistently miniscule funding by private foundations to Indigenous led work reveals the magnitude of disconnect between private foundations and the work of Indigenous communities work around the world as revealed by multiple giving reports.

Governing boards do not share the relationships, experiences or contexts that ultimately motivate change. Foundation Boards not having direct exposure or engagement with Indigenous people has direct consequences on the extent to which private philanthropy understands, trusts and invests in Indigenous led work.

Speculating on why private foundations don’t seem to adapt, exposure within the structure of mainstream philanthropy reveals the blind spot of Foundations.

Many mid-level program staff of Foundations connect, build relationships and adapt with grantees through their relationships. Mid-level program staff commit significant amounts of their daily lives to the business of philanthropy, yet the philanthropic top leadership invests dramatically fewer days to the business. Foundation Governing boards do not share the relationships, experiences or contexts that ultimately motivate change. Foundation Boards not having direct exposure or engagement with Indigenous Peoples has

direct consequences on the extent to which private philanthropy understands, trusts and invests in Indigenous led work.

The disconnect between mainstream Foundations and Indigenous-Led Funds creates real hurdles that stall or delay local efforts that can have significant impact on the issue arenas being worked on. As one Indigenous Led Fund shared:

“One of the biggest challenges that I find in my role is the pushback from mainstream philanthropy to do it how they want to see it, or how they want to see the bottom line. It always comes up, I think almost every year in our conversations about, “where is the middle ground in that?” It’s like: if you’re really in it for the long-haul, like, [you] really care about [these] issues? Just give us the money because that’s what’s needed now... having real, authentic conversations with funders around those critical areas of need and not like, beating around the bush about whether or not we meet a certain criterion as an intermediary [is challenging].”

The Global Philanthropy Tracker (GPT) estimates global individual giving to be around \$1.3 Trillion dollars, with private philanthropy contributing \$70 Billion dollars annually.

Indigenous Peoples exist everywhere in the world, with very different levels of recognition and status and are marginalized, irrespective of legal status

According to IFIP’s own research, less than 0.6% of global philanthropy was identified as benefitting Indigenous Peoples with a mere 33% of it going directly to Indigenous Peoples’ entities and organizations.

How often has the ‘negotiated middle ground’ resulted in reduced or diminished support of the efforts Indigenous People are organizing to deploy in their own communities, but are

not seen or recognized as legitimate efforts by mainstream philanthropy?

Indigenous Peoples exist everywhere in the world, with very different levels of recognition and status and are marginalized, irrespective of their legal status.

To balance economic, social and natural environments, governments must recognize and navigate the challenges of providing for the wellbeing of their populations, which includes Indigenous communities.

Some countries do not recognize or acknowledge their Indigenous Peoples. At the other end of the spectrum, some countries have treaties with Indigenous Peoples.

One key recommendation IFIP and the Indigenous Peoples' movement make to philanthropic organizations is to support Indigenous-led initiatives and ensure funding structures align with Indigenous values and governance.

Globally, an additional \$180 Billion dollars flow as aid to developing countries to support economic development and social welfare. In countries where Indigenous Peoples have limited or non-existent authority or self-determination over their lands or resources, their wellbeing is also marginalized by the governmental systems of their countries.

To balance economic, social and natural environments, governments must recognize and navigate the challenges of providing for the wellbeing of their populations, which includes Indigenous communities. This requires an honest look at the state of the Nation's specific situation and the factors that contribute to it, where current practices are shaped by historical priorities.

One key recommendation IFIP and the Indigenous Peoples' movement make to

philanthropic organizations is to support Indigenous-led initiatives and ensure funding structures align with Indigenous values and governance.

Indigenous philanthropic models offer a framework for ethical giving that prioritize healing, cultural resurgence, and long-term sustainability.

This shift requires a decolonized approach to philanthropy—one that moves beyond charity and towards self-determined economic empowerment. Indigenous philanthropic models offer a framework for ethical giving that prioritize healing, cultural resurgence, language preservation, and long-term sustainability.

Aligning mainstream philanthropic efforts such as those articulated in the 5 Rs of Indigenous Philanthropy means acknowledging the specific historical injustices that have shaped contemporary inequities. And, committing to long-term structural change that moves towards justice.

Meaningful Partnerships

Indigenous science, practices and ways of knowing have long held knowledge that social and economic scientists are starting to “discover” – the expansive connections between the land and the people that is directly tied to health and wellbeing of all life.

Social scientists and economists are beginning to glimpse the significance of knowledge that Indigenous people have always held. In the world's most critical environmental spaces, Indigenous people live and apply the thousands of years of Indigenous knowledge they have as ancient residents and lifeway practitioners in those environments.

Meaningful partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous philanthropy will be essential to creating the connections that advance self-determination, true equity and the restoration of Indigenous autonomy.

Acknowledging this history is not an act of guilt, it is an act of integrity and moral responsibility.

The truth of history is clear: Philanthropy, as a sector, must recognize its own complicity in upholding systems of colonialism and inequity. Many of today's philanthropic institutions were built on wealth accumulated through extractive industries, land dispossession, and economic systems that disproportionately benefited non-Indigenous communities.

Acknowledging this history is not an act of guilt, it is an act of integrity and moral responsibility. Indigenous-Led Funds see this moment in time as one of reckoning. Only through honest acknowledgement of the past and a commitment to equitable resource sharing can philanthropy truly contribute to building a just and sustainable future that serves the wellbeing of everyone.

Relationships, Equity and a Just Future

Partnerships require relationship; relationships build trust, mutual understanding and foster reciprocity and respect.

Meaningful partnership requires mutual investment of time, trust and relationship to yield readiness to explore and take risks together

Single, intermittent or periodic transactions between philanthropy and Indigenous Peoples do not form the basis for relatedness or relationship. Meaningful partnership requires mutual investment of time, trust and relationship to yield readiness to explore and take risks together.

Extended connection and relationship foster empathy, reciprocity and patience with the shared journey, affording the time necessary for shared efforts to unfold, emerge, attempt, learn and try again.

There is room in the shared future for long term relationships that work collaboratively and ultimately benefit everyone in the system.

Indigenous-Led Funds are committed to building a philanthropic ecosystem for the future that is transparent, operates from trust, reciprocity, accountability and inclusiveness. There is room in the shared future for long term relationships that work collaboratively and ultimately benefit everyone in the system.

There is an opportunity for private philanthropy and Indigenous-Led Funds to forge partnerships that ensure resources get into the hands of Indigenous communities and meaningfully facilitate the application of Indigenous knowledge and values in social, environmental and economic work throughout the world.

Collaborating for the Future

This is a moment of reckoning: Indigenous focused philanthropy stands before history, with an opportunity to purposefully shape the future.

Honoring Indigenous-Led Funds: The good intentions and respective capacities of Indigenous-led funds must be acknowledged and celebrated.

Building authentic partnerships: A commitment to Indigenous-led philanthropy rooted in honesty, accountability, and a shared vision for justice.

Philanthropy as a path for Human Liberation: Restoring Indigenous rights, economic autonomy and self-determination through equitable philanthropy put directly into the hands of Indigenous Peoples themselves.





Systems Change in Indigenous Philanthropy

Retrofitting systems is necessary to get philanthropic capital into the hands of Indigenous Peoples working diligently on priorities important to their own wellbeing.

For decades, Indigenous-Led Funds have adapting, evolving and adjusting the tools of philanthropy to ensure that the tools themselves do not colonize, assimilate or disrupt the knowledge, ways or practices of their communities. Led by Indigenous knowledge and practice, Indigenous-Led Funds continually evolve their philanthropic systems to be compatible with the context of Indigenous communities doing the work.

We have to keep balance between our culture, our community and the philanthropic world

Many Indigenous communities throughout the world are significantly disconnected and isolated from mainstream technologies, infrastructure and services and English is not the language in use.

Many remote Indigenous communities share a similar profile:

- English is not THE language in use
- Computers, internet, smart phones are uncommon or in limited use
- Broad cross sections of Indigenous communities are unfamiliar with technology

Diversity is a fact within Indigenous communities. Indigenous Peoples globally, regionally and locally are distinct from each other; neighboring communities may be culturally and linguistically different from each other, but these distinctions are navigable through relationship.

Veronica Aguilar of Cultural Survival shares this: ***“Our interest in making our support of the self-determination of Indigenous communities more flexible and respectful... [is] in supporting a community from different***

angles, not only with financing but also with communication and with accompaniment in cases of international lobbying... or, simply give visibility to their project or even to connect them with other organizations when there is a very specific need that we can address.”¹

In entering the philanthropic environment, Indigenous-Led Funds do so with purpose and intention, recognizing the importance of a refrain heard throughout the interviews: We must keep balance between our culture, our community and the philanthropic world. Indigenous-Led Funds provide this balance by recognizing the needs and situations of the Indigenous Peoples they’re working with, and assisting Indigenous communities’ self-determined efforts.

Approaching Philanthropy with an Indigenous Lens

Leeroy Bilney, formerly of the Spinifex Foundation, describes challenges that resonate with the experiences of newly established Indigenous Led Funders, and those who have been refining their service and delivery mechanisms for many years:

“How do we create a governance structure that allows us to maintain community individuality and autonomy, but at the same time collectiveness in bringing us together so we can be on the same page with it comes to working in this kind of [philanthropic] area? How can we attract funds to come to us, but then also identify where it goes within the communities - whether it be to [serve community in] the remoteness, the Metro, or what have you. Whether the people there have the ability and capacity to articulate their needs, versus some that might not have that capacity, you know? How are we making sure that we’re here for the majority [of our people]

¹ Veronica Aguilar, Cultural Survival, 2024 Governance Scan Interview (GSI)

and not just becoming another tokenistic entity or yet another gatekeeping entity?”²

Consciously asking the questions of the needs, readiness and priorities of Indigenous Communities is the persistent baseline of finding one's way into and through the field of Philanthropy, relying on an Indigenous lens.

Tia Oros Peters of the Seventh Generation Fund, the oldest Indigenous Led Fund continuously operating in the field of Indigenous Philanthropy, makes this observation: *“...we're wired really differently, [we] started really differently. We were first in the field doing [philanthropy] in the way we do it: grassroots organizing, traditional ceremonies, listening to elders, taking the time to not implement something externally, but saying, what do you all want? How can we help? And what you all want may be really different than what they all want over there. And that's okay...because our goal and our purpose is helping the [Indigenous] people just actualize what they want.”³*

Engaging with Indigenous Peoples from a point of understanding, allyship and partnership means forming relationships that are formed within the context of the community and the people and building outward from there. Coming alongside Indigenous Peoples in their own situations brings greater likelihood of ownership, adaptability and overall integrity of the relationship and any efforts that the relationship may yield.

The 5 Rs strengthen integrity in relationships around capital and center accountability among the partners themselves

In addition to recognizing the context of the environment and living reality of every community, Indigenous-Led Funds must consider the tone and posture they assume in bringing capital to Indigenous communities and the journey they share together. Terori Hareko Avaivilla of Koondee Woongagat Toorrang (KWT) Fund says: *“Doing [philanthropic] business has to be dignified because at the end of the day, we've got to*

answer to our community. And, you know, the wider philanthropy doesn't actually see...if the community is not happy about something, we're the ones who hear about it, we're the ones who have to deal with it. So, you know, we have to keep that balance between our culture, our community and the philanthropic world.”⁴

Indigenous philanthropy models pre-existing community values for what has been coined “The 5 Rs of Indigenous Philanthropy”: *relationship* and *reciprocity* that fosters *mutual respect* and *shared responsibility* in *redistributing* resources.

Demonstrating these values throughout the process of redistributing resources that support the efforts of the community are not about “charity”. The 5 Rs strengthen integrity in relationships around capital and center accountability among the partners themselves.

Responsibility and accountability among all parties makes the Indigenous approach to philanthropy highly impactful

To be effective, delivery systems must get capital into the hands of the community who are already invested and expending their own effort into work that is meaningful to them and deliver that capital in a straightforward, timely way.

