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## STORIES OF IMPACT: NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

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We encourage you to share your feedback with us and tell us how you are using the tool or resource. Nexus Community Engagement Institute and our partners intend these documents and tools to introduce practitioners, funders, evaluators, and community members to community engagement and to give the field clarity in its language and principles. However, community engagement is not a field that can rely on written materials alone; it takes a community of practitioners to support one another in practicing community engagement effectively, meeting its challenges, and tapping the strengths within each unique context. We encourage you to seek out experienced practitioners to support you in implementing these tools, principles, and concepts.

Nexus Community Engagement Institute is available for consultation. Please contact us at [www.nexuscp.org/ncei](http://www.nexuscp.org/ncei) or email [NCEI@nexuscp.org](mailto:NCEI@nexuscp.org).

Nexus Community Engagement Institute is continuing the work of the Building the Field of Community Engagement (BTF) collaborative. The BTF collaborative was a partnership between Casa de Esperanza, the Cultural Wellness Center, Hope Community, Lyndale Neighborhood Association, the Native American Community Development Institute, and Nexus Community Partners.



# Stories of IMPACT

NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

## Building the Field of Community

**Engagement** is a collaborative initiative designed to magnify and elevate the power of community engagement to change the way problems are solved and resources are invested. Building the Field is bolstering the work of community engagement practitioners and encouraging other organizations to integrate community engagement into their work. As part of the project, the partners produced a film, *Community at the Center*, which discusses the core principles and values of this important work. They also host the Engaged Learning Series, which are community conversations on critical community engagement topics. This report is part of a series of tools and stories that document the partners' and other practitioners' expertise and learning. Find us at [www.buildthefield.org](http://www.buildthefield.org).

## Building the Field partners:

Casa de Esperanza  
Cultural Wellness Center  
Hope Community  
Lyndale Neighborhood Association  
Native American Community  
Development Institute  
Nexus Community Partners



## The Native American Community Development

**Institute (NACDI)** is a unique organization dedicated to engagement, organizing and development in Minneapolis's American Indian community. NACDI's approach to community development is rooted in an enduring belief in the ideas, talents and resiliency of American Indians, and built on a foundation and commitment to community engagement. For NACDI, an engaged community guides decision-making and impacts the future of the organization and the community.

In 2014, NACDI worked with the community to wage, and win, a campaign to recognize Indigenous Peoples Day instead of Columbus Day in Minneapolis. It was a hard-earned and emotional victory, built on decades of strong organizing and engagement work by American Indians. The story of how NACDI built power for this victory demonstrates how community engagement strategies are essential to building political, cultural and economic power for American Indians living on the South Side of Minneapolis.



Left to right: Deanna Standing Cloud (Minneapolis Public Schools) and Clyde Bellecourt (American Indian Movement) celebrate the Indigenous Peoples Day victory in the Minneapolis City Council chambers.

PHOTO BY NACDI

## HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY

Minneapolis is home to the highest concentration of urban American Indians in the United States. Nationally, the Minneapolis American Indian community is a respected and well-known model of urban American Indian development—a place where American Indian people have created a sense of community identity and place. Yet when NACDI President and CEO Jay Bad Heart Bull moved to Minneapolis, he was surprised to learn that the city still recognized and celebrated Columbus Day.

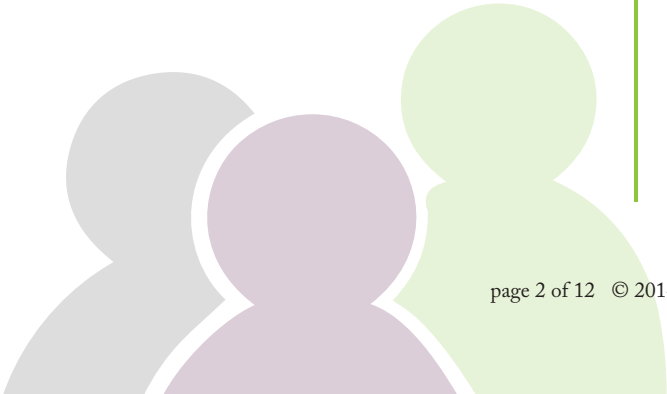
“I grew up in South Dakota, which had changed Columbus Day to Native American Day in the 1990s,” said Bad Heart Bull. “But in Minneapolis, where we’re supposed to be progressive, we were still recognizing Columbus Day.”

Native and non-Native people have protested the holiday for decades because it celebrates Christopher Columbus, a man known to have committed and presided over widespread atrocities against indigenous people across the American continents. One of the first voices calling for change was the American Indian Movement (AIM), an organization founded in Minneapolis in 1968. AIM was organized in response to police brutality against American Indians in Minneapolis, but soon grew to be an international advocacy movement on many issues important to Native people. AIM staged two occupations of Alcatraz Island in the late 1960s, which built power for a strong movement in the San Francisco area.

AIM soon began organizing an annual celebration of American Indian people in the Bay Area, and they made the strategic decision to hold the event on October 12—the day typically recognized as Columbus Day across the U.S. Thousands of American Indians from around the country gathered each year, building momentum for the idea of challenging Columbus Day.

