



— ADVANCE —
NATIVE
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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ADDRESSING THE STRENGTHS,
STRUCTURAL BARRIERS AND
OPPORTUNITIES TO GETTING
NATIVE AMERICANS INTO ELECTED
LEADERSHIP

CHRISSIE CASTRO
ANATHEA CHINO
LAURA HARRIS

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Andrade, Ron (Luiseno)

Executive Director, Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission

Barudin, Ann (Kewa)

Board Member, Native American Voter's Alliance

Begaye, Catherine (Navajo)

Alumnus, Emerge New Mexico

Blain, Ludovic

Director, Progressive Era Project

Byrd, Jessica

Owner & Principal Strategist, Three Point Strategies

Chino, Anatheia (Acoma Pueblo)

Strategic Initiatives Director, UltraViolet and President, Anatheia Chino LLC

Ellis, Kimberly

Executive Director, Emerge California

Fairbanks, Leroy (Ojibwe)

Leech Lake Tribal Council's District III Representative

Flanagan, Peggy (Ojibwe)

Minnesota State Representative District 46A

Free, Kalyn (Choctaw)

Attorney, Political Consultant, and President and Founder, INDN's List 2005-2011

Gomez Daly, Michael

Political Director, PowerPAC Los Angeles Office

Haaland, Debra (Laguna Pueblo)

State Chair, New Mexico Democratic Party

Harris, Laura (Comanche)

Executive Director, Americans for Indian Opportunity

Harris, LaDonna (Comanche)

President, Americans for Indian Opportunity
Jackson, Sharon (Navajo)
Alumnus, Emerge New Mexico

Jimenez, Alexis (Pawnee/Comanche)

Alumnus, Emerge New Mexico

Johnson, Julie Saw'Leit'Sa (Lummi)

Chair, Washington State Democratic Party
Native Caucus

Jordan, Paulette (Coeur d'Alene)

Idaho House of Representatives, District 5A

Killer, Kevin (Oglala Sioux)

South Dakota State Representative and Treasurer, National Conference of State Legislators Native Caucus

Koob, Julianna

Founder, Emerge New Mexico

Little, Charlotte (San Felipe/Taos Pueblos)

Board President, Emerge New Mexico

Louis, Georgene (Pueblo of Acoma)

New Mexico State Representative, District 26

Martinez Ortega, Julie

Senior Advisor, PowerPAC+

McAfee, Rhiannon

Executive Director, Engage San Diego

McCool, Daniel

Professor, University of Utah

McCoy, John (Tulalip)

Washington State Senator, District 38

McLean, Marci (Amskapii Piikani, Blackfeet)

Executive Director, Western Native Voice

Mendoza, Bill (Oglala-Sicangu Lakota)

Executive Director, White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education

Newton, Luke

Senior Program Officer, Common Counsel
Odio, Carlos
Managing Director, Florida Alliance and Chair, Florida for All

Oretga, Jr., Rudy (Fernandeño Tataviam)

Chairman, Los Angeles City/County Native American; Tribal President, Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians

Parker, Deborah (Tulalip)

Democratic National Convention's Platform Committee Member, and former Vice-chairperson, Tulalip Tribe

Phillips, Steve

Author, Brown is the New White

Poston, L. Stephine (Sandia Pueblo)

Founder and President, Poston and Associates, LLC

Proudfit, Joely (Luiseño)

Department Chair and Professor of American Indian Studies and Director of the California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center, San Marcos

Roberts, Chris (Choctaw)

Mayor, City of Shoreline, Washington

Ruark-Thompson, Courtney (Cherokee)

Chief of Staff, The Management Center

Roybal Caballero, Patricia (Piro Manso Tiwa)

New Mexico State Representative District 13

Salazar, Martha

Senior Policy Specialist, National Caucus of Native American State Legislatures

Garbani Sanchez, Corrina (Luiseño)

Councilmember, Pechanga Band of Luiseno

Sandy, Joan Marie (Zuni/Choctaw)

Alumnus, Emerge New Mexico

Totten, Gloria

Former President, Progressive Majority and Founder and President, Public Leadership Institute

Trahant, Mark (Shoshone-Bannock Tribes)

Journalist, Trahantreports.com and Professor, University of North Dakota

Warren, Alvin (Santa Clara Pueblo)

Program Officer, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and former Lieutenant Governor, Santa Clara Pueblo

Weahkee, Laurie (Diné, Cochiti and Zuni Pueblo)

Executive Director, Native American Voter Alliance

Zamarin, Kim

Founding Board Member & Former Treasurer, Emerge New Mexico

*Additional contributors preferred to not be named.

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INTRODUCTION

Native Americans make up less than 2 percent of the total U.S. population yet have been credited with heavily influencing outcomes of a number of local, state and national elections. This is despite the fact that the 567 federally recognized and 460 unrecognized tribes have unique nation-to-nation relationships with the federal government and histories of political participation that is much different from other racial and ethnic groups. Complex historical and contemporary factors, affect the level and depth of engagement of Native Americans in the political system, contributing to drastic underrepresentation as elected leaders at every level of government. A study conducted by the Women Donors Network of more than 41,000 elected officials from county to federal levels found that 90 percent of elected officials are white, while only .03 percent of elected officials are Native American.ⁱ



OF 41,000 ELECTED U.S. OFFICIALS FROM COUNTY TO FEDERAL LEVELS, 90% ARE WHITE AND .03% ARE NATIVE AMERICAN.



Between 2000 and 2010, the American Indian/Alaska Native population in the United States increased to 5.2 million citizens from 4 million – an increase of 30 percent.ⁱⁱ

Population increases over the next several decades are expected to accelerate and reflect the demographic projections of the changing electorate.ⁱⁱⁱ The projected majority-minority population shift that will occur in the next fifty years will create a new American majority. Investment in increasing Native American representation in elected offices is a critical endeavor for securing a reflective democracy for all Americans – one in which the country benefits from the leadership and talents of Native peoples and is responsive to the assets and issues of Native citizens.^{iv} Yet to secure that future, an understanding of the current landscape, including strengths and challenges, is required.

Through a series of key informant interviews with Native American leaders throughout the country, this brief seeks to provide an initial exploration of: **1) the strengths associated with recruiting and supporting qualified Native Americans to take on positions of elected leadership; 2) the structural barriers experienced by Native Americans in getting elected to office; and 3) recommendations on how to overcome barriers to electing Native leaders to office.**

ELECTIONS WHERE THE NATIVE VOTE MADE A DIFFERENCE

- Alaska Native voters helped to replace a governor hostile to Native sovereignty and issues and elect allies in Gov. Bill Walker and Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott, a Tlingit leader, in 2014.^v
- Ann Kirkpatrick heavily campaigned on Navajo and Apache reservations, which she credits for helping her to win her 2013 run for a congressional seat representing Arizona’s first district, the congressional seat with the highest concentration of Natives in the country.^{vi}
- In 2013, four of the tightest Senate races took place in states with some of the largest percentages of Native Americans: Arizona, New Mexico, North Dakota and Montana. The Native vote in three of those states helped Democrats win key victories and maintain control of the Senate.^{vii}
- In 2006, US Senator John Tester (D-MT) won his Senate seat over the Republican incumbent by only 3,562 votes. In that election, more than 17,000 voters cast ballots on Montana’s seven Indian reservations. And he credits the Native vote for helping to secure his seat in 2012.^{viii}

CONTEXTUALIZING NATIVE AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Native American tribes have unique nation-to-nation relationships with the federal government that are based on the U.S. Constitution and international treaty law. Before the founding of the United States, European countries made hundreds of international treaties with Native American tribes that promised resources, such as health and education, in perpetuity – often in exchange for land and peace provisions. The United States assumed those treaties once it was founded and made dozens of its own. Through these treaties, Native Americans are recognized as members of sovereign nations, not simply members of an ethnic minority. Native tribes are also very diverse. Each sovereign tribal nation has a long history of sophisticated forms of governance, education, social structures, language and culture.

The foundation of American democracy was heavily influenced by the governance systems of the Iroquois Confederacy, which demonstrated the possibility of a confederation of states. There was no such European alliance of nations at the time.

At the founding of the United States, relations with tribes were managed by the Department of War, and Native peoples were seen as citizens of foreign nations. As European immigrants arrived, there was a push for westward expansion. U.S. federal Indian policies were enacted to remove tribal nations from their lands and abrogate treaty agreements.

Throughout this time, Native peoples also suffered devastating population declines due to disease and genocide, which decreased the population from an estimated 30 million before contact with Europeans in 1491 to a mere 250,000 in 1890. With population levels at their lowest, 20th century policies sought to further eradicate Native culture through forced assimilation in boarding schools, displacement through urban relocation programs, termination of recognition of tribal sovereignty, and many other devastating policies that sought to assimilate and destroy Native identity, culture and nations.