“The first very distinct and very different way that we do this work is we don't consider grants as ‘giving’. Those kinds of ‘giving’ represent an imbalance between those who have and those who don't have. For us, it's a question of [being attentive to how we wield] power in our relationships with the community.”⁵

There is readiness within Indigenous communities to take action, if the support is available. Marissa Nuvayestewa, a program officer for the Colorado Plateau Foundation in the United States shares what they have seen throughout their work: *“There are real critical areas of community building that [Indigenous] folks are facilitating [themselves]...”*

² Leeroy Bilney, Spinifex, 2024 (GSI)

³ Tia Oros Peters, Seventh Generation Fund, 2024 (GSI)

⁴ Terori Hareko Avaivilla, Koondee Woongagat Toorrang Fund, 2024 (GSI)

⁵ Mali Ole Kaunga, Kipok Fund, 2024 (GSI)

it's interesting to hear from all of these community builders all of the different facets they're helping to uplift and leverage—because the knowledge is there. The wisdom is there, and the people are ready to organize around it.”⁶

Recognizing the origins of community efforts and readiness to take action and then engaging with that interest builds responsibility and accountability among all parties. These factors are part of the Indigenous approach to philanthropy and are highly impactful. Indigenous-Led Funds recognize the inherent value of this approach and see the benefits in every aspect of their work with Indigenous communities.

“The difference between our funding and others is ours is customized on Indigenous People’s aspiration. Our funding is very flexible. It’s a way to go about accessing and sharing the rich knowledge Indigenous Women are applying in different scenarios when we give them money. We give Indigenous Women autonomy to make whatever decisions they need to and build trust so that they open up. And even sometimes if [the project] has not worked, we’re also learning from where it is not working.”⁷

The systems that deliver resources into Indigenous communities is constantly under review, with community members informing adaptations by sharing their experiences, whether the work went the way anticipated, or if something else happened. In every instance, there is an opportunity to learn and adapt the work and the system as needed to ensure effectiveness.

Community Representation and Governance

The values of Indigenous communities are represented in internal governance structures of Indigenous-Led Funds.

The Saami Council is built on the fundamental thought that Saami are one people in four countries and that State borders shouldn’t divide them as Indigenous People. The Saami Council is made up of member organizations,

most of which are mainly Saami led entities. Members must agree with and accept the fundamental documents and declarations of the Council to ensure they are all working towards common goals. Each member nominates a representative to the Saami Council. The Saami Council operates from consensus decision-making that everyone can stand behind.

Aslat Holmberg describes the consensus approach taken by the Saami Council:
“[Consensus is] one part of what makes the governance efficient. Also, ensuring that everybody can feel like their points have been considered and that they support whatever decisions are involved.”⁸

The models vary but the ethic of leadership, roles and function are informed by and compatible with the Indigenous communities themselves.

Indigenous leadership demonstrates accountability and reliability in how they approach their responsibilities, relying on Indigenous knowledge and connectivity to inform and include community in their work.

“Effective governance from our board comes from a culture of operating that’s centered in care, reciprocity and integrity, bringing in people that really share those values. Our board...nurtures the vision...but also holds up accountability and integrity.”⁹

Governing boards across the Indigenous-Led Funds are not uniform in structure. Some operate from conventional non-profit leadership structures while others have linked networks that serve, support and advocate for the communities, districts and regions they are tied to, like neurons that constantly transmit and communicate critical decision-making information across the web or relationships. Dalee Sambo Dorrough of Inuit Nuunat Fund shared: *“One example of really altering the governance structure and posing questions, again, procedurally posing questions, related to: how is this community driven? Can the*

⁶ Marissa Nuvayestewa, Colorado Plateau Foundation, 2024 (GSI)

⁷ Jane Mariwas, NAAPU Indigenous Women Fund, 2024 (GSI)

⁸ Aslat Holmberg, Saami Council, 2024 (GSI)

⁹ Rona Glynn McDonald, First Nations Futures, 2024 (GSI)

*people within the community really speak to the questions that you normally don't see in a grant submission? But, I guess, asking more specifically: how does self-determination manifest itself within your community? Who are the people behind the movement? And, to really glean those kinds of questions will help to reveal how community is actually behind an initiative. Rather than...having a brilliant, wonderful idea and ticking off boxes until it looks gray at the end, right?"*¹⁰

The models vary but the ethic of leadership, roles and function are informed by and compatible with the Indigenous communities themselves. Does it make sense in the environment or demographic context the Indigenous Led Fund works? Does the model function and do what it's intended to do?

*"During my time, people...stayed on [the] board for many, many years and didn't rotate off quick, as in other places. The governance... that really assisted me was when the board people understood how this non-profit was developed"*¹¹ recalls Barbara Poley, former Executive Director of the Hopi Foundation, describing the value for having leadership from the community who had a shared understanding of the organization's origin, journey and context in advising and carrying the work forward consistent with the values of the community.

"We have more people-centered governing structures, where we [are] seeing our inspiration as the Indigenous Peoples [themselves]."

What is the actual work the knowledge holders must have in order to guide and nurture the organization well? When an entity knows what it needs to do and who has the skills, knowledge, relationships or practices to help do the work, that informs the question of who should be on the Board and why.

Governance structures are open to exploration and adaptation, based on the realities and functional intentions of each organization. Indigenous-Led Funds are motivated to explore

and create many different models that serve their purposes.

*"My dream is to create distributed governance, that's kind of networked across many, many, many people rather than having it narrow and small in terms of the number of people that represent that governance structure,"*¹² says Rona Glynn McDonald of First Nations Futures.

From their base in Nicaragua, Myrna Cunningham of the Pawanka Fund, describes the neuron-like model they've built which distributes leadership across a wide body of linked representatives connected to their own Indigenous communities.

*"We have a Guiding Committee from seven socio cultural regions; they are people who are part of Indigenous networks, who know the organization and processes in their respective regions. [Our ability] to respond is precisely having a guiding committee that knows the Indigenous movement [and] is part of the networks of Indigenous pueblos at a global level. And so, that [leadership knowledge and connectivity] facilitates the construction of associations and collaborations that in some way strengthen the Indigenous movement itself."*¹³

Whatever form the governance body takes, there is a shared conviction across all the Indigenous led entities that distinguishes them from their mainstream counterparts: *"We have more people-centered governing structures, where we [are] seeing our inspiration as the Indigenous people [themselves]."*¹⁴

Rona Glynn McDonald of First Nations Futures shares: *"We thought deeply about who would be on our Board and advisory groups as well. We spent about two years figuring out who those people would be. We wanted geographic equity...[and] intersectionality was such an important thing; having that diversity, that tapestry of strength, I call it."*¹⁵

¹⁰ Dalee Sambo Dorrough of Inuit Nuunat Fund, 2024 (GSI)

¹¹ Barbara Poley, Hopi Foundation, 2024 (GSI)

¹² Rona Glynn McDonald, First Nations Futures, 2024 (GSI)

¹³ Myrna Cunningham, Pawanka Fund, 2024 (GSI)

¹⁴ Jane Mariwas, NAAPU Indigenous Women Fund, 2024 (GSI)

¹⁵ Rona Glynn McDonald, First Nations Futures, 2024 (GSI)

Indigenous-Led Funds have developed leadership systems that hold accountability in a manner that is responsive to and compatible with their Indigenous communities.

There are many variables in what representation means to each organization: *“We have different ethnic identities in Kenya, and we work in all of them. So, in each and every community that we work in, we have a Board member.”*¹⁶

*“At the Hopi Foundation: “[We have] a three tiered governance body; the top is the community membership, the second is the Board of Trustees of the Foundation. And the third is the operational, the administrative layer. This three-tiered structure...understands and respects the dynamic of working within a small community, and the need to keep a buffer between political decision-making [and] the main vision and mission of the organization. That meant that the [top tier] membership would hold the power to appoint the governing board.”*¹⁷

Every Indigenous Led Fund is structured and focused on purposes that are compatible with the distinct values and priorities of the Indigenous communities they serve. Indigenous-Led Funds have developed leadership systems that hold accountability in a manner that is responsive to and compatible with their Indigenous communities.

The systems built by Indigenous-Led Funds center and facilitate Indigenous community control.



¹⁶ Mali Ole Kaunga, Kipok Fund, 2024 (GSI)

¹⁷ Monica Nuvamsa, Hopi Foundation, 2024 (GSI)

Systems Adapted in Indigenous Philanthropy

There are three arenas that Indigenous-Led Funds have significantly adapted to manage grantmaking to Indigenous communities. These systems are not levers of authority over Indigenous community, they facilitate access and manage flow of philanthropic capital and communication with Indigenous communities. The systems built by Indigenous-Led Funds center and facilitate Indigenous community control.

GRANTMAKING PROCESS OF Indigenous-Led Funds

Access	Grant applications gather exactly what's necessary. Completed by community, ally or ILF through capacity of community. (In person, third person, computer, phone)
Management	Collaboratively defined with community accountability for oversight and management of the project, effort and capital
Reporting	System and content of communication determined by what's appropriate to convey how funds were used, what happened and what was learned from what took place.

SUPPORTIVE SYSTEMS OPERATED BY Indigenous-Led Funds

Governance of ILF	Community diversity dictates the specific form of governance of each ILF. The profile of governing leadership determined by the functional role or task of leadership modeling of the values and ethic of the Indigenous community. Factors considered in defining appropriate governing leadership include: representation and deep knowledge of Indigenous communities served network and connections to the Indigenous communities served capacity to render knowledge, relationships and capacities called for to govern Indigenous Led Fund consistent with the purposes and practices of the ILF
Administration	Providing services that add value to Indigenous community efforts: communications support, technology access, legal services support, advocacy, etc.
Strategic Theories of Change	Translating self-determined Indigenous community priorities into strategic theories of change to guide and support consistent ILF accountability to those priorities over time.

Procedural Reform

Indigenous-Led Funds actively dismantle obstacles that limit or inhibit Indigenous community access to philanthropic capital around the globe

Open doors, available resources...none of that means anything if Indigenous Peoples can't reach for or claim what may be available. Indigenous-Led Funds actively dismantle obstacles that limit or inhibit Indigenous community access to philanthropic capital around the globe.

Having a clear sense of the reality of Indigenous communities and what is appropriate and navigable by the communities sets the baseline for aligning processes and systems with Indigenous community capacity.

"We're redesigning our grantmaking. After 20 years we've realized that this mainstream model of judging people and then declining others is just not working to build the relationships and trust we need with our communities,"¹⁸

One-size-fits all procedures are just inappropriate and ineffective in delivering capital to Indigenous communities and delays learning how that capital makes a difference. Indigenous-Led Funds are committed to avoiding the missteps that come with complicating access.

"We already have an idea of how to proceed without over-bureaucratizing, because it is not our reality -- a lot of bureaucracy. Without running away from the current legislation, both in Brazil and many times international laws, we [do] end up...bringing realities from the territories to our [own] documents,"¹⁹ says Claudia Soares of Podaali Fund.

"Our main interest is the free and determined development of Indigenous Peoples. What does that mean? Our financing will always be more holistic than sectoral. Our financing has

to be more inclusive and more flexible,"²⁰ says Myrna Cunningham of the Pawanka Fund.

One-size-fits all procedures are just inappropriate and ineffective in delivering capital to Indigenous communities, and learning how that capital makes a difference

Inflexibility of reporting procedures provided an example: where grants of \$5k or \$10k have the same paperwork requirements as grants of \$100k. In such instances, the tool is most important and becomes another weapon of power and control in what is exclusively a transaction, not a relationship.

Inflexible and overly complex evaluation processes also present obstacles that hinder community access. Indigenous communities may not have the capacity to write and submit reports online, but they do have the ability to recite their own story or experience of what happened and tell what they learned from it.

Indigenous-Led Funds provide a variety of supports to facilitate Indigenous community's ability to participate and contribute in the evaluation process; they model trust, relationship, responsibility, respect and reciprocity.

No system or tool is above review; there is a consistent query of: Does it work or not? How well does it help move capital into the hands of Indigenous communities? Indigenous communities themselves inform that review.