“Columbus Day is the foundation of racism work for Indian people,” says Bill Means, a longtime AIM leader. “People won’t take us seriously as human beings, they aren’t going to take us seriously on issues of treaty rights, racism, our contributions to the United States. They are not going to take us seriously if they think of us as being discovered by Columbus.”

The movement for Indigenous Peoples Day was not only about rejecting Columbus as a hero, but also about standing up for ancestors who had endured genocide, slavery, rape and loss of land during and after his time. In 1974, Means founded the International Indian Treaty Council, a coalition of indigenous people concerned about policy and human rights abuses in countries around the world. A delegation of indigenous people met in Geneva in 1977 to create public awareness about the campaign to eliminate Columbus Day. Despite AIM’s longtime organizing, only a handful of cities and counties have established Indigenous Peoples Day in the past 25 years.



*The movement for Indigenous Peoples Day was not only about rejecting Columbus as a hero, but about standing up for ancestors who had endured genocide, slavery, rape and loss of land during and after his time.*

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Women helped found and sustain the American Indian Movement that drove early efforts to establish Indigenous Peoples Day.



PHOTO BY DICK BANGROFT

## ENGAGEMENT IN MINNEAPOLIS'S AMERICAN INDIAN COMMUNITY

As a community developer, the issue of Indigenous Peoples Day is not on the list of obvious things NACDI would work on. But NACDI's work has always woven together community development, engagement and organizing.

The idea of working on the issue surfaced through NACDI's Make Voting a Tradition event in the fall of 2013, which was the first-ever mayoral candidate forum in the American Indian community. Nearly 300 people attended the historic event, including all but one of the major-party mayoral candidates. True to its commitment to community engagement, NACDI allowed community members, rather than community or political organizations, to control the agenda.

At the event, a young person stood up and asked the candidates if they would take any action on eliminating Columbus Day if they won the election. Only about one-third of the candidates said "yes." Then-city-councilmember Betsy Hodges was the most forthright in her response, saying that every Minneapolis resident had the right to

feel safe and welcome in their community and she would support changing the holiday. Hodges eventually won the mayoral election, and seven new potential allies were elected to the city council, which opened up an opportunity to begin organizing an Indigenous Peoples Day campaign.

In the spring of 2014, young leaders involved in NACDI's Organizing and Leadership Institute for young American Indian professionals were engaged in a process to map out issues important to the community. To build leadership capacity in the community, NACDI works with a dozen emerging American Indians in their 20s and 30s each year, all of whom do community engagement and organizing work as part of their professions. The idea of eliminating Columbus Day in the city of Minneapolis surfaced again, and the young professionals group decided to make it a priority for 2014.

One of those leaders was Ashley Fairbanks, a policy aide for newly elected Ward 9 City Councilmember Alondra Cano. Ward 9 is home to Little Earth, a community of 212 units

## Stories of IMPACT

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*The Indigenous Peoples Day victory validated American Indians as a part of society. There is a strong correlation between how a society views a group of people, how individuals within that group value themselves and how that group operates in society.*

of Native-preference housing, and has the highest concentration of American Indians in the country, with more than 35 different tribal nations represented. Fairbanks' new position gave NACDI and the rest of the American Indian community a direct line to the councilmember's office. NACDI also had relationships with other councilmembers, so staff began to have exploratory conversations asking them where they stood on the issue. Most of the councilmembers assured NACDI that the council would be willing to take action.

NACDI and Councilmember Cano's office worked in partnership to vet language for a city resolution to establish Indigenous Peoples Day. Fairbanks drafted the resolution and Councilmember Cano took the lead on aligning support among her colleagues for the language.

Equally important, however, was NACDI's work to shape the resolution with community members. Each opportunity to engage people around a critical issue develops community capacity and ownership that will build power for future victories. "We believe that no decision should be made about our community without our community," said Daniel Yang, NACDI's director of community building and organizing. "We could have easily said, 'We'll just get it done,' but that's not how we do our work. Engagement and organizing had to be a part of the entire process."

Community members discussed what language was important from the perspective of American Indian people. To pass the resolution, those discussions ultimately had to

be balanced with what the full city council would agree to. Although passing the resolution only required the votes of seven councilmembers, NACDI wanted to secure the full support of the council in the interest of healing and understanding for American Indians and for the greater community. NACDI's cultural agility allowed the organization to work with both community members and political allies, helping both groups find their self-interest in crafting a resolution that could meet the others' expectations. In the end, some language that was important to the American Indian community was struck from the resolution.

NACDI had already developed a strong relationship with Hodges as a councilmember and a mayoral candidate, but staff continued to strategically develop the relationship with her administration after she became mayor. Hodges selected Yang to serve on her transition team after the election, she attended a community dialogue at NACDI on her first day as mayor and she held her first State of the City address in the Native community the day before the Indigenous Peoples Day vote.