In the midst of these affronts to tribal nations and its citizens, the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act was passed, which granted suffrage rights to Native peoples. By granting Natives citizenship, many federal, state and local politicians called on Native peoples to deny their tribal identity and citizenship. Yet, citizenship also bore an opportunity for Native peoples to have a stake in American government, whose policies had a tremendous impact on their nations and communities. To further complicate matters, discrepancies between federal and state control created loopholes for enforcement. Several states refused to recognize Native Americans as citizens with relationships with state and municipal governments, and maintained their view of Native peoples as members of foreign governments. For example, Arizona and New Mexico – states with sizeable Native populations – were among the last states to grant Native Americans the ability to vote in state elections in 1948, and only when mandated through litigation.^{ix} In fact, legislation has been proposed in New Mexico as recent as 1982 to bar Natives from voting in state elections.^x

ARIZONA AND NEW MEXICO – STATES WITH SIZEABLE NATIVE POPULATIONS – WERE AMONG THE LAST STATES TO GRANT NATIVE AMERICANS THE ABILITY TO VOTE IN STATE ELECTIONS IN 1948, AND ONLY WHEN MANDATED THROUGH LITIGATION.

After gaining the right to vote, Native Americans experienced the same voter intimidation and suppression tactics as African Americans in the Jim Crow south. Poll taxes, literacy tests and tests that would assess whether a Native person had sufficiently given up his or her culture and language were rampant.

As such, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 included Native Americans and has been used in several counties and states to secure the right to vote and to elect Native peoples to municipal and county offices throughout the country.

METHODOLOGY

This research brief was developed based on nearly 50 key informant interviews and one focus group with Native and non-Native elected officials, candidates, campaign managers, activists and other leaders, both nationally and in focal states. The interviews were conducted both in person and by phone, and the focus group was held in person. All responses were anonymous, and participants understood that no names would be used in this report. The team relied upon semistructured interviews and open-ended questions to allow for flexibility and follow-up questions. The interviews were conducted from April through August of 20 . Conversations focused on these central questions:

- **What are the biggest structural barriers to getting Native candidates elected into office?**
- **What strengths or successes exist that can be built upon?**
- **What strategies will diminish the current gross underrepresentation of Native candidates in positions of elected office from the municipal to the federal levels?**

UNDERSTANDING THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Native American representation in elected leadership positions in federal, state and local offices is severely lacking, though some candidates have been successful despite all odds. At the federal level, Native Americans have held the offices of one vice president, eight House representatives and two Senators. Of those, 100 percent were male. As of August 2015, there were only two current Native officeholders in Congress: Tom Cole (R-OK) of the Chickasaw Nation and Markwayne Mullin (R-OK) of the Cherokee Nation.

At the state legislative level, representatives are organized through the National Caucus of Native American State Legislators. In 2015, the caucus reported a membership of 68 state legislators from a total of 19 states, with Oklahoma (14), Hawaii (9), New Mexico (7), Montana (8), Alaska (6) and Arizona (5) having the highest number of representatives. Of those, 74 percent (50) were men, and 26 percent (18) were women.

While there are most likely undercounts with regard to city and county identification of Native elected leaders, one study conducted by the Women’s Donor Network that used existing research, surveys and voter-file matching found that there were a mere 109 county-level Native American elected officials in 2014, of which 67 percent (73) were male, and 33 percent (36) were female.^{xi}

It’s important to note that data sources of Native American/Alaska Native elected officials are not 100 percent reliable due to challenges with identification, data collection and reporting for Native Americans. Yet when taken together, the data that does exist tells a compelling story. There is a gross underrepresentation of Native American elected officials at every level of government. And Native American women experience the most severe underrepresentation.

WHAT’S WORKED

There have been few, yet strong, advances in projects seeking to recruit and support qualified Native candidates. What follows are descriptions of key organizations’ efforts to: recruit and prepare Native candidates nationally; ensure enforcement of the Voting Rights Act; engage Native American voters; partner with non-Native progressive organizations; and create a Native American presence within political parties.

1) National Recruitment, Preparation and Financial Support for Native Candidates

Wellstone Action

Wellstone Action’s Native American Leadership Program (NALP) was created in 2007 and provided leadership training and technical assistance on civic engagement, community organizing, advocacy and nonpartisan electoral work to Native communities throughout the country. One of the key features of the NALP was Camp Wellstone in Indian Country, which trained potential Native elected officials and campaign staff about how to run effective campaigns. The program specifically sought to develop a Native American candidate pathway and made great strides to meet its goal. During its six-year run, the NALP trained 850 people, 25 of whom ran for office, and a handful were elected.

The NALP was spearheaded by Peggy Flanagan, a leader with a strong skillset and relationships in both Native and non-Native political networks. Due to staffing changes, the NALP and its Camp Wellstone in Indian Country have been inoperative since 2012.



FROM THE LOCAL TO THE FEDERAL, NATIVE AMERICANS ARE GROSSLY UNDER-REPRESENTED AMONG ELECTED OFFICIALS. FOR NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN, THE LACK OF REPRESENTATION IS EVEN MORE SEVERE.

Lessons learned from Camp Wellstone in Indian Country are as follows:

- Ensure curriculum is developed and provided by Native trainers who have familiarity with tribes and tribal communities.
- Ensure trainings are rooted in community values and are accessible.
 - Provide nontraditional supports, such as gas cards for tribal community members who would not be able to make trainings otherwise.
 - Be flexible in the provision of trainings to meet community availability, such as offering trainings on weekends and evenings.
- Develop separate tracks for candidates and campaign staff on issues such as:
 - understanding the concept of power and mapping decision makers;
 - internal and external messaging;
 - fundraising tactics;
 - developing and delivering an effective political speech;
 - get-out-the-vote strategies; and
 - exploring cultural values within the context of a political race (e.g., creating space and support for reconciling values conflicts, such as learning to get comfortable standing in the spotlight as a candidate whereas many Native cultures discourage the idea of an individual standing out from his or her community.)
- Develop a database of Native trainers and consultants that delineates specific experience, knowledge and skill sets.
- Ensure there is a sustainability plan that seeks to transfer leadership to a group and/or multiple people so that the work will continue despite inevitable staffing transitions.

Indigenous Democratic Network's List

The Indigenous Democratic Network (INDN's List) was founded in 2005 and was modeled after Emily's List, the political action committee that raises funds for prochoice Democratic women. INDN's List's mission was to recruit, elect and help fund Native American candidates and mobilize the Native vote on behalf of those candidates.^{xiii} INDN's List helped to elect more than 60 Native Democrats into office with broad support from elected leaders such as Al Franken, Mike Honda, Howard Dean and others.

INDN's List was founded by Kalyn Free, a strong and well-connected leader with a vision for creating a long-term Native candidate pathway that would eventually result in the election of the nation's first Native American president of the United States. "Until we have Indians representing us on city councils, school boards, county commissions and in the state legislatures, we'll never see the faces and color of power in America change," she said. "We must build that farm team so we have Indians representing our interests at the local level while we are grooming them to run for higher office later." INDN's List operated for six years before it closed its doors in 2011 due to a lack of sustainable financial support.

Lessons Learned from INDN's List are as follows:

- Running a national organization is expensive and requires a long-term investment from reliable funding sources.
- National strategies and organization require commitment from dedicated leaders with strong contacts and networks in Native and non-Native networks.
- Long-term buy-in and support for laying down a Native candidate pathway, and understanding that it will take time to build up to seeing more Native leadership in high-profile leadership positions, is needed.
- Partnerships that utilize existing candidate training programs and infrastructures, rather than fundraising to hold trainings, is a way to minimize costs.
- Year-round engagement in Native communities is needed so that presidential elections aren't the only time the Native vote has a high turnout.
- A focus on the local level will provide a farm team for higher posts in the future.
- Involvement with local and state political apparatus will benefit the project of electing more Native candidates, e.g. state Native Democratic caucuses.

National Congress of American Indians

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) is the nation's oldest and most well-established organization to represent tribes and tribal interests. It was founded in 1944 to respond to U.S. termination and assimilation policies and to assert tribal government treaty rights and sovereignty.^{xiii} Since its inception, NCAI has worked on a number of flagship campaign issues, including voting rights. Brian Cladoosby, NCAI's president, has commented that "we're the first ones here, and we're the last ones to have the opportunity to vote."

NCAI currently runs a national, nonpartisan Native Vote campaign that has four main areas of focus:

- get-out-the-vote (GOTV) and registration efforts
- election and voter protection awareness and advocacy
- tribal access to data
- voter and candidate education

The intention of NCAI's education strategy is to encourage more Native people to run for office, though it has not yet fully developed into a program that has gone to scale.

Additionally, its emphasis is on congressional, not local or state, elections.

2) The Voting Rights Act and Litigation

The Voting Rights Act (VRA) has had a major role in securing opportunities for Native political candidates in jurisdictions where they were previously systemically excluded. There have been 74 known VRA-related cases since 1965. The majority of cases have argued on the right to vote and to run for elections, and discriminatory practices, such as voting restrictions, polling locations and voter identification. There are also cases involving inadequate minority Native language provisions, and litigation against states seeking exemption from the VRA. Most cases resulted in advances for securing the Native vote and for electing Native candidates.^{xiv}

THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT (VRA) HAS HAD A MAJOR ROLE IN SECURING OPPORTUNITIES FOR NATIVE POLITICAL CANDIDATES IN JURISDICTIONS WHERE THEY WERE PREVIOUSLY SYSTEMICALLY EXCLUDED.