Indigenous-Led Funds have also developed powerful muscle in both the language and the practice of evaluation and rely on that body of knowledge to inform how they go about their own work in the Foundation sector. In these instances, the Indigenous communities themselves are not required to mirror or embody the broad

¹⁸ Susan Balbas, Na'ah Illahee Fund, 2024 (GSI)

¹⁹ Claudia Soares, Podaali Fundo Indigenas Da Amazonia Brasileira, 2024 (GSI)

²⁰ Myrna Cunningham, Pawanka Fund, 2024 (GSI)

technical knowledge, rather, the Indigenous Led Fund operates evaluation tools to monitor the constellation of grants, programming and resources to Indigenous communities.

Tapuwae Roa of New Zealand is one Indigenous Led Fund that uses evaluation to continuously adjust their approaches. Te Puoho Katene shares what they look for as they deploy their evaluation tools: ***“What are the critical success factors we’ve identified for those long term strategies that we need to see in order to tell us we’re going in the right direction? They form the criteria by which we make decisions, by which we prioritize the things that we fund. That’s where we can build more around our reporting and evaluation work.”***²¹

Tapuwae Roa is among Indigenous-Led Funds that have developed long range Theory of Change or strategic plans to guide their work to serve self-determined priorities of the Indigenous communities they’re in relationship with. Over generations, these plans consider the social, environmental, cultural and political wellbeing of their peoples. And, evaluation takes a substantially longer view to truly understand how fast or directly their investment in the work of their communities is taking them to their desired future. No system or tool is above review; there is a consistent query of: Does it work or not? How well does it help move capital into the hands of Indigenous communities? Indigenous communities themselves inform that review.

Whether the steps are small and consistent or long and strong, Indigenous-Led Funds are making strides supporting the work of the Indigenous communities by continuously monitoring the function of systems they rely on to move capital into community.

This approach to systems adaptation ensures that Indigenous-Led Funds stay current with the capacities and realities of the Indigenous communities they partner with.

Navigating Legal Hurdles to Receive Capital

When Indigenous communities speak a completely different language than the commercial centers where capital systems operate, and there is no bridge or accommodation made for the language itself, Indigenous communities are completely excluded from access to funding on their own.

Banking systems that move and store capital create their own set of circumstances that Indigenous-Led Funds navigate with Indigenous communities who need capital.

Indigenous organizations must meet various legal and regulatory requirements to participate in the capital ecosystem; requirements of being a “legal” entity, registered as a “business” with the government, registered in and compliant with regulatory and taxing entities, capable of completing financial and other reports, as well as bank accounts and means to accept and distribute resources.

These systems represent “THE” baseline that Indigenous communities must meet in order to be eligible to even ask to be considered for a grant from private mainstream philanthropy, starting with language as the first point of entry to access. When Indigenous communities speak a completely different language than the commercial centers where capital systems operate and there is no bridge or accommodation made for the language itself, Indigenous communities are completely excluded from access to funding on their own. Jenifer Lasimbang of Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund (IPAS) gives this glimpse into scope of responsibility they take on to create Indigenous community access where it doesn’t exist otherwise: ***“There are so many legal registrations, setting up bank accounts, looking for staff to be part of the Secretariat. And we have to service the whole of Asia - like 13 countries...huge areas, as well as [all of their respective country] requirements.”***²²

21 Te Puoho Katene, Tapuwae Roa, 2024 (GSI)

22 Jenifer Lasimbang, Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund, 2024, (GSI)

Many Indigenous-Led Funds are working to develop operations capacity that includes financial management alongside other helpful assistance that meaningfully supports the work of Indigenous communities

The ability to activate regionally focused global philanthropy requires substantial financial capacity, which takes some time to develop. Enter fiscal management partners who have come alongside Indigenous-Led Funds to support their launch.

Jenifer Lasminbang of IPAS recalls: *“When we started, Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN) took up the role of fiscal sponsor to support [us].”*²³

It can be a huge undertaking to launch a global Indigenous led philanthropic fund, and entities like IPAS have embraced the assistance from partners who share their interests to bring capital resources to isolated Indigenous communities. Many Indigenous-Led Funds are working to develop operations capacity that includes financial management alongside other helpful assistance that meaningfully supports the work of Indigenous communities.

Indigenous-Led Funds develop and make available services like technical legal assistance to help communities navigate the more complex public and banking systems surrounding them, with the goal being to facilitate Indigenous communities having direct access to philanthropic capital.

Within the network of Indigenous-Led Funds, there are distinct ways Funds are achieving scale.

Future Planning and Growth

Clarity on what the self-determined future looks like helps Indigenous communities and Indigenous-Led Funds focus leadership and decision-making effectively.

In addition to guiding the systems and practices of engagement, leadership is tasked with considering growth, and everything that comes with it, like scale.

Indigenous-Led Funds are at different points on their own journey of determining how, where and when they need to invest in building out the relationships that expand support for the work of Indigenous communities. And, determining whether they're ready to receive and manage the volume of capital that could result from those efforts.

Contemplating scale has implications on governance, operations and geographic scope that are considered in determining what an appropriate growth model looks like. There is no one answer; within the network of Indigenous-Led Funds, there are distinct ways Funds are achieving scale.

Chris Googoo, Executive Director and CEO, working with one Indigenous Board, presides over all entities under the Ulnooweg Development Group maintaining alignment among missions and functional purpose to serve their Indigenous communities. Structurally, they have found it necessary to create multiple vehicles to address the different dimensions of work that are priorities to achieve the desired self-determined future their communities defined nearly forty years ago. The Ulnooweg Development Groups includes an economic development corporation, a philanthropic Indigenous Led Fund and an educational non profit that is expanding to provide capital access through personal financing.

Chris Googoo speaks to the ways in which each of the enterprises model and operate from the Indigenous values and practices in both operations and management. The

²³ Jenifer Lasimbang, Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund, 2024, (GSI)

operations and management approach are intended to caretake the Indigenous-informed systems that are in place, as well the people who make the magic happen across all of their entities.

Ulnooweg services maintain relationship, reciprocity, respect, responsibility and capacity for redistribution among the 100+ people who make up their entire team by minimizing layers in management. Operating from the same values-based system and nearly flat leadership structure across their web of organizations (they have 2 levels of managers) ensures that all of the entities are consistent, fair, balanced and inter-connected across the entire system.

IPAS's body of associations function like a neuron center, where information and resources flow throughout the system, across the web of people and relationships that ensure the integrity, reliability and accountability of the overall system.

The Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity (IPAS) Fund has organized a web of individuals, organizations and entities that span Asia, an area that includes the largest percentage of Indigenous Peoples on earth.

IPAS's body of associations function like a neuron center, where information and resources flow throughout the system, across the web of people and relationships that ensure the integrity, reliability and accountability of the overall system.

Beyond planning for the day-to-day operations, and the reliable presence of the organizations created to serve their peoples, Indigenous-Led Funds must consider the future leadership needs of their work and communities as well.

Despite the size of the region and scale of the work, (IPAS connects over 6M Indigenous Peoples and their intersectional groups to direct capital to support local Indigenous work) the Indigenous values by which the

entire system operates maintains coherence, accountability and impact because they are connected by the 5 Rs, not bureaucracy. Beyond planning for the day-to-day operations, and the reliable presence of the organizations created to serve their peoples, Indigenous-Led Funds must consider the future leadership needs of their work and communities as well.

The Hopi Foundation has a value for investing attention and resources to succession planning. And, taking the time to prepare the path for leadership transition that ensures the new leader's confidence and readiness to continue the work in a way that maintains continuity in relationships across the work of the organization.

At the Hopi Foundation, the process and journey to prepare the next generation of leadership is considered that way – that the next phase of work and life of the organization will continue under the care and stewardship of another caring leader. The process is purposeful and takes a year or more to complete with deep investment and connection between the outgoing leader and incoming leader and is deeply tied with the practice of the 5 Rs.

Barbara Poley, former Executive Director of the Hopi Foundation, stresses the significance of succession planning, and prioritizing the investment of time to have the current Director mentor and grow the successor to keep the leadership needed, from within your own community: ***“Look at succession planning based on where you live, what you need, giving [...] time to a new leader to gain the confidence that they need to be in that position.”***²⁴

Looking broadly across the existing capacity and the growing potential of one's own community is an important part of that readiness building and investment. Indigenous-Led Funds are at different stages of venturing into this work.

“Something we've been talking about for quite a while is can we have a youth advisory that is contributing and gaining experience and also... build pathways into this work?”²⁵ ponders

²⁴ Barbara Poley, Hopi Foundation, 2024 (GSI)

²⁵ Emily Cabrera, First Peoples Cultural Foundation, 2024 (GSI)

Emily Cabrera of British Columbia's First People's Cultural Foundation.

Tapuwae Roa has embarked on a similar path:
*"We've established a big focus on building future governors and directors for boards throughout New Zealand. We need better representation of Indigenous Maori on not just our boards, but on all boards."*²⁶

This intentional journey-making for Indigenous leadership emergence, growth and authority is occurring throughout the network of Indigenous-Led Funds.

This intentional journey-making for Indigenous leadership emergence, growth and authority is occurring throughout the network of Indigenous-Led Funds.

Following the Lead of Indigenous-Led Funds in Mainstream Philanthropy

Indigenous-Led Funds know what parts of the philanthropic process are necessary, functional and relevant to each Indigenous community's situation and use that knowledge to build an Indigenous philanthropy ecosystem that nurtures everyone in it. This experience has surfaced areas where mainstream private philanthropy can adapt its own ecosystem to facilitate delivery of meaningful philanthropic capital to Indigenous communities.

- First, recognize that trust, accountability, relationship, reciprocity and redistribution are hardwired into the practices of Indigenous-Led Funds
- Partner with Indigenous Led Fund as allies and thought leaders to help adapt private philanthropic systems
- Make explicit commitments of meaningful volumes of capital (NOT .2%) to Indigenous community determined work and the environments Indigenous communities are in
- Commit to ensure that private philanthropy delivers resources into the hands of Indigenous communities (Advocate, invest, advocate more)
- Invest in Indigenous-Led Funds as recognized bridges into Indigenous communities
- Make room for Indigenous people to tell their own stories – center the opportunity on the truths and experiences of Indigenous Peoples, rather than attaching them to an "other" effort, focus or priority as a 'pop of color'
- Advocate for the rights of Indigenous Peoples to be self-determined
- Educate the people, context, leadership and management of private philanthropy on the realities, experiences and efforts of Indigenous people ... and if that information is not known,
- GO to Indigenous communities to learn, experience and grow the context, lens and factual knowledge base from which your own philanthropy derives

Indigenous-Led Funds are organized and committed to creating equitable and inclusive philanthropy across the globe by collaborating to benefit generations of Indigenous communities.

²⁶ Te Puoho Katene, Tapuwae Roa, 2024 (GSI)





Mechanisms Supporting Practice

Indigenous-Led Funds (ILFs) are very diverse, from their longevity and maturity as an organization, their size, their capacities, where resources come from, how they're structured and operate, how they govern and make decisions.

The ILFs with distinct forms of governance and operations are highlighted to demonstrate the spectrum of options Indigenous-Led Funds have formed.

The IFIP Governance Scan project interviewed ILFs from around the world. As Non-profit Organizations, they all have a governance body, typically a staff (although often it may be one or a small handful of personnel) and many volunteers who carry out the work. The distinct mechanisms that define ways ILFs who participated in the Governance scan are organized and operate from are listed in the classifications that follow.

This is a representative but not exhaustive list. Not every ILF interviewed is listed here. The ILFs with distinct forms of governance and operations are highlighted to demonstrate the spectrum of options Indigenous-Led Funds have formed. These entities establish funding and operational mechanisms that facilitate ILF efforts to secure, manage, deliver capital, programming, services in some cases – and mission in all cases. The descriptions include a synopsis of the features distinct to the model, to aid emerging and existing Indigenous-Led Funds to explore options already in use within the Indigenous network.