For example, in Montana’s U.S. v. Blaine County, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) successfully argued under provisions of the Voting Rights Act for the county to move from at-large elections, which favored the white majority population, to district-specific elections. Doing so created a district whereby, for the first time, a Native American was elected as one of its three county commissioners.^{xv}

There are several other examples of these types of cases. To name a few: Windy Boy v. Big Horn County in Montana invalidated at-large county and school board elections; and in U.S. v. San Juan County, the DOJ argued against vote dilution in a county that was 42 percent Native, yet no Native had ever served in an elected county commissioner seat. More recently, in 2014, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in Montana won a case that mandated redistricting so that Native candidates would have a fair chance at getting elected.

The districting system had given preference to the majority-white voting district, which elected one high school board member for every 143 residents, while the Native district elected one board member for every 841 residents. Jon Ellingson, attorney for the ACLU of Montana commented: “The old districts clearly violated the principle of one person, one vote by creating a school board where the political power of the Native American community was diluted by the unconstitutional imbalance of the voting districts. Now every person’s vote will count equally.”^{xvi}

AMERICAN INDIAN FEDERAL VOTING RIGHTS CASES BY TYPE

Type of Case	Number of Cases
Challenges to at-large elections	1
Disputes over redistricting	2
Discriminatory administration of election procedures	3
Disputes over section 5 preclearance	4
Enforcement of section 203	5
Denial of access to ballot	5
Bailout actions	6
Other (section 203 interpretation)	6

Though there have been many wins using a legal strategy, there are many instances where the seats were not sustained in future elections, arguing for the need for a continuous candidate pathway. As one interview respondent stated: “The legal strategy is useless without an engagement strategy. Yet the legal strategy is the sexy part that gets big headlines. A lot of the time, community engagement gets short shrift.”

3) Integrated Voter Engagement and Nonpartisan Civic Engagement

While litigation may dismantle the structural barriers that preclude Native candidates from being competitive, the strategy is incomplete without Natives turning out to vote.

While the NCAI’s national campaign “Native Vote” has made important advances in registering and drawing attention to the need to increase turn-out in Native communities, there are also models of local, integrated voter engagement that can be built upon. These models demonstrate the efficacy of continual engagement on issues of importance to community members, not just high-profile elections, and what can be accomplished with investments in building community leadership opportunities and sustained linkage to policy change. The Native American Voters Alliance in New Mexico and Western Native Voice in Montana are illustrative of the success of this approach in Indian Country. Both organizations fit the definition of Integrated Voter Engagement as described by the Funder’s Committee for Civic Participation:

1. Staff and leaders are drawn from the community, including training community members to talk to their peers versus paying workers outside of the community
2. Election work is ongoing and integrated with issue work in a continuous cycle, with election organizing helping to fuel issue organizing and vice versa.
3. A long-term view of leadership development is present with strategies for escalating and grooming leaders to higher levels of responsibility and influence.
4. Enhanced voter files emphasize reaching underrepresented communities and maintaining relationships outside of election cycles.
5. Strategies not only increase voter participation but also lead to policy changes.

“THE LEGAL STRATEGY IS USELESS WITHOUT AN ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY. YET THE LEGAL STRATEGY IS THE SEXY PART THAT GETS BIG HEADLINES. A LOT OF THE TIME, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GETS SHORT SHRIFT.”

The Native American Voters Alliance

The Native American Voter’s Alliance (NAVA) grew out of a community organizing battle to preserve petroglyphs at a sacred site just outside of Albuquerque. In the process of engaging on issues of land development, bonds and taxes, the organizers grew their capacity to understand both issue and electoral campaigns. Though they had several wins in their decade-long battle to preserve the petroglyphs, they ultimately lost against business interests. Leaders from within the organization later established NAVA – a system of affiliated organizations, including a 501(c)(3), a 501(c)(4) and a 527 political action committee, based on the work with the petroglyphs.

NAVA serves all of New Mexico, including tribal and urban areas. It conducts trainings to prepare Native candidates to get elected into office and to sit at progressive tables where candidates are being identified to run and receive backing from progressive organizations. NAVA’s 527 has raised money for and endorsed successful candidates such as Doreen Wonda Johnson in New Mexico House District 5, among many other candidates.

Western Native Vote and Western Native Voice

Western Native Vote, a 501(c)(3), and Western Native Voice, a 501(c)(4), are affiliated organizations founded in 2011 in Montana by a group of Native women leaders who sought to create a year-round voter engagement strategy that went beyond the traditional short-term election funding cycles. Since its establishment, Western Native Vote has registered nearly 9,000 new Native American voters in Montana and ran successful get-out-the-vote campaigns that utilized traditional door knocking and radio ad campaigns. Its efforts have been credited with wins such as getting two Native school board members elected after the successful Wolfpoint VRA case. It also worked to educate Native communities about voting registration accessibility, such as the advent of a satellite voting office in Glacier County that offered same-day registration.

Western Native Voice prepares Native candidates to get elected into office through trainings, mobilizes the Native vote, and endorses both Native and non-Native candidates, such as Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Denise Juneau, Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction. It also works with partner organizations, such as Western Organization of Resource Council, Wellstone Action and Montana Conservation Voters, to assess opportunities of running new candidates for upcoming open seats.

Native Youth Leadership Alliance: Non-partisan civic engagement strategy

The Native Youth Leadership Alliance (NYLA) is a multiyear fellowship program that provides culturally based training, resources and a community of support to help young Native leaders create positive change in their communities. NYLA was cofounded by Kevin Killer, a graduate of, and trainer for, Wellstone Action's Native American Leadership program, and a current representative in the South Dakota House of Representatives.

Under Killer's leadership, NYLA embarked upon a mass voter-mobilization effort to change the name of its local county from Shannon to Oglala County. The county is located completely within the Pine Ridge reservation and was named after Peter Shannon, a chief justice with the Dakota Territory Supreme Court whose actions led to Native land dispossession. As a result of its voter registration and mobilization drive, NYLA won the name change by 80 percent – 13 percent above the two-thirds margin needed to win. Killer shared that the ballot initiative was successful as a voter engagement strategy because it was a nonpartisan issue that helped to change Native perceptions on voting.

It was a tangible issue they trusted, and they saw an immediate win. NYLA trained and relied heavily on Native student canvassers, many of whom had experience working on Killer's run for the state House. It's part of NYLA's strategy to build the capacity of young leaders to take on future issues and electoral campaigns and to change voting perceptions and patterns in their communities.

4) Partnerships with Non-Native Progressive Organizations

In all national best practice examples, partnerships forged between Native and non-Native organizations and leaders. Non-Native partner organizations included Wellstone Action, PowerPac+, Progressive Majority, Emily's List, Emerge New Mexico and State Voices. These partnerships were successful because they connected assets of both communities. Native organizations and leaders brought Native cultural values, an understanding of community

history and dynamics, and political sophistication. Non-Native organizations brought a broader network of resources and supports, best practices and partnerships that otherwise would not have been possible.

5) Native-Focused Efforts Within Political Parties

Creating formal infrastructures within the party system that is inclusive of Native Americans has also worked well to increase Native political participation and serve as a springboard into deeper representation in electoral work. At the state level, there are active state Democratic Native American caucuses in New Mexico, California, Washington, Minnesota, South Dakota and Wisconsin to name a few. At the national level, there is a director of outreach for Native Americans within the Democratic Party, who is: seeking to engage with state parties to discuss specific Native American outreach and organizational plans in preparation for turning out the Native vote in 2016; working to ensure that Native American diversity is included in every state party's delegate diversity plan; and developing a social media presence on Native American Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other platforms. Many Native leaders have become delegates and superdelegates during presidential cycles, and turning out the vote has been a training ground for future work in running and/or supporting other Natives in being elected to office. No such internal infrastructure was found within the Republican Party.

NATIONAL BARRIERS TO ELECTING NATIVE AMERICAN ELECTED OFFICIALS

Interview respondents named a number of barriers faced when seeking to recruit and prepare Native candidates nationally, including: voting rights; financial constraints; gender issues; racism and implicit bias; data barriers; history of relationship with the federal government; lack of a national infrastructure; and lack of research.

1) Voting Rights

Voter suppression and lack of access to the ballot box continues today. According to the National Congress of American Indians, Native American voter turnout was 17 percent less than non-Natives in 2012. There are structural barriers that preclude many Natives from voting:

- Polling booths are located hours away from people's homes, especially in rural tribal lands.
- Native-predominant precincts run out of ballots, such as in recent elections in Alaska.
- Voter intimidation tactics by police and others is still experienced, such as those recently reported in South Dakota.
- Tribal identification cards are often not recognized as valid forms of identification, such as in Texas.
- There is a lack of satellite offices on reservations, which limits access to early voting and same-day registration services.

Recognizing these and other contemporary barriers, Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT), vice chairman of the Indian Affairs Committee, introduced the 2015 Native American Voting Rights Act in August 2015 to increase voter protections and access to the polls for Native Americans. The Native American Voting Rights Act would expand access to the polls by requiring states to establish polling locations on reservations upon request from a tribe, including early voting locations in states that allow votes to be cast prior to Election Day. The bill also directs state election administrators to mail absentee ballots to the homes of all registered voters if requested by a tribe. The bill is currently pending.