Non-Profit Entities

Within the broad category of non-profit Indigenous Led Fund organizations, there are notable distinctions among them that shape how they are governed and carry out their missions. The Seventh Generation Fund is the first Indigenous Led fund to enter the field of philanthropy in 1977, fiscally sponsored by another entity until formally incorporating as its own entity in 1984. Emerging from the ripples of power movements taking place around civil

rights, there was no model for Indigenous led philanthropy to follow. Seventh Generation Fund is led by Indigenous board members who bring the global Indigenous lens to its leadership. Leadership has multi-language and cultural fluency across the Board, which works from a consensus decision-making process. Tia Oros Peters describes their process like this: *"With our style, anyone can ask anything, anyone can contribute. And then the Board will decide by consensus, how they want to proceed... sometimes it's really fast. And sometimes, it takes a minute, you know, and people are committed to taking the time to understand each other and get on the same page, rather than overriding each other, or getting some kind of super majority or something that's quieting somebody. That doesn't happen, it just doesn't happen"*²⁷

Since its inception, Seventh Generation Fund has exclusively supported Indigenous work, of all kinds.

Pawanka's experience reinforces the commitment to continue delivering support that strengthens local and community governance that is inclusive and respectful of Indigenous Pueblos' traditional values for relationship and collective decision-making.

Pawanka Fund is a 10-year-old organization founded to support and address needs identified in the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples from the UN World Conference of Indigenous Peoples. A major objective of the fund is to channel resources directly to Indigenous organizations and model community-focused direct funding to conventional philanthropy and demonstrate how to actively engage in this type of philanthropy in responsible and impactful ways.

Pawanka's Guiding Committee represents seven sociocultural regions. The Board comes from Indigenous networks who know the Indigenous organizations and processes in their respective regions. Pawanka's Guiding Committee is actively involved in identifying

27 Tia Oros Peters, Seventh Generation Fund, 2024 (GSI)

and supporting the organizations that are invited to receive grants.

Pawanka's learnings over the years are that successful and impactful implementation of local work is grounded in community governance. Pawanka's experience reinforces the commitment to continue delivering support that strengthens local and community governance that is inclusive and respectful of Indigenous Pueblos' traditional values for relationship and collective decision-making. In the management of grant funding, Pawanka facilitates community access to experience, dialogue and supports that help communities become familiar with the practices of communication and accountability tied with capital coming into Indigenous communities.

First Peoples Cultural Foundation was established to broaden access to non-governmental funding and operates in conjunction with First Peoples Cultural Council, an Indigenous-led crown corporation created in the province of British Columbia, Canada. The Foundation opens the door to philanthropic funding which the Council is not eligible to pursue or receive.

The Hopi Foundation is a 40-year-old organization founded by local Hopi people to serve the needs of Hopi outside of government funding. They serve a broad spectrum of needs with a special emphasis on traditional agriculture, leadership development, substance abuse prevention as well as operating KUYI, a public radio station that serves the remote region. The Foundation runs programs and redistributes grants derived from other funders as well as funds from endowments they have been managing and growing for decades.

The Hopi Foundation governance and operations structure is three-tiered with membership, board and staff. The board and staff operate conventionally, but there is an additional tier of "membership". Members are cultural and community leaders whose primary purpose and power is to select and appoint the governing board. The founders envisioned this structure as an additional protection to

ensure that decision-making stays in alignment with the intended vision and mission of the organization.

Saami Cultural Fund is led by representatives nominated by the Saami Council, which is a membership entity whose members are mostly Saami organizations operating with a small number of staff. 100% of representatives appointed by the Council to the Saami Cultural Fund are Saami; they are responsible for making decisions and distributing funds, consistent with the values and priorities of the Saami Council. The Saami Council and therefore the Saami Cultural Fund operate from consensus. To ensure representation from all of the Council members, leadership on the Saami Cultural Fund rotates leadership every two years to ensure that each region has the opportunity to be represented in the granting body leadership. The Saami Council works internationally in arenas that influence National or State processes (like biodiversity), to introduce Saami priorities into those discussions. On a local level, funding is project based with emphasis on Saami arts and culture with decisions being made by the Saami Cultural Fund.

Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity (IPAS) Fund started in 2022 and focuses its attention to serve one of the largest marginalized Indigenous populations worldwide – 300M Indigenous people distributed across the whole continent of Asia in 13 countries are among groups that receive the least amount funding. There are many factors that block these significant numbers of Indigenous community populations from pursuing or receiving philanthropic capital. IPAS works directly with Indigenous communities to address the hurdles. AMAN (Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara) had taken up the role of fiscal sponsor before IPAS become independent. Members of the IPAS board were selected through the General Assembly by subregion and geographical representation. Women have their own representative, as do youth and persons with disabilities. The governance body was established by Indigenous Peoples in a

very democratic, participatory, and inclusive manner.

In addition to the IPAS board is the development of national steering committees. Each country's steering committee consists of Indigenous experts-- people who have already been in the movement for many years.

Agreements were made on the vision, mission, goals, objectives of IPAS that set the parameters of the work of the governing body or boards. The collective body also developed policies to guide the work across the web of networks and relationships; these include policies and guidelines on allocation of funds.

Since its inception, the board has developed the five-year strategic plan, the budget, and started approaching donors. And it's also the governing body that's now setting up the secretariat.

There are two governing bodies involved. At the regional level is the IPAS board, and then at the country level are the national steering committees. Each country's steering committee consists of Indigenous experts-- people who have already been in the movement for many years. They are the decision makers of grants that flow across the national level down to the grassroots level. The country's steering committee also provides capacity building, monitoring and supervision of grants going down the line.

Federation of Indigenous Organizations

Fundo Rio Negro falls under the umbrella of FOIRN, the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Rio Negro, a collective representation federation organized by the General Assembly of Brazil. It was established to defend the rights of Indigenous people of NW Amazon. The recognized rights that are part of the defense and protection efforts include territory rights, environment,

food security, culture, language, Indigenous education, health and rights to participate.

Affiliate of Indigenous Entity

Some organizations are affiliated with an entity that assists and supports their development as an emerging fund. This shows up in different configurations like receiving fiscal sponsorship or being hosted by a larger entity that has greater capacity. In this role of being a smaller part of a larger entity, Indigenous-Led Funds are able to attend directly to local or regional work with Indigenous communities, while being formally recognized as an offshoot, ally or affiliated member of the larger organization.

Ereto represents an important mechanism for the organizations to have protected capital and resources, particularly in cases where individuals who are fighting for Indigenous Peoples' rights are dispossessed and forced to go into exile, even if they or their organizations' bank accounts are frozen.

Ereto Solidarity Fund, hosted by Impact Kenya, is a consortium of organizations working for Indigenous Peoples. The collaborative organizations came together to formally establish Ereto Solidarity Fund specifically to leverage resources, and overcome accessibility and regulatory hurdles that limit access to philanthropic capital. Ereto represents an important mechanism for the organizations to have protected capital and resources, particularly in cases where individuals who are fighting for Indigenous Peoples' rights are dispossessed and forced to go into exile, even if they or their organizations' bank accounts are frozen.

The AYNi Indigenous Women's Fund is under the International Indigenous Women's Forum. "AYNI" is a Quechua/Kichua word meaning reciprocity, equality and justice in the indigenous worldview.

This fund mobilizes and exchanges human, financial and material resources to support

Indigenous Women's organizations globally in strengthening their capacities and in the implementation of economic, environmental and social development projects.

Podaali Indigenous Fund of the Brazilian Amazon, a Fund managed and led entirely by Indigenous people from the Brazilian Amazon, is the realization of the dream of the Indigenous Movement, led by COIAB (Coordenação das Organizações Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira). The fund was established to mobilize resources to support the Indigenous Movement across 9 states of the Amazon to impact self-determination, culture, ways of life, sustainability, autonomous management of territories and natural resources.

Podaali is a technical financial mechanism. The governing body is an 11-person, 100% Indigenous deliberative council made up of one representative of each of the nine states in the Brazilian Amazon, plus one representative each of the organizations COIAB and the Women's Organization of the Amazon. There is an executive board comprised of four directors. Members of the full board and executive board are Indigenous professionals who understand the technical part of management, administration, accounting and economy.

Fundo Rio Negro falls under the umbrella of FOIRN, the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Rio Negro, a collective representation federation organized by the General Assembly of Brazil. It was established to defend the rights of Indigenous people of NW Amazon. The recognized rights that are part of the defense and protection efforts include territory rights, environment, food security, culture, language, Indigenous education, health and rights to participate.

Tapuwea Roa is an affiliate entity of Te Kahui o Te Ohu Kai Moana, established through the Maori Fisheries Deed Settlement of 1992. Tapuwea Roa operates as a Trust established in 2004 through legislation tied with the Fisheries Act. Tapuwea Roa manages their funds on behalf of all Māori

to sustain Māori identity, through funding and investing in leadership development, education, training, and entrepreneurship for Indigenous people throughout the country. The Tribes own the Trust; all directors are Indigenous and representative of Indigenous people directly from the community. Because they are established in legislation, there are many applicable pieces of law that define the roles, function and authorities as governors and directors. Now, after 20 years, having mastered the parameters of this entity, leadership is stepping back to objectively analyze the Western systems they have been operating within, and working to Indigenize their governance with the originating self-determined mandate as their focus and Māori values in their heart.

Affiliate of Non-Indigenous Entity

The Indigenous leaders of FAPY have a deep understanding of the needs and knowledge base of Indigenous Peoples throughout the region.

Fundo Agroecologico Peninsula de Yucatan (FAPY) was born in 2020. It is an offshoot of the Global Agroecological fund, partnering to facilitate that organization's efforts to decentralize operations to more consistently and effectively respond to regional territorial needs. The Indigenous Peoples' networks enabled the connections that identified community members who shared the understanding of how these resources could serve the region, and had the capacity to build out the organization. The Indigenous leaders of *FAPY* have a deep understanding of the needs and knowledge base of Indigenous Peoples throughout the region. And, understanding that the food systems of the Yucatan continue to be strongly related to ancient Mayan knowledge, tradition and culture, it made sense that Indigenous leadership for this fund would be an important mechanism to connect global resources to Indigenous practice, communities and be Indigenous led.

Governance for the *Yucatan agroecological fund* consists of the parent agroecology fund. The coordinating team of the regional fund is an advisory board made up of five people from the peninsula and the council, which is made up of Indigenous representatives of different regions and areas of the peninsula. Management is currently dependent on others as the local fund grows capacity.

Trust Fund and Endowments

Some ILFs have assets from which derived in come is used for the benefit of Indigenous people. ILFs with endowments have been mentioned in other sections of this document. The primary distinction between a trust and an endowment is ownership. Assets held in Trust are owned by the entity. Assets in an endowment are typically allocated for a specific purpose and are not really owned by the entity. These funds may be managed by the ILF, but the endowed assets are actually held in the public trust.

There are 4 Indigenous Noongar people who make up the council that makes decisions over grants derived from Trust income.

Noongar Charitable Trust is focused on holding funds and delivering support for projects for Noongar people. The seed funds for the Trust came from the sale of a property held by the with the intent that revenues derived from the sale would be invested as a Trust to benefit the Noongar Indigenous community in the areas of culture, health, housing and youth. There are 4 Indigenous Noongar people who make up the council that makes decisions over grants derived from Trust income. The Trust itself is managed by a non-Indigenous trustee who is not part of the decision-making process about spending.



List of Participating ILFs by Mechanism

All of the ILFs have the shared feature of delivering resources directly into the hands of Indigenous Peoples working on self-determined priorities. Each Indigenous Led Fund has a unique origin story, and, has a mechanism by which it receives and redistributes funds. All of the ILFs have the shared feature of delivering resources directly into the hands of Indigenous Peoples working on self-determined priorities. The following list indicates the mechanisms of each organization.

Organisation Type	Organisation Name
Non-Profit Entities	Colorado Plateau
	First Nations Futures
	Koondee Woonga-gat Tooroong (KWT) Fund
	Seventh Generation Fund
	Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund (IPAS)
	Ulnooweg Community Foundation
	Cultural Survival
	Hopi Foundation
	Kipok Fund
	Na'ah Illahee Fund
	Saami Council
	Spinifex Foundation
	First Peoples Cultural Foundation
Affiliate of Non-Indigenous Entity	Fondo Agroecologico Peninsula De Yucatan (FAPY)
	The Inuit Nunaat Fund
Affiliate of Indigenous Entity	Ereto Fund
	AYNI Indigenous Women's Fund
	NAAPU Indigenous Women's Fund
	Podaali Fund
	Tapuwea Roa
Trust	Noongar Charitable Trust
Federation of Indigenous Organizations	Fundo Rio Negro





Trust Matters

Trust within a group has the power to unlock the extraordinary.