2) Financial Constraints

Candidate pathway development projects are difficult to fund for any community or interest. Previous efforts, though catalyzed by deep passion and sharp strategy, ultimately were unsustainable because of the lack of financial resources. While there is the possibility and potential for Tribal Nations to provide a piece of a financial stability plan, some respondents shared that they have not done so because there is not yet a national strategy. Other participants thought tribes were more likely to give to a collective strategy.

2012 NATIVE
AMERICAN
VOTER
TURNOUT
WAS
17%
LESS
THAN
NON-WHITES

3) Gender

National interview participants agreed that all candidates of color, and specifically women of color, have a harder time getting through the gatekeeping system and getting elected than their white counterparts. One interview respondent shared that, even in progressive circles, being a Native woman is considered to be a “double disadvantage.” To overcome that gatekeeping system, respondents advised to be aware of it, give the campaign more lead time, and plan in advance to break through the barriers.

One respondent shared: “People of color candidates are going to have to be twice as good. They have to make relationships with gatekeepers. [So they] need to factor in enough lead time, given additional obstacles they will face.”

4) Racism and Implicit Bias

Again, most respondents shared that race is a barrier, whether through overt racism or through implicit or unconscious bias. For example, one respondent shared that if a white man decides to run, people will say, “we better get on his good side and donate to his campaign.” For women and candidates of color, people will not assume that they will win, and therefore they don’t get that pre-election privilege. When candidates of color do demonstrate they have the values, skill and talent to run, they face challenges to gaining the support of gatekeeping systems even in progressive circles.

One story was shared about how a very strong Native woman candidate was running in a primary against a white man, and she was stronger on every front. When a leading progressive organization backed the Native woman candidate, the progressive organization was accused of prioritizing race over qualifications. The progressive organization had to meet with the leaders of those gatekeeping systems to provide the logic and rationale about why she was a better candidate. Ultimately, she received the support of those progressive gatekeepers, but not without a fight.

5) Data Barriers

Data on Native Americans is difficult to access in all fields and is even more prohibitive when considering data on Native American voter engagement and participation. The voter database contains the official government lists of all registered voters in specific areas and provides basic information, such as names, addresses, phone numbers, wards, precincts and voting records (whether people voted). As part of the 2008 State Voices campaign, a more sophisticated voter database was established called the Voter Activation Network (VAN). The VAN allows users to cross-reference voter information with consumer and enhanced demographic data, as well as tracking voter contacts and other vital information. Unfortunately, data for Native Americans lags behind available data for others.





DATA ON NATIVE AMERICANS IS DIFFICULT TO ACCESS AND IS EVEN MORE PROHIBITIVE WHEN CONSIDERING DATA ON NATIVE AMERICAN VOTER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION.

Without information on voter turn-out and enhanced voter files, it’s virtually impossible to assess the efficacy of civic engagement efforts in Native communities, including targeted campaigning for Native elected officials. There is a lack of cross-tabulated voter files with tribal enrollment and/or urban organization lists. In instances where such enhanced voter files do exist, they are expensive and difficult to maintain. In California, lack of data is even more extreme. State voter files are available for dozens of ethnic minorities, though not for Native American citizens.

Without accurate voter information, Native candidates seeking to turn out the Native vote will not have access to the data needed to implement strategic voter turnout strategies. Native Vote, in partnership with State Voices, is working to provide training and technical assistance to select communities on maintaining enhanced voter files. Alyssa Macy, former director of NCAI’s Native Vote, advocates for the need for more data and research. She suggests exit polling should be done following presidential elections in high-density precincts and wards to provide critical turn-out data to assist with future efforts.^{xviii}

6) History of Relationship with Federal Government

Because of the troubled history with the U.S. federal and state governments, it’s easy to understand why some Native peoples question whether increasing political participation within the American system will erode tribal sovereignty. Native author Jerry Stubben asks: “Will federal forces set about to revive the terminationist sentiment of the 1950s and 1960s because of a perception that indigenous participation in non-Indian politics means that Indians have become so assimilated that their own governing structures and institutions are no longer necessary?” Seneca scholar Robert Porter has also cautioned tribal citizens against voting in state elections for fear that this would weaken arguments for tribal sovereignty.

Yet others make an argument for how tribes have increased their exercise of tribal sovereignty through political savvy amassed against and within the state political system. For example, tribes in California were successful in changing the state constitution to secure continuation and expansion of their gaming compacts with the state. As a result of gaming, California tribes have raised and reinvested resources that contribute to nation building, including education, health care, culture, language and political action that would have otherwise not been possible. And many tribal leaders cite the importance of civic engagement in order to secure, and not diminish, tribal sovereignty.

Joe Garcia, former president of NCAI said: “increasing civic participation among American Indian and Alaska Native communities is imperative to protecting sovereignty and ensuring Native issues are addressed on every level of government.”^{xix} Still, these are issues that affect civic participation, including attitudes about running for office within the American political system.

7) Lack of a Current National Infrastructure

Though elements of a national candidate pathway exist now, or have been successful in the past, there is no current, comprehensive national strategy or infrastructure for Native candidate recruitment, preparation and support. Additionally, there is no organization to coordinate peer sharing across communities that are engaged in getting Native candidates elected into office, nor tracking best practices and lessons learned. Some interview respondents shared that the lack of an infrastructure is the result of a lack of a deep Native leadership bench, or pathway, that would create the preparation and pathway for future leaders to step into national roles.

8) Lack of Research

There are very few books and articles that have been written about Native political participation and civic engagement, and even fewer that have addressed the experiences of Native American candidates and campaign managers in their journey to serve as elected officials. Additionally, research on Native voting attitudes and patterns, and data trends is virtually nonexistent.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CREATE A NATIVE AMERICAN CANDIDATE PATHWAY



1. Build a leadership cadre of Native Americans who have the skills and experience to lead a national Native candidate pathway project.

Interview respondents identified the need to consciously identify and develop Native organizational leaders with both skill and knowledge sets, such as galvanizing human and financial capital, to develop, and more importantly sustain, a Native candidate project. Few could name more than a small handful of individuals who could lead such an endeavor, and almost none of those who were named thought they would actually take on the project, which infers that new leaders need to emerge and/or be cultivated.

2. Establish a national advisory group that brings together experienced leaders based on previous and current efforts related to building a national Native candidate pathway.

Given the work of NCAI, INDN’s List, Wellstone Action and other local and state campaigns, respondents named the deep experience base and capacity that exists today within Native candidates and campaign managers that didn’t even twenty years ago. Respondents recommended convening past and current Native leaders to form a national advisory group that could inform the development and execution of next steps as a result of this brief.

3. Create a national framework and strategic plan for a Native candidate pathway project, nationally and/or in select jurisdictions.

Interview respondents named the following as elements of a comprehensive Native candidate pathway:

- youth civic participation, leadership opportunities and field experience, at high schools, colleges and/or Native youth programs
- candidate and campaign manager preparation programs, which can either be Native specific or leveraged through existing training infrastructures, such as Wellstone, taking care to place an importance on enhanced Native-specific supports for Native candidates
- candidate identification and vetting infrastructure, linked to Native American tribes and organizations
- data analysis of jurisdictions that have population density and leadership capacity to win and ongoing tracking of open seats with a database of potential Native candidates
- candidate endorsements and financial backing with endorsements vetted through a set of core values and issues consistent with the overall welfare of Native communities
- post-election supports, including training and mentoring support
- development of model pro-Native policies^{xx}
- engagement in redistricting so as to avoid packing and diluting the Indian vote
- a comprehensive support system once Native candidates get elected into office to promote positive policy for Native communities

Interview respondents also made the following recommendations:

- Gain clarity about the goals of such a project and what it would seek to accomplish. For example, is the goal to produce short-term victories of existing leaders, a long-term view of leadership pathways that won’t necessarily pay off immediately, or both?
- Increase number of Native organizations conducting civic engagement activities and increase diversity of organization types.
 - Create a map and analysis of existing organizations that work together to form a continuum of organizational structures including 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4) and 527 organizations.
 - Build the capacity of organizations to understand the differences among organization types and consider utilizing a broader range of organizational structures to build political power in Native communities.
- Create partnerships with national Native organizations, such as the National Congress of American Indians, as well as non-Native organizations doing this work.
- Include a data development agenda as part of the strategic plan and work to advocate for inclusion in exit polls, voter files and other data sources.



1

CANDIDATE IDENTIFICATION



2

VETTING INFRASTRUCTURE



3

LINKED TO NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES AND ORGANIZATIONS

4. Create an organization, or build a staffed department within an existing organization, to execute the pathway framework and strategy.

Respondents named the following as needs that could be fulfilled by such an organization:

- Maintain a Native candidate pathway best-practice clearing house.
- Provide Native candidate training, including train-the-trainer models.
- Create Native-specific candidate preparation curriculum that can be tailored for local communities.
- Manage a technical assistance and support center for candidates and jurisdictions seeking to take on a campaign.
- Develop and maintain a Native technical assistance provider database with detailed information about knowledge and skill sets.
- Facilitate peer learning among jurisdictions, either through a national network or through jurisdiction-specific peer exchanges.
- Serve as a linkage to progressive groups and organizations seeking to include work in Native communities as part of their agenda.