“Trust” is a beacon of Indigenous Led Philanthropy. Trust is deeply rooted in one’s own capacity to be fully present, authentic, and accountable in relationship. Contrast this to doubt and uncertainty. Trust in relationships is significant between individuals and is powerful when it exists within a group. Trust within a group has the power to unlock the extraordinary.

Throughout time, Indigenous cultures have operated from deep trust: in higher spiritual knowledge, sacred teachers, visions, prophesy and lessons. These instruct how to conduct oneself, to live and function appropriately in all the environments and settings where Indigenous Peoples are present in the world.

“All of us are [Indigenous] tribal people. And the old [Indigenous] tribal values that are embedded within our culture, we live these values. It’s not like we are learning them. We live them all through our life.”²⁸

The continued presence, viability and potency of Indigenous community is nurtured by the people’s individual and collective ability to act upon and trust their ways, themselves and each other. These Indigenous ways of knowledge have guided life for Indigenous people for many centuries and are real, reliable and legitimate practices. It matters to be loyal, to operate from and trust Indigenous knowledge and practices as the bedrock from which Indigenous communities operate in the contemporary world.

Trust In Philanthropy

Consistently throughout the interviews, leadership of Indigenous-Led Funds discussed the primacy of operating from trust to guide internal processes of their organizations and to guide external action and engagement with Indigenous communities because it puts

Indigenous people in the position to lead the work: ***“Indigenous Led Funding works better when Indigenous people have ownership because it addresses the real problems of the people, what people [themselves] perceive as the problem, and not what a third party perceives as a problem. Indigenous Led Funding provide[s] compatible, realistic solutions because the Indigenous themselves still own [their] solutions.”***²⁹

Ultimately, “trust-based philanthropy” means letting go of impractical and displaced expectations of being able to exercise control over time, progress and prescribed outcomes.

Indigenous-Led Funds engage culture, practice and community leadership to drive and inform approaches to effectively build bridges that link philanthropic capital to Indigenous community efforts. If there are obstacles that prevent access, Indigenous-Led Funds rely on community knowledge and practices to find ways to overcome or address those obstacles.

Connecting Indigenous people directly to the oversight and management processes of capital is critical to fostering community trust in the ILF as they come alongside communities investing in and doing their own work.

Ultimately, “trust-based philanthropy” means letting go of impractical and displaced expectations of being able to exercise control over time, progress and prescribed outcomes. Setting aside control does not mean abandoning accountability. In a reciprocal relationship, every partner is accountable to contribute their role or share of responsibility for the integrity of the relationship. Indigenous people hold deep accountability to relatedness and reciprocity.

Rona Glynn McDonald of First Nations Futures observes: ***“When there’s a strong relationship between the governance, the decision-making and the work, the stronger the decision-making can be. I’m learning that... separation***

²⁸ Mali Ole Kaunga, Kipok Fund, 2024 (GSI)

²⁹ Anna Ndiko, Ereto East Africa Fund, 2024, (GSI)

*[between these] doesn't work as effectively as when the people are really intertwined in the work."*³⁰

The relationships and dialogue between ILFs and Indigenous communities open important pathways for resourcing Indigenous work that may not otherwise exist when the resources flow far beyond the capacity of the community to secure them. For example, in many remote Indigenous communities, banking options don't exist and the community itself cannot comply with access, management or reporting requirements of global funds.

Because Indigenous-Led Funds are significantly connected to and part of the Indigenous communities they serve, they know what mechanisms can be activated to establish practical connections between Indigenous communities and mainstream philanthropy. This role requires significant trust among all parties because it requires much more than superficial commitment to be effective.

Indigenous-Led Funds practice a new approach to distribute capital among Indigenous communities that emphasizes consideration of the communities themselves, first. Indigenous-Led Funds work diligently to connect and communicate with Indigenous communities to create familiarity and readiness to participate in the philanthropic ecosystem, trust the system they become part of and carry out their own work with confidence, knowing their culture, knowledge and practices are valued and respected.

Jenifer Lasimbang, Executive Director of IPAS, the Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund, says: *"Knowing that the Indigenous people of Asia definitely want self-determination... the way we do development is giving the empowerment, the resources...to the communities for them to determine what kind of work they want to do on the ground, just giving them the chance to lead in their own communities, or in their own country in terms of contribution - [makes] a positive contribution and recognition of our... respect for the rights of Indigenous people."*³¹

³⁰ Rona Glynn McDonald, First Nations Futures, 2024 (GSI)

³¹ Jenifer Lasimbang, Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund, 2024 (GSI)

As Indigenous-Led Funds activate supports for Indigenous led efforts across their regions among Indigenous communities, building trust into the function of leadership ensures that the work being done is relevant to the self-determined priorities of the community itself and highly likely to yield positive results. Indigenous-Led Funds do not create work in Indigenous communities; they come alongside and partner with communities to encourage the work already being done and bolster the efforts of those doing the work by delivering capital where and when it is useful.

Trust in Leadership Across the Web of Indigenous Community

Who leads? Who is qualified to lead? Who is trusted to lead? During the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples 2025 global convening, leaders of Indigenous-Led Funds reflected on the topic of trust and leadership, noting the disruptive effects of singling out and raising up one person as leader: *"Individualism is colonialism"*³²; *"there is a way in Indigenous community where trust is broken by only acknowledging and focusing on single leaders rather than the collective. Things like singling out individuals for awards can place a target on those people. Recognizing the entire community's work addresses this,"*³³

In the work of Indigenous-Led Funds with Indigenous communities, the summoning for Indigenous people to lead, and to do so with purpose, integrity and with trust includes everyone from the governance table to the pasture. Distributed leadership across the web of community doing the work and within the management of the Indigenous philanthropic ecosystem makes practical sense and has nothing to do with titles or education and everything to do with legitimate Indigenous knowledge and function.

Says Veronica Aguilar of the Indigenous community work of Cultural Survival: *"I've realized that it's very important to have collective decision-making and even collective leadership of the projects. It can be for something as basic as monitoring. If the*

³² Lisa Fruichantie, Na'ah Illahee Fund, 2025 IFIP Global Conference, Nairobi Kenya

³³ Naomi Lanoi, Global Greengrants Fund, 2025 IFIP Global Conference, Nairobi Kenya

*leader loses email, gets sick or something... he can't answer us. If there is no other person in leadership, we lose contact with that effort and opportunities and collaboration are lost on both sides."*³⁴

Trust in working with community is necessary for leadership of ILFs to operate from: *"As an Indigenous funder for my own community, I think about the breadth of the accountability that I carry because it's serving people I know and meet at the grocery store, at the post office on a daily basis...that carries another level of accountability."*³⁵

*"One of the most important driving forces [of how we work] is recognizing our own responsibility. As Indigenous Peoples we wake up every day...and we know whatever we do will have some impact somewhere and we have a responsibility to others and to ourselves."*³⁶

That feeling of responsibility has compelled many Indigenous-Led Funds to explore ways to activate the principles and values of trust in every aspect of the work.

Operationalizing Trust

To advance the well-being of Indigenous Peoples in their territories, Indigenous-Led Funds trust that the aspirations, intentions and capability of Indigenous people themselves are legitimate, appropriate and worthy of philanthropic capital investment.

Trusting in the community's knowledge base, its capacity and awareness of its own needs allows Indigenous-Led Funds to be confident and decisive in the work they're doing with Indigenous communities.

Barbara Poley, retired former Executive Director of the Hopi Foundation says: *"One of the things I've learned in my years of working, not only at the Foundation and in other places is, if you believe in the abilities of people, they tend to do well."*³⁷

Living close to the environment, working hard daily to live, Indigenous people recognize

when things don't make sense, or waste their time or resources. Indigenous-Led Funds are sensitive to the fact that, when trust is present in their relationship with community, it's not appropriate to manufacture senseless paperwork or requirements when there is so much deep and meaningful work to be done.

Demonstrating flexibility and being responsive to the community's own sense of what it needs is an important way Indigenous-Led Funds model trust.

Trusting in the community's knowledge base, its capacity and awareness of its own needs allows Indigenous-Led Funds to be confident and decisive in the work they're doing with Indigenous communities. And reducing or shifting reporting requirements is an active exercise of trust that Indigenous communities are reliable and fulfilling their intentions.

*"Because we're not seeing as much red tape and censorship as we did 50 years ago, I think that's leading to a stronger resurgence of Indigenous-led governance models and different ways of doing things that are based around what is informed by place and what is informed by local community and values, which is really exciting."*³⁸ says Rona Glynn McDonald of First Nations Futures.

The Agroecological Fund's experience reinforces this thought: *"Community based organizations know how to deal with the challenges or problems; how to have a council at the local community level so that they can make recommendations on how they would like it to operate, advise, decision-make, etc."*³⁹

Demonstrating flexibility and being responsive to the community's own sense of what it needs is an important way Indigenous-Led Funds model trust: does the community need capital for general support or project funds? Do circumstances call for an extension or change of plans from the original expectation?

³⁴ Veronica Aguilar, Cultural Survival, 2024 (GSI)

³⁵ Monica Nuvamsa, Hopi Foundation, 2024 (GSI)

³⁶ Dalee Sambo Dorough, Inuit Nunangat Fund, 2024 (GSI)

³⁷ Barbara Poley, Hopi Foundation, 2024 (GSI)

³⁸ First Nations Futures, Rona Glynn McDonald, 2024 (GSI)

³⁹ Dulce Magaña, Agroecological Fund for the Yucatan Peninsula, 2024 (GSI)

Connection, inclusiveness and relationship building are the ways Indigenous-Led Funds encourage systems, programs and supportive efforts that, from the beginning, are set up with the realities of the communities in mind in the first place, not as an afterthought and those efforts are working.

Indigenous-Led Funds listen to their communities and are creating access to philanthropic capital after being chronically denied by other funders.

“Trust-based philanthropy - we’ve developed that well in the past four years, where we’re not looking for a 3-page report from a community or a charity on what ‘key performance indicators’ they’ve met, or something like that, right? This really goes back to the testimonials and whatever stories they want to share about their impact,” ⁴⁰ says Chris Googoo at the Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation in Nova Scotia, Canada.

Persistent engagement and communication with Indigenous communities to ensure communities clearly understand the resource and process to access capital is important because it demonstrates that Indigenous-Led Funds listen to their communities and are creating access to philanthropic capital after being chronically denied by other funders. The community must be actively connected to the process through ongoing communication in order to trust that those funding processes and relationships with Indigenous Led Funders truly do make funds available directly to Indigenous communities.

NAAPU Indigenous Women’s Fund takes a different approach to getting capital into the hands of their Indigenous communities; they rely on the gold standard of personal referral through the web of trusted relationships tied to their communities. *“We don’t do open applications that people can apply for. No, we do the invite from either women movements, women groups, or, if someone understands a group which is doing very well, they refer them to us. And, sometimes also, the committee*

*can also identify a group from the village. And, the community and the women can also verify who is out there.”*⁴¹

Knowing what to do and having the means to formalize trust building processes can be a challenge, but when the resources are there, no time is wasted in taking action, as Mali Ole Kaunga of the Kipok Fund describes: *“When we come across flexible funding from some of the very sensitive organizations that respect Indigenous people...this is when we were able to tailor our work very quickly, because they respect you, they give you resources, and, they give you the space to navigate. And this does not restrict you to a pipe, where you have to do things not as you intend.”* ⁴²

Managing Perceived “Risk”

Trust builds participation, ownership and accountability, all of which are deeply necessary to meaningfully shift the ways Indigenous communities engage with money.

Some situations are logistical, as NAAPU Indigenous Women’s Fund points out: *“Sometimes, you can give seed capital for an institution which does not have a governing structure or a governing mechanism. Some of them are not registered. So, [the distribution of capital] comes with a lot of trust and belief that, yes, Indigenous people, they are going to do what they say they will do...they are going to know, trust the process and the support. So far, that has worked very positively.”* ⁴³

So, [the distribution of capital] comes with a lot of trust and belief that, yes, Indigenous people, they are going to do what they say they will do... they are going to know, trust.

⁴⁰ Chris Googoo, Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation, 2024 (GSI)

⁴¹ Jane Meriwas, NAAPU Indigenous Women Fund, 2024 (GSI)

⁴² Mali Ole Kaunga, Kipok Fund, 2024 (GSI)

⁴³ Jane Meriwas, NAAPU Indigenous Women Fund, 2024 (GSI)

the process and the support. So far, that has worked very positively.

Challenges Indigenous-Led Funds are working with community to overcome include: *“this [unbalanced] relationship between those who receive resources from [within] the communities and those who are in charge of managing the resources. Generally, this is a barrier, like a kind of inferiority complex between those who receive a resource and those who give a resource, right? Because we have to be accountable, we have to show what we have done and it’s necessary to work through this together.”*⁴⁴

Trusting the legitimacy and reliability of people providing leadership and engaging in the Indigenous network is highly efficient and promotes decisive action.

Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund shared their experience: *“When it comes to handling money, we need to trust. So, within [IPAS], because we know each other, we are already working with the same values and principles, and our target aspiration is working together in solidarity. We do away with the ‘due diligence’ and all that because, especially when it comes to emergency funds, we actually already know the situation. Because we know each other, we know who the ones in each country, that are convening or heading the country steering committee; and themembers are very well connected, not only at the national level, but even at the grassroots level.”*⁴⁵ Trusting the legitimacy and reliability of people providing leadership and engaging in the Indigenous network is highly efficient and promotes decisive action.

Building trust is a process-- nothing happens instantly or overnight. However, with steadfast commitment, trust-based relationships yield results: *“Initially, we had seen that [this trust approach is] more of a challenge and maybe most people are not going to comply. But for the last four years, it has become like a very*

*good example where most of the people come together and agree as a group and they later tell us what they need and can handle.”*⁴⁶

Instead of criminalizing mistakes, we turn them around as learning.

The benefits of this approach touch many topics that ripple across many Indigenous Peoples who have connections with each other in environments that consistently communicate and value trust.

Jane Meriwas of NAAPU describes: *“We’re also building trust and confidence around issues and things like investing. Every day, to us, is a learning because each and every year, we bring different expertise, different people, Indigenous people, women with knowledge. And we try to say [in those gatherings]: ‘last year, how did it work? How do you think that we are going to do it this year?’ So, each year, we want to bring them to learn what other things...inspire them, so they want to have those small capitals stay [among] us. It’s become an open process for everyone - building trust, respect and inviting them so that they can also learn.”*⁴⁷

Handling Missteps

So, what happens when there are missteps, money goes missing or things don’t play out the way it was envisioned?

*The Kipok Fund addresses it this way: “Instead of criminalizing mistakes, we turn them around as learning. We understand that organizations get scared; they’re scared to make mistakes. So, they end up sometimes lying about things, saying it’s working, but it’s not working.”*⁴⁸

Demonstrating trust, normalizing language and practice around trust fosters courage to take risks, promotes a sense of mutual reliability and tempers fear -- all of which create space for learning and growth.

44 Basilio Velazquez Chi, Agroecological Fund for the Yucatan Peninsula, 2024 (GSI)

45 Jenifer Lasimbang, Indigenous Peoples of Asia Fund, 2024 (GSI)

46 Jane Mariwas, NAAPU Indigenous Women Fund, 2024 (GSI)

47 Jane Mariwas, NAAPU Indigenous Women Fund, 2024 (GSI)

48 Mali Ole Kaunga, Kipok Fund, 2024 (GSI)

Standing alongside partners as they work through what's right for them is helpful and has lasting value. *"Everyone is different and they know best what steps they need to take and we just got to be there to nurture them and really stand beside them to do that."*⁴⁹, says Chris Googoo of Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation.

Demonstrating trust, normalizing language and practice around trust fosters courage to take risks, promotes a sense of mutual reliability and tempers fear – all of which create space for learning and growth.

Building on Trust to Serve the Future

Operating from trust is a commitment to operate with integrity and respect for the relationships that are built into connections with Indigenous communities. Mali Ole Kaunga of Kipok shares this: *"[I am] constantly reminding myself that I am 100% dependent on the respect of the community, despite me being one of them. I'm 100% dependent on that respect and honor. And money can't replace that."*⁵⁰

When principles of trust and reciprocity are embedded in practice, there are widespread benefits that ripple across the web of relationships and touch everyone, if not face-to-face then by culture and practice built into the processes.

Trust filled relationships, partnerships and efforts produce outcomes that have value beyond oneself, contribute to the wellbeing of others and reciprocate respect between people who invest their energies, spirit and effort to make good things happen in their communities, contexts and environments.

At the root of activating trust in relationships is reciprocity – of knowledge, leadership and beneficial outcomes: they trust us, we trust them.

"We have been put in these positions by people who trust us, and by people who expect us to

*do great things. I always say that mandate isn't owned, it's leased, and rent is due every day to the people who put you there,"*⁵¹ says Te Puoho Katene of Tapuwae Roa.

At the root of activating trust in relationships is reciprocity – of knowledge, leadership and beneficial outcomes: they trust us, we trust them.

When principles of trust and reciprocity are embedded in practice, there are widespread benefits that ripple across the web of relationships and touch everyone, if not face-to-face then by culture and practice built into the processes.

*"We have not been able to meet everyone [across our territory] and, in fact, we will not be able to do it 100%. But what has evolved? Today, there is more prominence [of Indigenous associations] involved in deciding the implementation of the territorial management plan."*⁵²

Indigenous self-determination, leadership, reciprocity, accountability, reliability, and growth; all are embedded within and are by-products of investing in work that is both built on trust and builds trust in the way it is done.

⁴⁹ Chris Googoo, Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation, 2024 (GSI)
⁵⁰ Mali Ole Kaunga, Kipok Fund, 2024 (GSI)

⁵¹ Te Puoho Katene, Tapuwae Roa, 2024 (GSI)
⁵² Dario Baniwa, Fundo Rio Negro, 2024, (GSI)





Recognition, Justice & Redistribution

Critical Underpinnings of Recognition to Advance Justice

Recognition is directly tied with Indigenous Peoples' efforts to achieve justice. Recognition is defined as *identification of someone from previous encounters or knowledge; and, acknowledgement of something's existence, validity or legality.*

Indigenous Peoples around the world span the full spectrum of recognition in both dimensions of this definition.

In the absence of recognition, the likelihood of being overlooked, dismissed or bypassed increases exponentially because the basis for acknowledging the legitimacy of Indigenous Peoples is marginalized or non-existent.

From the perspective of familiarity, most people in the world have archaic, romantic or non-existent knowledge Indigenous Peoples in the world. The invisibility of Indigenous Peoples is the result of erasure by systems that educate the world's populations and perpetuate disregard for the presence and attendant rights of Indigenous People to exist and be self-determined.

In the global political framework, many Indigenous people throughout the world are not recognized and do not have designation of being Indigenous and are not seen, recognized or acknowledged as social, cultural, linguistic subsets of their global Nations.

In the absence of recognition, the likelihood of being overlooked, dismissed or bypassed increases exponentially because the basis for acknowledging the legitimacy of Indigenous Peoples is marginalized or non-existent.

Wealth redistribution is a foundational tenet of philanthropy and, in the context of philanthropy, is about addressing societal inequities. The painful reality of colonization is that it has consistently suppressed recognition, language,

culture and ways of living in ways that cause ongoing harm for generations.

Indigenous-Led Funds describe common Indigenous social issues that are symptoms of colonization, like: housing, criminalization, incarceration, children being taken away from their families, massive health gaps and disparities, chronic drugs and alcohol issues related to being dispossessed of Indigenous lands and ways of life.

Adapting to life in a currency-based economic system is another disruptive dynamic. Money economies introduce ways of looking at resources as "assets" with monetary value associated with them. This introduces the potential for economic disparities among community members – producing "haves" and "have nots", resulting in previously unimaginable social problems like poverty.

The practices and language of mainstream philanthropic models still reflect and perpetuate the colonial mindset and associated harms, even when there is a desired and stated intention to support and benefit Indigenous people.

Given some of the hard realities that Indigenous communities are challenged by, it would seem that philanthropic funding would be unconditionally embraced as part of the solution towards addressing problems. But it's not that simple; the practices and language of mainstream philanthropic models still reflect and perpetuate the colonial mindset and associated harms, even when there is a desired and stated intention to support and benefit Indigenous people.

Mainstream philanthropy often does not acknowledge the harms of the past, and the position of privilege it presides over as a result of history.

So, when mainstream philanthropic support is offered to address problems that are the result of colonization, it's difficult to accept with a full and heartfelt sense of gratitude. Indigenous Peoples' knowledge that much of

philanthropy's originating wealth came from the taking of Indigenous resources complicates and compounds the conflicting sentiment. One interviewee summed it up: *"not only do we not have assets, but we also see all of our assets deriving benefits for others."*

Power and control come into play in ways that reinforce colonial values – to the detriment of well-intended outcomes envisioned by funders.

The inherent power disparity and casual reliance on colonial language and practices ignore or minimize the legitimacy or relevance of Indigenous approaches to philanthropy. And, inhibits the redistribution of resources that build pathways to justice for Indigenous communities.

One Indigenous Led Fund reflected on mainstream philanthropy's persistence unwillingness to embrace different approaches to fund redistribution: *"philanthropists want to be at the center of the decision making; they want to hold the relationship and they want to be the power brokers."*

Power and control come into play in ways that reinforce colonial values -- to the detriment of well-intended outcomes envisioned by funders.

A familiar dynamic cited throughout the interviews is mainstream private funders trying to drive processes into Indigenous community efforts when the processes are misaligned with the community's needs or priorities.

Mainstream funders that want to direct how funding will be spent base their expectations on an uninformed or overly simplistic understanding of the community and its needs, as well as a presumption of "knowing" what to do.

Another facet of power and control is subjective decision-making on what is "worth" funding.

One Indigenous Led Fund observed that the pace of community benefit of philanthropic investment misses the mark or doesn't achieve imagined results because: *"there are so many non-Indigenous organizations that are funded to actually impact Indigenous people, but they do it their own way, not ours."*

Non-Indigenous entities that presume to know what will work, often don't achieve the results that are hoped for.

Another facet of power and control is subjective decision-making on what is "worth" funding. Mainstream funders make an assessment informed by measures and standards that may be vastly different than what Indigenous communities value and understand about their needs for in their own context. Or, funders prescribe criteria that is not relevant to Indigenous communities because philanthropy is unaware or unfamiliar with what's happening at the community level. Funders also by-pass necessary steps in the process because they don't know where the community is in its readiness to do the work.

One example where images and expectations were radically misaligned relates to Indigenous community food production. The Indigenous community organized itself to grow food to unify families and collectively address community cohesiveness around health, hunger, land use, land restoration, land knowledge transfer... but the mainstream funder focused on volume of production and marketplace value as the measure of project success.

Language, culture and traditional ways of life are critical, foundational elements of Indigenous Peoples' existence, and many are at risk. And yet, these critical elements of Indigenous life, knowledge and ways serve as examples of what may be dismissed as insignificant by mainstream funders without context or connection.

Another Indigenous Led Fund described a project to preserve their culture, where the challenge of conveying the importance of the project to funders where *"we have a project*

that is serving the needs of our Indigenous community, but it might not seem interesting to the external funder, because they don't know the situation we have with language and culture, and they don't know what the needs are, in the same way as somebody from our Indigenous communities."

Funders want to be able to measure impact. Some things, like cultural preservation, can't easily be measured using conventional tools. So then mainstream funders may impose their own measures that are inappropriate—in order to justify grants, like the food-production-market project described earlier.