Respondents also named the following recommendations for approach and organization:

- **Utilize social media.** Organizations like Color of Change and Presente.org offer models for how to engage and mobilize a large constituent base through social media tactics.
- **Keep innovating and trying new things.** Release fears of not being successful – all of the attempts at increasing civic participation and electing Native leaders are contributing to a knowledge base from which future efforts can learn.
- **Engage young people.** The Native American population is a young and growing population. Partner with organizations such as UNITY, the White House Generation-I Youth Initiative, The Center for Native American Youth and local youth organizations to engage young people in understanding the importance of, and building the skill sets associated with, engaging in leadership and policy issues.
- **Hold a long-term view.** Think about building infrastructure and leadership as a long-term project with a 10-year or longer horizon. Changing attitudes and perceptions about engagement in local, state and national politics will not happen overnight. Funders must understand, and contribute to, a long-term vision.

5. Consider models of national non-Native organizations that can be adapted to work in a Native context.

Progressive Majority

Progressive Majority is a national organization whose mission is to “elect progressive champions.” This is accomplished by: “identifying and recruiting the best progressive leaders to run for office; coaching and supporting their candidacies by providing strategic message,

campaign, and technical support; prioritizing the recruitment and election of candidates of color; and bringing new people into the political process at all levels.” Progressive Majority provides almost daily webinars with titles such as “Know your base – strategies and tactics for your campaign,” “Best practices for writing a finance plan,” “Writing a GOTV plan that turns out your voters,” and “Can I win this election? Things to consider before taking the jump.”

PowerPac+

PowerPac+ is a national advocacy organization whose mission is to increase voter participation in underrepresented communities. Its work focuses on issue campaigns, constituency mobilization, candidate campaigns and research and analysis. It also supports progressive candidates by identifying candidates; pooling financial support on behalf of candidates; mobilizing the multiracial majority vote through polling, research and messaging; and facilitating community and connections through events, receptions and other communications.

Emily’s List

Emily’s List is a political action committee whose mission is to elect prochoice Democratic female candidates to office. Emily’s List has trained more than 9,000 women, has supported 800 women being elected to office, and has raised \$400 million dollars. It has endorsed and supported every woman of color who serves in Congress and has a membership base of 3 million women. Its name contains an acronym for “Early Money is Like Yeast,” because like dough it rises, referencing the field wisdom that early money attracts donors throughout the campaign, and is a good indication of the prospect of a win.

CANDIDATE PATHWAY PROJECT

1 Build a leadership cadre of Native Americans who have the skills and experience to lead a national Native candidate pathway project.

2 Establish a national advisory group that brings together experienced leaders based on previous and current efforts related to building a national Native candidate pathway.

3 Create national framework and strategic plan for a Native candidate pathway project, nationally and/or in select jurisdictions

4 Create organization, or build a staffed department within an existing organization, to execute the pathway framework and strategy

5 Consider models of national non-Native organizations that can be adapted to work in a Native context.



A DEEPER DIVE ON SELECT GEOGRAPHIES

This brief seeks to understand whether strengths, barriers and recommendations would vary by state or region. Given the scope and scale of the project, two states were chosen based upon a) history of civic engagement and leadership candidate pathway infrastructure; b) prominence as a swing state or identification by the major parties as a battleground state; c) the likelihood of the state reaching a new majority-minority within the next 20 years; and d) a population with high percentage of Native Americans. Based upon the criteria, New Mexico and California were chosen.

NEW MEXICO

NEW MEXICO STATE RANKING IN THE NATIONAL REPRESENTATION INDEX^{XXII}

Overall, New Mexico ranks 12th in the country as representing a reflective democracy:

- The gender gap within New Mexico as a whole for elected officials is more prominent than the racial gap.
- Men of color in New Mexico are represented at their current population ratio.
- White men are overrepresented by 17 percent, which is attributed to the underrepresentation of white women by four percent and women of color by 14 percent.

New Mexico established a Native American Election Information Program (NAEIP) in 1978 as a result of a lawsuit from the Department of Justice against the Sandoval County Commission. Rather than being brought into the suit, New Mexico voluntarily established NAEIP to expand translation of state election documents to include New Mexico tribal languages, inform tribal members about voter information and candidate requirements needed during an election, and develop voter education projects in counties with large Native populations.

Natives have also been active in the party system. The mission statement of the Democratic Party of New Mexico's Native American Democratic Caucus affirms its commitment to "increasing the political participation of Native American individuals and allies in the Democratic Party and to ensuring that the party, its officers, candidates, public officials and members respect and support the political status of tribal nations and issues of concern to Native American peoples and our communities" through education, advocacy and the strategic use of collective power. Native leadership has also grown from the caucus into the party itself. Shortly after being the first Native American woman to run as a candidate for lieutenant governor, Debra Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) was elected as the chair of the state Democratic Party – the first time a Native American woman has chaired a major state political party.

NEW MEXICO'S STRENGTHS IN DEVELOPING A CANDIDATE PATHWAY

1) High Percentage of Native Americans, Both Statewide and in Specific Districts

New Mexico has high Native population density, which provides an opportunity for visibility and significant participation in electoral work. Early electoral efforts began in relationship with the SAGE Council's efforts to get an Albuquerque mayor elected in 1996 who would be sympathetic to preserving sacred petroglyphs in defiance of a highway being constructed. The capacity that was built through that campaign later was leveraged during the 2000 presidential campaign and grew from there. This capacity also lent itself to the establishment of the Native American Voter's Alliance, which works in state House and Senate districts containing a high number of Native voters. Emerge New Mexico also has a committee that is focused on preparing and supporting Native candidates for districts where there are an opportunities. Both organizations have contributed to galvanizing support for many of the current Native elected officials in these districts. Districts that have a significant percentage of the Native population can be seen in the chart below.

NEW MEXICO HAS THE SECOND HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF NATIVE AMERICANS IN THE COUNTRY WITH APPROXIMATELY 193,000 PEOPLE, OR NEARLY 10 PERCENT OF THE ENTIRE POPULATION.

NEW MEXICO HOUSE AND SENATE DISTRICTS WITH LARGEST NATIVE POPULATIONS

House District	Elected Leader	% of Native Population
4	Sharon Clahchischilliage	70%
5	D. Wonda Johnson	74%
6	Eliseo Lee Alcon	63%
9	Patricia A. Lundstrom	66%
13	Patricia Roybal Caballero	5%
26	Georgene Louis	7%
40	Nick L. Salazar	5%
41	Debbie A. Rodella	5%
46	Carl Trujillo	5%
65	James Roger Madalena	64%
69	W. Ken Martinez	62%

Senate District	Elected Leader	% of Native Adult Population
3	John Pinto	73%
4	George K. Munoz	66%
5	Richard C. Martinez	6%
6	Carlos R. Cisneros	5%
22	Benny Shendo, Jr.	64%
29	Michael S. Sanchez	7%
30	Clemente Sanchez	25%

Native elected officials are in blue text. Majority Native adult populations are highlighted in light blue.

Below are highlights of House and Senate districts with majority Native adult populations that are represented by Native elected officials:

- House District 4 is primarily on the Navajo reservation and is represented by Rep. Sharon Clahchischilliage. The adult population of House District 4 is 70 percent Native, and the seat has been held by a Native elected official at least since 1998.
- House District 5 is also primarily on the Navajo reservation and is represented by Rep. Doreen Wonda Johnson. The district's adult Native population is 74 percent. The seat was held by a Native elected official during the past four election cycles at minimum.
- House District 65 includes parts of the Navajo reservation and the pueblos of Jemez, San Felipe, Santo Domingo, with a 64 percent Native adult population. It has been represented by Rep. James Roger Madalena, Jr. since 1985.
- Senate Districts 3, 4 and 22 have majorities of Natives within their adult voting age populations, and only two of the three are represented by a Native elected official. Senate Districts 3 and 22 are on the Navajo reservation and represented by Sen. Benny Shendo, Jr. and Sen. John Pinto, respectively.

Below are highlights of House and Senate districts with minority Native populations that are represented by Native elected officials:

- House Districts 13 and 26 are held by Patricia Roybal-Caballero and Georgene Louis, respectively, both of whom graduated from the Emerge New Mexico program. Their districts are majority Latino districts, though they do have sizeable Native constituent bases.

Below are highlights of House and Senate districts that hold opportunity for Native candidates:

- There are three house districts (6, 9 and 69) and one senate district (4) with majority adult Native populations represented by non-Native elected officials, and several other districts with adult Native populations between 5 percent and 25 percent.

Below are highlights of municipal and county governments with opportunities for Native candidates:

- There are at least 11 New Mexico counties with substantial Native American populations: Bernalillo, Cibola, McKinley, Otero, Rio Arriba, Sandoval, San Juan, Santa Fe, Socorro, Taos and Valencia. These regions provide entryway opportunities for potential Native candidates to run for local elections, including county and municipal offices and commissions, as well as school and water boards.

For further information, see the appendices titled Map of NM House and Senate Districts and NM Voter Registration and Turnout by County and Precincts.

2) Existing Political Infrastructure and Electoral Organizing

Compared to other focus states, New Mexico has a strong organizational infrastructure and components of a comprehensive Native candidate pathway, including the following:

- **Youth leadership development programs**, such as the Santa Fe Leadership Institute and the Native American Community Academy, provide opportunities to infuse an understanding of civic engagement and future candidate skill building within its leadership curriculum.
- Native leadership is represented in **candidate preparation programs**, such as Emerge New Mexico, whose mission is to identify, train and encourage women to run for office, get elected and seek higher office. Emerge New Mexico’s leadership has included Native women as part of its leadership since its inception, and its board is currently being led by a Native woman.
- A small pool of **Native political consultants and campaign managers** understand Native culture, values and political landscape.
- **Native civic engagement organizations** are present, such as the Native American Voters Alliance, which has 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4) and political action committee organizational affiliates.
- **Get-out-the-vote drives** during presidential elections have been successful. For example, Sandia Pueblo reached an 89 percent turn-out rate during the 2004 presidential election.

3) The Majority-Minority as an Opportunity to Form Political Alliances with Other Communities

New Mexico is one of only four current majority-minority states, meaning it has shifted as a majority-white state to one whose majority is now made up of Latinos, Natives, African Americans and Asians. Of those groups, the Latino population is the largest. Latinos make up 47 percent of the population today and are expected to grow to 61 percent by 2060. New Mexico’s Native population is also expected to grow. In the Center for American Progress’ “States of Change” report, authors cite that New Mexico’s Asian/Other Eligible Voters doubled from 6 percent to 12 percent between 1980 and 2014 and will rise to 19 percent by 2060. Unlike other states, this growth was mainly attributed to Native American, and not Asian, population growth.^{xxiii}

There is opportunity for collaboration and alliance building between Latino and Native communities – which together make up 57 percent of the population – that holds the potential for increasing political power on both sides.

Yet, it’s also important to note that neither Latinos nor Natives are monolithic in their political views. They both have majorities that vote Democrat, yet they are also part of the Republican Party, especially in northwestern and northern New Mexico.

4) Status as a Battleground State

New Mexico is one of several states with a large and growing Latino population.^{xxiv} While New Mexico as a whole voted Democrat in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, and prior to that for Gore, it had a previous pattern of voting Republican – Nixon, Ford, Reagan and the Bushes. While some have taken it off of the list of swing states, its reputation as a blue state should not be taken for granted. The margin of victory for Democrats dropped from 15 percent to 10 percent from 2008 to 2012. Meanwhile, the governorship switched party hands, from Democrat Bill Richardson to Republican Susana Martinez, in 2010. As of August 2015, Republicans held the state House by a mere four seats.

BARRIERS TO NATIVE AMERICANS SERVING AS ELECTED OFFICIALS IN NEW MEXICO

1) Impacts of Racism and Implicit Bias on Who Is Identified and Supported by Gatekeepers and Voters

In most interviews, racism and implicit bias were cited as overarching barriers for Native Americans in New Mexico to overcome when seeking to serve as elected officials. Racism was cited as a hurdle that superseded gender and that existed in both conservative and liberal political circles, both explicitly and implicitly. Unconscious or implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner. Interviewees cited stereotypical associations of the electorate, elected officials and gatekeepers that categorized Native American candidates as not as credible as their Anglo counterparts.^{xxv}

One interviewee disclosed a realization she made midway through her election that, when she woke up in the morning and looked in the mirror, she saw a highly educated and respected attorney who was committed to making a difference in her community, while others simply saw a Native American woman; she immediately questioned her ability to lead. Other interviewees shared that this barrier exists even after being elected, with fellow elected officials intentionally or unintentionally leaving them out of conversations and influence circles, repeatedly mistaking them for interns, and/or being generally dismissive, even as they hold formal leadership roles.

Interview respondents cited the historical relationship of the American political system and Native peoples as the root of these forms of racism.

Though great strides have been made in countering stereotypes and reimagining Native leadership, racial stereotypes about Native peoples as unsophisticated, uneducated and unable to lead remain. These beliefs and attitudes bleed into the informal and formal gatekeeping circles that identify, vet and back potential candidates, even in circles that consciously understand, and may be vocal proponents of, racial inclusion in political leadership and structures.



NEW MEXICO'S GROWTH IN ASIAN/OTHER ELIGIBLE VOTERS DOUBLED FROM 1980 TO 2014, DRIVEN MAINLY BY NATIVE AMERICAN POPULATION GROWTH.

2) Financial Disadvantage in Campaign Fundraising and Lack of Salaried Legislature

Compounding racism and implicit bias, the cumulative financial advantages for Anglos as compared with Native Americans further exacerbates the paucity of Native Americans in office. Interview respondents cited the financial barrier as one of the most difficult to overcome. New Mexico has the distinction as the only state in the country that does not provide salaries for state legislators. Meanwhile, Native Americans have a distinct economic disadvantage. An average of 18 percent of New Mexicans live below the federal poverty level (\$23,050 annually for a family of four), as compared with 31 percent of Native Americans in New Mexico living below the federal poverty level. And in some tribal communities, such as the Mescalero Apache, the poverty level is nearly 50 percent.^{xvi}

Interview respondents cited numerous examples of strong potential Native American candidates who decided not to run once they learned there is no financial compensation. In each instance, they simply could not afford to be unpaid for their service for the 30 to 60 days the state Legislature is in session.

New Mexico has debated whether or not to change the no-salary system, with opponents citing that the lack of a salary gives preference to older, retired candidates. Any changes to pay would require a change to the state Constitution, which would require a vote of the New Mexico electorate.^{xxvii}

While other elected positions in New Mexico do pay salaries, including city councilmembers, school district members, judges and members of Congress, strong financial backing is still required to get elected. Candidate preparation programs typically ask candidates to map their networks and begin by fundraising with their family members, colleagues and social networks. Yet most Native candidates don't have access to social networks that can amass the capital to get elected.

There are also cultural considerations. Interview respondents cited their own cultural attitudes about asking for money as a barrier to getting the resources required to win an election. In tribal communities, there are strong values related to generosity to others, which potential candidates experience as antithetical to campaign fundraising. Some respondents also cited that, because Native candidates are mostly seen as unlikely to win, it is difficult to raise money before getting elected – while money typically flows once in office.

3) Gender Dynamics Within Native Cultures

There was a range of feedback about whether or not gender was a significant barrier for Native women getting elected into office. Some respondents shared that they experienced Native men feeling threatened by Native women rising into positions of power. Others noted differences between Pueblos and other tribes in the states. For example, Pueblos maintain their traditional forms of governance, which includes appointment of leadership positions and honoring complex ceremonial calendars. Some interview respondents shared that these roles sometimes logistically prevent males from being able to run and hold office. In these

IN MOST INTERVIEWS, RACISM AND IMPLICIT BIAS WERE CITED AS OVERARCHING BARRIERS FOR NATIVE AMERICANS IN NEW MEXICO TO OVERCOME WHEN SEEKING TO SERVE AS ELECTED OFFICIALS.

instances, interviewees saw that there was a distribution of leadership responsibilities – with internal tribal governance being held by males and external leadership positions being held by females. In these examples, interviewees viewed attitudes about women running for office in their communities as either neutral or supportive.

4) Lack of a Coordinated, Statewide Native Candidate Pathway

Interviewees cited numerous elements of a candidate pathway upon which to build, yet referenced a lack of statewide coordination that bring all the parts together. For example, youth leadership development programs, such as the Santa Fe Leadership School and the Native American Community Academy, are not necessarily connected to civic engagement opportunities in the community or encouraged to consider themselves as potential elected leaders. Interviewees also shared that there is no system for candidate selection and endorsement from tribes. Although there is Native representation at progressive coordinating tables, there is no organization or process that is situated to vet Native candidates and help coordinate tribal support. Interviewees felt that, overall, there was a lack of: focused recruitment and support for Native candidates; information sharing about what offices would become vacant; and an overall strategy related to preparing Native candidates to run.

5) Historic Relationship with Government

Natives in New Mexico were not granted the right to vote in state elections until the late 1940s – one of many reasons many don't feel part of the American political process and system. Some interview participants cited a general distrust of government and the political system as a deterrent for potential Native candidates. Some interview respondents thought that strong potential Native candidates did not want to get involved in the “dirty politics” of elections, with their services best being utilized through tribal governments or other community-based work.

6) Barriers to Targeted Campaigning Caused by Data Constraints

Interviewees reported that there were differences in the availability of reliable datasets among urban, rural and reservation districts and precincts. One respondent shared that the campaign tactics that are formulaic in the city, including door knocking and phone banking, do not work in Native communities.