Sometimes reporting requirements are beyond the capacities of Indigenous communities. Or, sometimes applications are looked upon unfavorably because they come from someone that does not speak the language fluently. Rather than figuring out how to innovatively meet Indigenous Peoples where they're at, funders will dismiss opportunities to fund impactful projects in favor of more conventional ones that they have a comfort level with.

One Indigenous Led Fund observed:
"[mainstream funders] preload all of the barriers and hurdles in the application process. To the point where they're not funding the most impactful people, they're funding the best application writers."

While Indigenous people appreciate the benefits and support of mainstream philanthropy, it's more consistent, from an Indigenous lens, to see the investment of philanthropic capital as Recognition and meaningful steps towards Justice.

Even the terms *philanthropic Giving and Redistribution* can be experienced as reinforcing harmful colonial narratives. While the philanthropic intent might be altruism, it's more consistent, from an Indigenous lens, to see the investment of philanthropic capital as

Recognition and meaningful steps towards Justice.

Many of the Indigenous-Led Funds interviewed shared the perspective that philanthropic funding is a form of justice *"for everything that has been taken from us, all the time. [Philanthropy] is not donating us money, they are repairing everything that has been taken from us."* There is a collective call to balance power in the relationship and shared purposes of philanthropy.

Journeying to the Future Together in Philanthropy

Indigenous-Led Funds (ILFs) have emerged worldwide for the common purpose of better serving the needs of local Indigenous communities who are working to address their own issues.

Being intermediaries, working in coordination with mainstream philanthropy, ILFs facilitate wealth redistribution into Indigenous communities in ways that are effective, impactful and just.

ILFs have varying capacities to fund and manage the process of putting philanthropic capital directly into the hands of Indigenous Peoples at local, regional, national and international levels. The philanthropic ecosystem continues to grow and evolve, providing more opportunities for Indigenous-Led Funds to serve more communities and to support one another.

Being from the communities they serve, ILFs intimately understand the values and culture, the work, the needs and most impactful approaches to engage and support the work of Indigenous Peoples. ILFs can make philanthropy accessible, meeting the people where they're at.

Indigenous-Led Funds believe there is a need to educate mainstream funders, to generate

evidence that shows donors it is possible to do things differently, with positive impact. Through that shared strategy, they feel it is possible to have a relationship of mutual respect.

As the Indigenous philanthropy ecosystem grows, so does its capacity to build wealth and redistribute its own resources. Being intermediaries, working in coordination with mainstream philanthropy, ILFs facilitate wealth redistribution into Indigenous communities in ways that are effective, impactful and just.

Mainstream philanthropy is integral to the continued growth and development of Indigenous philanthropy and ILFs.

Dulce Magana of Fondo Agroecológico Peninsula de Yucatan sums up the way Indigenous-Led Funds view their role in the philanthropic ecosystem:

“For us, it is important that the distribution of resources has a direct impact on the community and that the funds are not just for technical advice or for organizations that provide support, but that they have a direct impact. [...] ILFs guide philanthropy to be] fairer, more equitable, accessible and [...] precisely where we can participate as grassroots organizations in the decision-making process.”⁵³

Mainstream philanthropy is integral to the continued growth and development of Indigenous philanthropy and ILFs. Indigenous-Led Funds seek and value long-term durable, sustainable partnerships with mainstream philanthropy that are built on trust, understanding and mutual respect.

Truth is the foundation upon which reconciliation, justice, and meaningful change must be built - even difficult truth

Indigenous-Led Funds believe there is a need to educate mainstream funders, to generate

evidence that shows donors it is possible to do things differently, with positive impact. To move towards meaningful relationships, it's important for mainstream philanthropy to:

- see and understand their own biases and gaps in knowledge about the Indigenous communities they work with
- be aware of how operating from a narrow base of knowledge diminishes the impacts and outcomes of their funding
- acknowledge the truths and realities of Indigenous Peoples' history with colonization and western institutions, including philanthropy
- understand the significance of seeing philanthropy as a form of reparation and justice from an Indigenous lens

Truth is the foundation upon which reconciliation, justice and meaningful change must be built – even difficult truth.

The difficult truth of Indigenous people is that they have endured centuries of colonization, forced displacement, and cultural suppression. The dispossession of lands, the destruction of languages, and the erasure of traditions were deliberate acts that shaped the current disparities faced by Indigenous communities.

Justice calls for an end to performative allyship and demands the creation of new or adapted structures that empower Indigenous leadership, ensuring that philanthropy is not a tool of control but a mechanism for liberation.

To move forward, philanthropy must begin with an unwavering commitment to acknowledge these historical realities and their present-day consequences. Without truth, efforts toward reconciliation and equity remain performative and hollow.

Justice demands recognition coupled with action. True justice in the realm of Indigenous philanthropy means dismantling systems of inequality that continue to disenfranchise Indigenous Peoples. Justice means shifting

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power back to Indigenous communities, recognizing and upholding sovereignty, autonomy and rights to self-determination.

Justice calls for an end to performative allyship and demands the creation of new or adapted structures that empower Indigenous leadership, ensuring that philanthropy is not a tool of control, but a mechanism for liberation.

Recognition and redistribution are essential in addressing the long-term consequences of colonization and systemic oppression. More than issuing apologies or symbolic gestures, they require tangible commitments to economic restitution, land reparation, and meaningful capital investment in Indigenous-led initiatives.

Recognition in philanthropy involves prioritizing Indigenous organizations in redistribution to fund language and cultural revitalization and ensure that Indigenous communities have the resources necessary to thrive. Without recognition and meaningful redistribution, philanthropy risks continuing to perpetuate the very inequities it seeks to address.

Wealth and power have historically been concentrated in the hands of a few, often at the expense of Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized communities.

Redistribution is not about charity—it is about justice. It is about recognizing that much of today's wealth has been built on the exploitation of Indigenous lands and resources. Philanthropy, as a sector, must recognize its own complicity in upholding systems of colonialism and inequity.

A reimagined philanthropic model recognizes Indigenous Peoples' right to exist and be self-determined, centers wealth redistribution and ensures that resources flow directly into the hands of Indigenous Peoples and normalizes practices that honor Indigenous values that are just, fair and restorative for the entire ecosystem.





Rooted in Trust: A Funders' Toolkit for Strengthening Indigenous-Led Funds

Indigenous Led Funds (ILFs) are guided by Indigenous worldviews and led-by and for Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous-Led Funds strengthen self-determination and support a process that empowers the communities, at the local to the global level, to be able to change paradigms and shift power relations addressing the asymmetry of powers and resources to recognition and reciprocity. They offer a powerful model of community-rooted resource distribution grounded in Indigenous governance, accountability, and care. As ILFs grow in number and influence globally, philanthropy has a critical opportunity—and responsibility—to support this transformation not just through funding, but through deeper shifts in values, relationships, and structures.

This toolkit, informed by the ILF Governance Scan and aligned with the 5Rs of Indigenous Philanthropy—Respect, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Relationships, and Redistribution—offers a roadmap for funders to support Indigenous-Led Funds in meaningful and lasting ways. The Indigenous Led Funds movement is reshaping philanthropy by modelling values-based, rooted in Indigenous wisdom and community-driven approaches.

Applying the 5Rs is a pathway to meaningful partnership. This toolkit is a guide—not a checklist—to shifting from transactional funding to sacred, accountable relationship. Ultimately, trust-based philanthropy means releasing control while deepening accountability. Indigenous-led Funds already operate from these principles—philanthropy must follow with humility, commitment, and shared responsibility.



Respect

Recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples rights and worldviews. Seek to uphold the principles articulated in the UN Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People (UNDRIP). Respect and recognize Indigenous Women's rights by upholding CEDAW General recommendation No.39 on the rights of Indigenous Women and Girls. Work directly with Indigenous Women's Organizations to advance their rights and to gain understanding of their aspirations, solutions, and initiatives.

Honoring Indigenous Knowledge, Governance, and Self-Determination

Respect in philanthropy begins with recognizing that Indigenous Peoples are the experts on their own lives, lands, and communities. Indigenous-led funds often operate within systems of governance rooted in cultural values, ancestral protocols, and collective accountability. These may not resemble standard nonprofit frameworks, but they are legitimate, robust, and effective.

1. Funders can demonstrate respect by adapting due diligence practices to accommodate Indigenous governance systems, such as community councils, elder advisory groups, and customary law. These systems are often deeply tied to community life and spiritual values, and recognizing them as valid is a fundamental act of respect.
2. Respect also means supporting Indigenous-led initiatives in ways that reflect Indigenous worldviews. Rather than requiring Indigenous-Led Funds to conform to Western nonprofit models, funders should create space for diverse leadership and flexible application formats that are accessible and culturally appropriate.
3. Extractive reporting requirements should be replaced with relational accountability. Funders must acknowledge that Indigenous communities may define impact and success through community healing, language revitalization, restoration of cultural practices, or youth engagement. Such outcomes, though often intangible, represent the true impact of ILFs.
4. It is important for funders to understand and respect the cultural protocols that underpin governance, such as the use of ceremony, consensus decision-making, or long deliberation processes grounded in intergenerational dialogue. Respecting these protocols requires patience and a willingness to move at the pace of the community, not the pace of institutional urgency. This includes ensuring that funders educate their teams and boards about the principles and practices of Indigenous governance before entering partnerships.
5. Funders should also examine internal policies and procedures that may unintentionally undermine Indigenous governance. This includes questioning who sets the criteria for legitimacy, exploring how these criteria may be rooted in colonial norms, and listening deeply and being willing to shift internal assumptions to honor Indigenous sovereignty.



Relationships

Engage directly with Indigenous communities by understanding the nature of their relationships with Mother Earth, their culture, traditions and spirituality. Build and nurture relationships based on mutual respect and trust that eliminate the tendency to exert power over another.

Investing in Long-Term, Trust-Based Partnerships

Trust is built over time, through mutual presence, shared experiences, and consistent engagement. Indigenous communities prioritize long-term relationships that are built on care, patience, and integrity. Yet too often, philanthropy operates on short-term cycles that fail to honor this principle.



1. Investing in Indigenous-Led Funds requires funders to commit to multi-year general support, which enables ILFs to plan effectively, invest in leadership development, and build internal capacity for the long haul. General operating support reflects a vote of confidence in the vision and structure of the fund, allowing it to operate with the flexibility needed to respond to evolving community needs.
2. Funders should go beyond transactional grantmaking by engaging with Indigenous communities outside of formal reporting cycles. When invited, attending community gatherings, listening circles, ceremonies, or invitation-only spaces fosters a deeper understanding of the context and lived realities of the communities served. These relational moments are essential to trust-building.
3. Funders should remain in open dialogue, offering support rather than withdrawing funds or trust during moments of challenge, such as leadership transitions, administrative delays, or programmatic shifts. Many ILFs are engaged in design processes that reflect shifting realities in their communities. Funders must be willing to embrace change alongside them.
4. Relationships require consistency. Foundations should avoid sudden exits, erratic communication, or last-minute shifts in expectations. Building trust means showing up and staying engaged even when it's difficult or inconvenient. Philanthropy should evolve into a role of partner, ally, and co-learner, grounded in reciprocity and respect.
5. Relationships are further strengthened when funders provide solidarity, mentorship, skills building, and peer learning networks—not as a top-down intervention, but as co-created opportunities that support the aspirations of ILF leaders. Creating safe spaces for reflection, conflict resolution, and collective learning and unlearning.

Responsibility

Be accountable and transparent in ensuring the effective, meaningful and intersectional representation and participation of Indigenous Peoples where critical decisions that affect them are made. Use funding processes and approaches that are accessible, adaptable, flexible, transparent, and accountable.

Centering Indigenous Priorities and Practicing Ethical Accountability

Philanthropy must take responsibility for its historic and ongoing role in reinforcing systemic inequities. Responsible funding means actively working to dismantle these structures by aligning resources with Indigenous priorities, acknowledging harm, and ensuring funders are accountable to the communities they serve—not just to their boards or donors.