COMPOUNDING RACISM AND IMPLICIT BIAS, THE CUMULATIVE FINANCIAL ADVANTAGES FOR ANGLOS AS COMPARED WITH NATIVE AMERICANS FURTHER EXACERBATES THE PAUCITY OF NATIVE AMERICANS IN OFFICE.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CREATE A NATIVE AMERICAN CANDIDATE PATHWAY IN NEW MEXICO

1. Start young and integrate candidate skill development into model youth programs.

Almost all interview respondents stressed the importance of leadership preparation and civic engagement at an early age. Many current Native candidates and elected officials retold their own stories about becoming politically active, and they almost always began with childhood memories – often with parents and grandparents exposing them to community work and engagement and/or student activism in high school and/or college. Interview respondents recommended not re-creating youth leadership programs but rather working on partnering with existing youth leadership programs, such as the Santa Fe Leadership Institute and Native American Community Academy. In fact, the Native American Voters Alliance already hosts a legislative advocacy day for students at the Santa Fe Leadership Institute’s Policy Academy. The recommendation is to deepen the curriculum, reach a greater number of students through existing programs, and thereby deepen the Native leadership bench.

2. Create a statewide, coordinated pathway that is intentional and strategic.

While New Mexico has many elements of a Native candidate pathway, they are not currently connected through one coordinating organization. Respondents named a coordinated pathway as a system that would do the following:

- **Engage youth**, starting with building civic engagement and candidate skills into existing youth programming and curriculum.
- **Identify candidates** by engaging with existing civic organizations to identify potential candidates who are in alignment with community values and issues.
- **Prepare and support Native candidates and campaign managers** as a supplement to existing candidate preparation programs and train Native American political operatives, including campaign managers.
- **Track open offices.**
- **Increase Native representation at larger tables** by engaging with state and other tables where candidates are identified.
- **Develop a Native vetting process** that includes vetting from Native tribal and/or urban communities.
- **Coordinate engagement with tribes** on issues such as facilitating endorsements for Native candidates, alleviating the need for each Native candidate to do this individually, and alleviating strain on tribes’ time.
- **Provide after-election support** for Native elected officials.

THE SANDIA PUEBLO VOTER TURNOUT FOR THE 2008 ELECTION WAS **89%** - A RESULT OF NATIVE VOTER ENGAGEMENT

3. Change perceptions Natives have of themselves as leaders.

One of the biggest changes interview respondents shared is the need to change the way Native peoples see or don’t see themselves as leaders. Oftentimes, potential candidates see elected leadership positions as a system of government that is operating outside of themselves. Additionally, many talented potential candidates have never considered running for office, or think they have the skills to win.

Interview respondents named the importance of Natives changing perceptions of themselves as leaders, even if they come with nontraditional experiences and capacities.

ALMOST ALL INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP PREPARATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AT AN EARLY AGE.

4. Increase Native civic participation and uplift successes and best practices.

To change these perceptions, respondents recommended increasing civic engagement activities that are nonpartisan, such as Native-specific voter education and engagement on issues that are relevant to Native communities, such as health care, education and water rights. Interviewees also recommended building upon practices that have demonstrated their effectiveness in Native communities. For example, a voter engagement and turn-out campaign was spearheaded at Sandia Pueblo during the 2008 presidential election. The pueblo turned out 89 percent of its registered voters – well above the national average. One of the most important reasons for the turn-out was having a tribally designated lead person who knew how to approach individual tribal members and families, and knew who should be the messengers.

When members of Native communities begin to see themselves as constituents with a stake and a voice in elections and policy that is important to them, they will begin to also see the value of having Native elected officials who can represent their community interests.

CALIFORNIA



California has the largest number of Native Americans in the country with a population of 723,225.^{xxviii} Yet, because of the overall state population size, Natives make up only 1 percent of the total population. California is home to the most diverse of tribal groupings and languages than anywhere else in the country. There are 104 federally recognized and approximately 50 state-recognized tribes, including tribes in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Most California tribes have smaller sociopolitical groups, with many having just a few hundred tribal members. The Yurok Tribe is the state's largest with 6,000 members. California is also home to large urban Native communities. Through the federal relocation program of the 1950s and 1960s – a government-sponsored program designed to move Native peoples from their tribal homelands and into cities – hundreds of thousands of tribal citizens moved to California, representing more than 100 tribal nations. Los Angeles and San Francisco were Bureau of Indian Affairs relocation sites, which accounts for large Native populations in both areas. Los Angeles County is home to the largest county Native population in the country with more than 140,000 Native residents.^{xxix}

California tribes have risen to considerable political and economic power within the past three decades. When the Cabazon tribe established the first gaming venture in 1987, California tribes had little financial or political capital, were vastly underserved by government programs and lived on the periphery of the California economy. Today, California tribes have sophisticated gaming enterprises that generate billions of dollars of annual revenue, which they have reinvested in their own nation-building projects – including development of their tribal governance infrastructures, social services, schools, health care and court systems – and in the local non-Native community. The root of this dramatic shift is their assertion and insistence of their tribal sovereignty in operating gaming on tribal lands free of state intervention and regulation. On the side of the state, in the late 80s and 90s, then Republican Gov. Pete Wilson and his administration attempted to drastically limit and regulate gaming on tribal lands. There were many complex issues at play, with some of the main contentions focused on lucrative slot machines and other casino-style games, and on whether the state had the authority to regulate workforce issues, including the right of casino employees to unionize.^{xxx}

In 1998, tribes put forth Proposition 5, where tribes sought to secure much less restrictive and favorable gaming compacts than what was offered by the Wilson administration. They used the capital they had amassed through their gaming enterprises to hire political consulting firms to wage ground campaigns, collecting more than 800,000 ballot signatures, as well as launching message-tested television ads that promoted tribal self-reliance and investments back into the state tax base. They also invested heavily in the governor and state legislature races. Their campaign tactics were successful. They helped to move the governor's office and the Legislature from Republican to Democratic control, and they won their ballot initiative with 65 percent voter approval. Yet opposition from Las Vegas casino interests, labor unions and others contested the constitutionality of the ballot initiative given a prior state constitutional amendment prohibiting Las Vegas-style gaming. Tribes unified once again, this time with Democratic political allies that they helped to elect just a few years earlier, and in 2000 successfully secured passage of Proposition 1A, a state constitutional amendment that made legal the more lucrative forms of gaming and set the table for more favorable compact negotiations.^{xxxi}

CALIFORNIA HAS THE LARGEST NUMBER OF NATIVE AMERICANS IN THE COUNTRY WITH A POPULATION OF 723,225. YET, BECAUSE OF THE OVERALL STATE POPULATION SIZE, NATIVES MAKE UP ONLY

1% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION.

Through the process of asserting their tribal sovereignty, tribes gained a sophisticated base of experience with the state political system and networks. Yet throughout the years, that political capital has not resulted in electing Native leaders into elected positions.

CALIFORNIA STATE RANKING IN THE NATIONAL REPRESENTATION INDEX^{XXXII}

Overall, California ranks 20th in the country as representing a reflective democracy:

- The racial gap within California as a whole for elected officials is more prominent than the gender gap.
- White women constitute 20 percent of the population and 22 percent of elected officials, while white men constitute 19 percent of the population but make up 55 percent of elected leaders – more than double their population size.
- Men of color in California, who make up 30 percent of the population, make up only 16 percent of elected leaders.
- Women of color are the most underrepresented group in leadership positions. Women of color make up 31 percent of the population yet constitute only 7 percent of elected leaders.

California Natives have also made inroads into the state’s Democratic Party. The Native American Caucus was founded to “reach out and bring into the Democratic Party interested registered Democrats who support the goals and objectives of inclusion, political education, voter training, outreach, legislative tracking, research, and participation in the official Democratic Party for all people. The Caucus was formed with particular focus on including the Native American communities of California in the furtherance of Democratic ideals, issues, and political participation.”

CALIFORNIA’S STRENGTHS IN DEVELOPING A CANDIDATE PATHWAY

1) Financial Capital as a Result of Gaming

California tribes are among the top contributors of political races, both for Democrats and Republicans. Pechanga Band of Luiseno Mission Indians, San Manuel Band of Mission Indians and Morongo Band of Mission Indians were among the top ten national Indian gaming contributors for the 2013-14 election cycle, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Those three tribes alone spent more than \$1.5 million in contributions; the majority supported Democratic leaders, some tribes split their monies between both parties, and

some gave a portion to outside interest groups. National trends suggest that gaming revenue and political contributions will at least continue at their current rate, if not continue to increase. For example, campaign contributions increased to \$10.4 million during the 2008 presidential cycle, a dramatic increase from the \$1.6 million contributed ten years earlier, during the 1998 presidential cycle. Considering these figures, tribal gaming revenue is an asset and may be part of the solution to the monetary challenges experienced by many Native candidates, especially challenges related to securing early campaign money.

2) High-Functioning Tribal Alliances

Sophisticated tribal alliances and organizational structures are an asset in developing greater opportunities for Native candidate recruitment and election into office.

Organizations such as the California Tribal Business Alliance (est. 2004), Southern California Tribal Chairmen’s Association (est. 1972) and the Tribal Alliance of Sovereign Indian Nations (est. 1995) are led by a great number of Native leaders who have cultivated the skills, relationships and networks that would support a successful bid at a local or statewide office.

Furthermore, these organizations could provide a strong network of support for a Native candidate and provide access to the human, financial and political resources needed to win.

3) Potential Alliances with Progressive Groups

California progressive, nonpartisan organizations have expressed a desire to better engage and partner with Native American communities and constituents. One interview respondent said: “Tribes in California have a lot of money but not a lot of people. Progressive People of Color Organizations have a lot of people, no money. Let’s work together.” For example, Emerge California, seeing the outcomes of an explicit focus on Native American women by Emerge New Mexico, has expressed a desire to learn more about opportunities to partner with Native tribes and organizations to recruit Native women to participate in its candidate preparation program. Similarly, PowerPac has named a desire to better engage with tribes and/or tribal citizens in their targeted regions, which include the tribal strongholds of San Bernardino and San Diego counties. State Voices also has a presence in the Southern California region and has also expressed strong interest in learning how to better engage with tribes and its citizens. However, some interview respondents cautioned against assuming that tribes would completely align with a progressive agenda. For example, labor issues might be a mismatch between groups. To address this, one respondent suggested that tribes might

agree to support a slate of candidates in their region who are in alignment with the tribes' priority issues, and there could be a strategic, political alliance based on a small slate of issues versus seeking to create alliances that agree on every issue.

BARRIERS TO NATIVE AMERICANS SERVING AS ELECTED OFFICIALS IN CALIFORNIA

1) Lack of History Electing Native Americans to Office

California lacks a track record of electing Native Americans into office. One of the most prominent tribal leaders in California, Mary Ann Andreas, former chair and current vice chair of the Morongo Band of Cahuilla Mission Indians, ran for Assembly District 80 in 2004. Andreas asserted herself as a Democratic candidate that happens to be Native American in a district that was predominantly Latino. She secured endorsements from then Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante and national Democratic leaders such as Howard Dean.

If elected, she would have been the first Native American – male or female – to serve in the state Assembly. Despite matching her Republican opponent's campaign spending at \$1.1 million, Andreas lost the bid.

The local press attributed the loss to lower voter-registration rates for Democrats in the district, as well as low voter turn-out for those who were registered.

These same challenges may be faced by Andrew Masiel, a Pechanga tribal council member and the most recent prominent Native American leader to throw his hat in an Assembly race. Masiel recently announced his intention to run for state Assembly District 75 in 2016. If he wins, he'll be the first Native American to hold a state legislative seat in California.

Though there have been no Native state legislative representatives to date, there have been some inroads at the county and municipal levels. James Ramos of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians is the current board chair of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors. Mitch O'Farrell, of the Wyandotte Nation, is the first Native American to be elected to the Los Angeles City Council as a representative for Los Angeles City District 13.

2) Small Population Size, When Compared with Whole Population

In New Mexico, Arizona, Montana, Alaska, South Dakota and other states, there are municipal, county and state legislative districts where Native Americans either represent a majority or have a large enough population size to be a viable part of a campaign – whether by raising issues for non-Native candidates to address or by running a Native candidate themselves. Yet in California, due to the small ratio of Native Americans when compared with the rest of the population, this is not the case. Native American candidates who decide to run have to serve a broad and diverse

“TRIBES IN CALIFORNIA HAVE A LOT OF MONEY BUT NOT A LOT OF PEOPLE. PROGRESSIVE PEOPLE OF COLOR ORGANIZATIONS HAVE A LOT OF PEOPLE, NO MONEY. LET'S WORK TOGETHER.”

base of constituents and must have the skills to build relationships and alliances across a number of different communities and interests. Because they are not representing a majority Native constituent base, their allegiance to promoting Native peoples, organizations and policies is variable and lacks the community accountability mechanisms to ensure that they are responsive to Native issues.

3) Lack of Organizations Focused on Native Candidate Recruitment, Preparation and Endorsement and/or Civic Engagement

Interview respondents could not name an organization in California that is working to identify, prepare and/or endorse Native candidates in California. While this work is aligned with the mission of the Native American Caucus of the state's Democratic Party, there are no current active efforts to do so. There are also very few organizations that focus on civic engagement, and none that involve integrated voter engagement strategies. While this is a considerable barrier, it is also an opportunity to found and/or support such a project in California.

4) Lack of Data

Voter-file data for Natives in California are abysmal for a number of reasons. California is among the last states to receive updated data through the Voter Activation Network, and even then, data for Native Americans is inaccessible or inconsistent at best. For this reason, candidates and civic engagement organizations use the California voter file, Political Data Inc. (PDI), for up-to-date voter information. While the state voter files are available for dozens of ethnic minorities, including Armenian, Filipino, Greek and others, it does not have a feature that allows for the identification of Native American voters, making identification and engagement of Native voters outside of tribal lands virtually impossible.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CREATE A NATIVE AMERICAN CANDIDATE PATHWAY IN CALIFORNIA

RESPONDENTS ADVISED TO TAKE A LONG-TERM VIEW THAT IS SUSTAINABLE AND BUILDS OVER TIME RATHER THAN TO FOCUS ON SHORT-TERM POLITICAL WINS THAT RELY UPON A SINGLE CANDIDATE.

1. Start young and integrate candidate skill development into existing youth programs.

Almost all interview respondents recommended that any endeavor to build a Native candidate leadership project in California needs to begin with cultivating youth leadership. Interview respondents recommended partnering with existing high school youth leadership programs, as well as engaging with tribal student associations at college campuses.

The rationale for beginning young is to shape the orientation toward being involved civically as an avenue for protecting tribal sovereignty. Additionally, some respondents also named the importance of young Native leaders being grounded in their histories, cultures and values so that when they become leaders, they understand their purpose in their positions and are accountable to the communities in which they were raised.

2. Concentrate efforts in a specific region of California.

California is the most populous state in the country, and as such can be a difficult place to launch a statewide project of this kind. One interview respondent commented that Los Angeles County alone is so big that one could easily spend \$5 million there, and no one would notice.

Respondents advised to begin by working in a specific region where there are opportunities and strengths upon which to build and slowly branch out to other areas once a proof of concept is developed.

3. Begin slowly and leverage existing non-Native organizations.

Respondents recommended beginning on a small scale in California and forging partnerships with non-Native progressive organizations to include a targeted Native constituent base. For example, partnerships can be made with candidate recruitment programs already in place to include Native participants, and once the candidates are prepared, they can be matched with Native-specific political action committees. Whatever the strategy, respondents advised to take a long-term view that is sustainable and builds over time rather than to focus on short-term political wins that rely upon a single candidate. The idea is to create a team of people who can support a number of different Native candidates over time.





ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Chrissie Castro, (Diné and Chicana), is a social justice consultant working for equity for all people, including the self-determination of American Indian/Alaska Native communities. Chrissie was the lead author and project manager of this report, which is in alignment with her passion of addressing the underlying roots of underrepresentation of Native Americans in the political landscape. She serves as the Network Weaver of the Native Voice Network, a collaborative network of Native American families and organizations that mobilize through indigenous cultural values to inspire positive change in Native communities; is the Vice-chairperson of the Los Angeles City/County American Indian Commission; and sits on several boards of American Indian organizations.

She is also a Senior Consultant with the Center for the Study of Social Policy, (CSSP), a national intermediary for whom she has managed early childhood development, place-based community change and child welfare system reform initiatives with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, First 5 LA's Partnerships For Families and Best Start initiatives, and the Western and Pacific Child Welfare Implementation Center. Additional select clients have included the Institute for Community Peace, Los Angeles Community Development Technologies Center, Leadership that Works, Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office, Native Americans in Philanthropy, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. She is an International Coach Federation-certified executive coach, and is passionate about utilizing coaching as a methodology for personal, organizational and systemic transformation towards equity for all peoples

Anathea Chino (Acoma Pueblo) has more than 10 years of experience in politics, including engagement, training and fundraising at the state and national levels. In Washington, D.C. she served as an investment advisor at Democracy Alliance seeking to build a strong, sustainable progressive infrastructure. Prior to that she was the development director at NARAL Pro-Choice New Mexico and a regional field director in New Mexico for the Democratic National Committee's 50 State Partnership Program. Chino is a founding board member and former president for Emerge New Mexico and currently serves on the boards of directors for Americans for Indian Opportunity and PowerPac+. In 2013, Chino launched a boutique political styling firm working with elected officials and candidates running for elected office.

Laura Harris (Comanche) has dedicated most of her life to American Indian issues and causes. She worked for the Council of Energy Resource Tribes and the National Indian Policy Review Commission. For the past five years, she held the position of projects director for Americans for Indian Opportunity, where she directs the American Indian Ambassadors Program, a unique national leadership training initiative. This year, Harris was promoted to executive vice president after helping to secure a \$3-million endowment for the future development of Native American leaders. In the fall of 1997, Harris was appointed senior consultant to the President's Initiative on Race. She helped design the Tribal Issues Management System,

a conflict resolution and consensus-building process. Harris uses this system, specifically developed for tribal governments and Indian organizations, to facilitate forums with many different groups to build coalitions that address the issues facing tribal America. In particular, Harris has been involved in many activities aimed at enhancing government-to-government interaction between tribes and other governmental entities. Harris is also a veteran of politics and Capitol Hill. For six years she worked as an administrative correspondent and constituent liaison in the Washington, D.C. office of Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM). She has extensive experience on presidential, senatorial, state and local campaigns, including Fred Harris' 1976 presidential campaign, in the national headquarters of Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign, and Jeff Bingaman's 1983 and 1989 senatorial campaigns.

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