1. Taking responsibility starts with acknowledging the extractive nature of past philanthropic practices, and committing to co-creating grantmaking processes that eliminate unnecessary burdens. This includes removing rigid eligibility criteria that don't fit Indigenous governance models, offering technical support during application processes, and simplifying reporting.
2. Respecting Indigenous Peoples' intellectual property means recognizing and protecting the ownership of Indigenous knowledge, cultural expressions, and community-generated data or products that may be as a result of funding. Funders must seek free, prior, and informed consent before using or sharing any information and uphold principles of data sovereignty and cultural integrity.
3. Funding core operations—not just projects—and supporting long-term strategic development. ILFs need infrastructure, leadership development, communications, and administrative support to function well. Without this core support, funds are forced to divert limited energy away from their missions to fulfill compliance requirements.
4. Model accountability by reporting back to grantees, sharing how their feedback is being used, and offering transparency around decision-making processes. Funders need to defer to Indigenous leadership and expertise, allowing communities to define their own measures of success and frameworks of evaluation and providing capacity-building when invited, without assuming authority. This affirms the agency of Indigenous partners while offering genuine support.
5. Building internal accountability mechanisms that monitor how well they are upholding commitments to Indigenous partners. This can include community advisory boards and participatory evaluation approaches led by Indigenous experts. Responsibility is not a one-time action, but a continuous practice.



RESPONSIBILITY

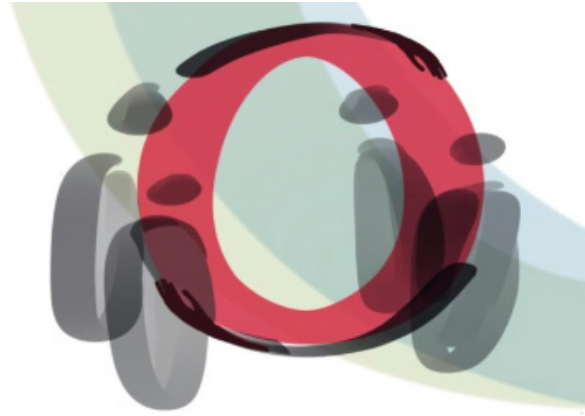
Reciprocity

Practice the essence of Indigenous ways of living, giving, and sharing that connect people and their beliefs and actions. Be open to learning, unlearning, and receiving. Giving and receiving from a place of mutual benefit and solidarity is also part of a virtuous circle of healing principles.

Building Mutual Value and Two-Way Learning

Reciprocity is a central principle in Indigenous lifeways, emphasizes mutual giving and shared benefit. In philanthropy, reciprocity challenges the traditional one-way flow of resources from donor to recipient, encouraging a more balanced and respectful relationship where learning, care, and insight are exchanged.

1. Funders should engage in co-designed learning exchanges with Indigenous Led Funds, creating space for mutual education and the deepening of understanding. These can include storytelling sessions, community-based learning, and shared problem-solving to explore how ILFs navigate challenges and opportunities. Funders should not only fund these exchanges, but participate in them as observers or fully when invited, and humbly.
2. Elevating Indigenous voices by supporting Indigenous storytelling, research, and thought leadership funders help to correct misrepresentations and foster visibility of Indigenous knowledge systems within philanthropic spaces.
3. Supporting ILFs to contribute to donor education and philanthropy-wide strategy design, ensures that Indigenous perspectives are embedded in the system from within.
4. Funders to invest in supportive systems that meet ILFs where they are, being responsive to their needs, and creating channels for ongoing dialogue.
5. Recognizing the emotional and cultural labour involved in community leadership because ILFs are part of their communities and Creating funding models that honor care work, traditional knowledge keepers, and intergenerational exchange.
6. Transforming philanthropy into a space of shared growth, where all parties benefit, evolve, and deepen their practice.



RECIPROCITY

Redistribution

Practice redistribution based on Indigenous values and ways of living, sharing, and giving to shift towards a just and equitable world. Do this through building trust, ensuring Indigenous Peoples are at the decision-making table and directly funding Indigenous-led solutions, initiatives, and organizations worldwide

Shifting Power and Resources to Indigenous Hands

Redistribution demands a fundamental restructuring of how resources and decision-making power flow. In Indigenous worldviews, wealth is not hoarded—it is shared and circulated for the wellbeing of the collective. For philanthropy to support Indigenous-led change, it must move beyond the transfer of funds toward the transfer of control to address the asymmetry of power in philanthropy.

1. This includes funding Indigenous Led Funds that offer community-rooted alternatives to top-down models and increase local ownership of decision-making.
2. Funders should also support ILFs to develop endowments or capital reserves that allow for long-term sustainability, not dependency and advocating within philanthropic institutions for larger allocations to Indigenous Led Funds and Indigenous communities.
3. Indigenous Led Funds need timely and direct access to grants that are unrestricted, long-term, and disbursed in ways that respect community systems and reduce administrative burden.
4. Funders to advocate for institutional change. This includes educating their boards about the role of ILFs, influencing peer funders, and participating in sector-wide campaigns to shift more resources to Indigenous leadership. It also includes inviting Indigenous leaders into foundation



governance, ensuring they shape decisions about resource flow and allocation.

5. Funders must also consider redistributing not only money, but also voice, visibility, and influence. This includes creating space and platforms for Indigenous leaders to shape policy and influence decision making. Redistribution is ultimately about justice, and requires political will, bold action and sustained commitment.

Appendix A - Comparative Governance Models

Community Foundations, Feminist Funds and Social Environmental Funds

Traditional philanthropy has historically been structured around hierarchical, donor-driven systems rooted in Western models of control, accountability, and measurement. These systems often center power within philanthropic institutions, with decisions about where, how, and to whom resources are distributed made by funders, not by the communities they intend to serve. Funding has typically been short-term, project-based, and tied to rigid outcomes defined by the funder. Grantees are expected to comply with complex reporting and evaluation systems that prioritize metrics, efficiency, and quantifiable results over relationship, process, and cultural relevance- self-determination. In these models, accountability flows upward—to boards and donors—rather than outward or reciprocally with communities. These structures have resulted in limited space for Indigenous leadership, knowledge systems, and governance models. Indigenous communities have often been seen as recipients of aid rather than as partners or leaders in solutions. The exclusion of Indigenous voices from philanthropic decision-making has contributed to funding approaches that are extractive, misaligned, and or even harmful.

There is an urgent need to document and learn from governance structures that center values, leadership, and self-determination. This governance scan primarily focuses on ILFs, drawing on lessons from Indigenous communities about accountability, cultural integrity, and collective decision-making. To complement this focus, we also examine the governance models of other philanthropic movements—including community foundations, feminist funds, and social environmental funds—that have also been evolving in their approaches to funding and leadership. By analyzing these models, we identify promising practices, challenges, and lessons that can inform the evolution and strengthening of philanthropic practices.

This desk review explores the governance structures and operational models of community foundations, feminist funds, and social environmental funds, with the aim of identifying insights relevant to Indigenous-Led Funds (ILFs). In recent years, various funding movements—community foundations, feminist funds, and social environmental funds—have taken significant strides to embed participatory and equitable practices into their structures. These models offer examples on how alternative governance and funding distribution mechanisms are being developed to counter the traditional top-down approaches that have long dominated philanthropy.

Across all governance models, inclusive governance and participatory leadership emerge as similar and critical features. Community foundations are generally governed by local boards comprised of community leaders and philanthropic stakeholders. Their governance aims to ensure alignment with local priorities but often remains tethered to conventional philanthropic norms. While many community foundations are experimenting with participatory grantmaking and increased community engagement, donor-driven decision-making still holds considerable sway. Additionally, a trend toward community-led philanthropic initiatives shows potential for innovation within traditional structures. Feminist funds, particularly those in the Prospera International Network, are practicing shared governance models that embody power-sharing, decentralization, and movement accountability. For instance, Fenomenal Funds employs co-governance structures involving both feminist fund representatives and private funders, built on trust and mutual accountability. The Global Resilience Fund and the Black Feminist Fund emphasize participatory grantmaking led by grassroots organizers and movement actors. These models challenge hierarchical governance by centering intersectionality, shifting power toward those most affected by the issues, and creating new norms of transparency and collective leadership.

Social environmental funds tend to reflect a hybrid of technical and grassroots inputs in their governance structures. While they often include scientists, environmental experts, and Indigenous leaders in their governance processes, decision-making may be mediated by institutional funders and compliance frameworks. For example, some of these funds, blend activist grantmaking with regional advisory boards composed of local environmental defenders. Yet many such funds continue to grapple with challenges like greenwashing, donor control, and limited community ownership in operational decision-making..

Decision-making and funding distribution practices also vary across these models. Community foundations increasingly adopt participatory mechanisms, such as community advisory committees and open call processes, but decisions often remain influenced by donors or staff with professional philanthropic training. Feminist funds practice activist-led grantmaking, offering flexible and responsive funding mechanisms driven by the needs and timing of social movements. Social environmental funds may allow communities to identify priorities through consultation processes, but grantmaking criteria are often shaped by donor expectations or regulatory restrictions tied to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) metrics.

Each of these funding models faces governance and operational challenges. Community foundations struggle with inclusivity and power-sharing with historically excluded communities. Feminist funds face systemic underfunding, especially for work led by women of color or from the Global South, and navigate tensions between grassroots values and institutional expectations. Social environmental funds risk replicating top-down structures despite community engagement, and continue face increased scrutiny for failing to deliver meaningful climate justice outcomes.

Yet across the board these models also offer other ways of supporting funding flows in ways that are in closer proximity to the realities and needs of the communities they seek to support. They point to the need for continued transformation in the philanthropic sector of shifting away from top-down philanthropic norms. Philanthropy should continue to move in this direction: learning from and building on these diverse models to reshape funding systems that are not only more just, but also more effective in meeting the needs of and reflect the lived realities the communities they serve.

The Distinctive Contribution of Indigenous-Led Funds

Indigenous-led philanthropy is reshaping the field by introducing values-based approaches grounded in trust, reciprocity, and community self-determination. This evolving model shifts decision-making into the hands of Indigenous Peoples, through governance structures that are collective, transparent, and rooted in cultural protocols. It emphasizes long-term, flexible funding that allows communities to determine their own priorities, pace, and definitions of success. Rather than focusing on compliance and control, it centers Indigenous values, relationships, mutual accountability, and shared learning. This evolving model is not only about numbers but about stories, cultural continuity, land stewardship, rights, and intergenerational impact. Funders are invited to become learners and allies, to listen deeply, and to move resources in ways that support Indigenous sovereignty and holistic well-being. The shift from transactional philanthropy to transformational partnership marks a crucial turning point in the field—one that challenges funders to reimagine power and responsibility.

Their structures are shaped by the 5Rs of Indigenous Philanthropy—Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Redistribution—which together offer a framework for how resources are governed and redistributed, decisions are made, and accountability is practiced. **Respect** affirms the inherent rights, worldviews, and governance systems of Indigenous Peoples, recognizing their knowledge and leadership as vital to meaningful solutions. **Relationships** elevate connection over efficiency, ensuring that funding decisions are made in community, with community, and for community. **Responsibility** frames governance not as a transactional process but as a caretaking obligation to people, land, and future generations, positioning both funders and Indigenous-Led

Funds as stewards of intergenerational commitments. **Reciprocity** breaks from the traditional one-way flow of aid by cultivating mutual exchange and learning between funders and Indigenous communities, redefining power as balance rather than control. Lastly, **Redistribution** challenges the philanthropic sector to confront entrenched systems of wealth accumulation and direct resources toward communities historically dispossessed, in ways that restores agency and dignity.

Ultimately, the evolution from traditional to Indigenous-informed and led philanthropy represents a shift from systems of control to ecosystems of care—where funding serves not only as a means of support but also as an act of solidarity and restoration. ILFs are not merely another model of funding or mechanisms—they represent a fundamental reorientation of philanthropic values. Their presence enriches the ecosystem by demonstrating what it means to fund with integrity, to govern with respect, and to lead with community at the center. Recognizing, resourcing, and learning from ILFs is essential for any funder seeking to support a reframing and paradigm shift towards equity, sustainability, and justice.





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