The State of the City address was held at the Minneapolis American Indian Center, just up the street from the NACDI offices. It was the first time the address had ever been made in the American Indian community, and Mayor Hodges invited Yang to speak about the significance of the upcoming vote. Yang used the opportunity to vocalize some of the feelings he and other members of the community were experiencing:

## Stories of IMPACT



Above: Celebratory Round Dance at City Hall after the Indigenous Peoples Day Resolution vote.

*The common argument from those outside of this community is that there are more important issues for the city to dedicate their time to—that this isn't a big deal. And they're right. It's not a big deal...*

*It's not a big deal if you've never sat in a classroom as a child and been teased, taunted or tormented about Columbus Day. It's not a big deal if you've never shed a tear reflecting about indigenous relatives and ancestors who faced murder, torture*

*and rape that resulted from this man and moment in history. It's not a big deal if this issue isn't one that inflicts trauma and pain on those you love most in the world. No, it's probably not a very big deal...*

*But if you or someone you love has had to endure any one of those things, it's a pretty damn big deal.*

Immediately after Yang's speech, NACDI began getting feedback from council insiders saying that they made a tactical mistake delivering that message. Yang, however, said that NACDI had a responsibility to say those words. "If you're going to come to our community, we're not going to bow down, we're going to tell our truths and speak truth to power," he said. "A lot of people felt really proud that was the message we delivered."

The next morning, more than 500 people gathered at City Hall. It was an emotional ceremony filled with speeches by American Indian leaders and dignitaries, and watched by hundreds of indigenous people and their allies.

NACDI had printed t-shirts that said, "Goodbye Columbus Day, Hello Indigenous Peoples Day" in English and multiple Native languages. High school students from a local Latino charter school had seen the t-shirts and called NACDI asking if they could join the celebration.

"They said, 'Our kids are really excited about this and they feel a part of this,'" Yang said. "The kids made t-shirts in their own indigenous languages and 50 students came to witness the event."

PHOTO BY NACDI

## Stories of IMPACT

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PHOTO BY NACDI

**Bill Means (International Indian Treaty Council) addresses the Minneapolis City Council. Also pictured from left to right: Daniel Yang (NACDI), Deanna Standing Cloud (Minneapolis Public Schools), Minneapolis City Councilmember Alondra Cano.**

Before the vote, NACDI arranged for longtime and emerging community leaders to address the council. Means, AIM founder Clyde Bellecourt, and Deanna Standing Cloud, a graduate of NACDI's leadership program, spoke about the significance of the vote for them, for the community and for future generations of American Indians. Standing Cloud said, "Replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day in the city of Minneapolis would show my children that it's never too late for healing and reconciliation to occur between communities and throughout Turtle Island."

Means talked about the changes he had seen in local government's attitude toward American Indians in his lifetime. "It's kind of refreshing to come and be invited to this chamber... This marks a great change in our

relationship to be able to come to this legislative body with an idea that has come to fruition: the recognition of indigenous peoples."

In a historic decision, the 13 city councilmembers unanimously voted to establish Indigenous Peoples Day in the city of Minneapolis. In a statement to the community, Mayor Hodges said the vote acknowledged a "living, breathing community that is at the heart of the city of Minneapolis."

"I want to thank the community for insisting on its own behalf that we are one Minneapolis, we are one city, that we are one people and we should acknowledge that—officially and formally—as a city," she said.

# Stories of IMPACT

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORTED THE VICTORY

The American Indian community's victory for Indigenous Peoples Day was built upon decades of organizing and engagement work in the community. NACDI has built an infrastructure of community engagement that helped to bridge community relationships to decision-makers, elevate the community's wisdom about the political opportunity to advance the campaign, and align the resources to win a community-led campaign for policy change over a few short months.

That same engagement structure will help NACDI on future campaigns and issues as well. The organization plans to organize to establish Indigenous Peoples Day in St. Paul next, and eventually take on the issue at the state level. The organization is also involved in multiple community processes working on racial and economic equity issues with other Native organizations, communities of color and allies. Community engagement strategies are at the heart of what makes all of that work successful.

### BELIEVING IN PEOPLE

Bad Heart Bull says that part of the reason the Indigenous Peoples Day victory was so important to the community was because it validated American Indians as part of society. There is a strong correlation between how a society views a group of people, how individuals within that group value themselves and, in turn, how that group operates in society. "We need to recognize where our power lies and capitalize on our assets in the community," he said. "The #1 asset is always people."

### STARTING WITH HEALING, SPIRITUALITY AND CULTURE

NACDI's victory would not have been possible without the organization's years of work to establish trust with community members. According to Bad Heart Bull, that work started with, and continues to require, helping people understand who they are as individuals, what their role is in their community, how to claim their power, and how to advocate for themselves. Healing and spirituality, he says, have to be at the core of that work.



PHOTO BY NACDI

Community reception prior to the vote.

"Coming from a traditional American Indian community where spirituality was at the center of everything, it was hard to come to the city and see how disconnected people were from their spiritual beliefs," said Bad Heart Bull. "As American Indian people, we don't necessarily have the strong bond we once did. It's a big piece of where we gain our strength." NACDI works with community members to reclaim that identity and then to use shared strengths to build power for issue-based work.

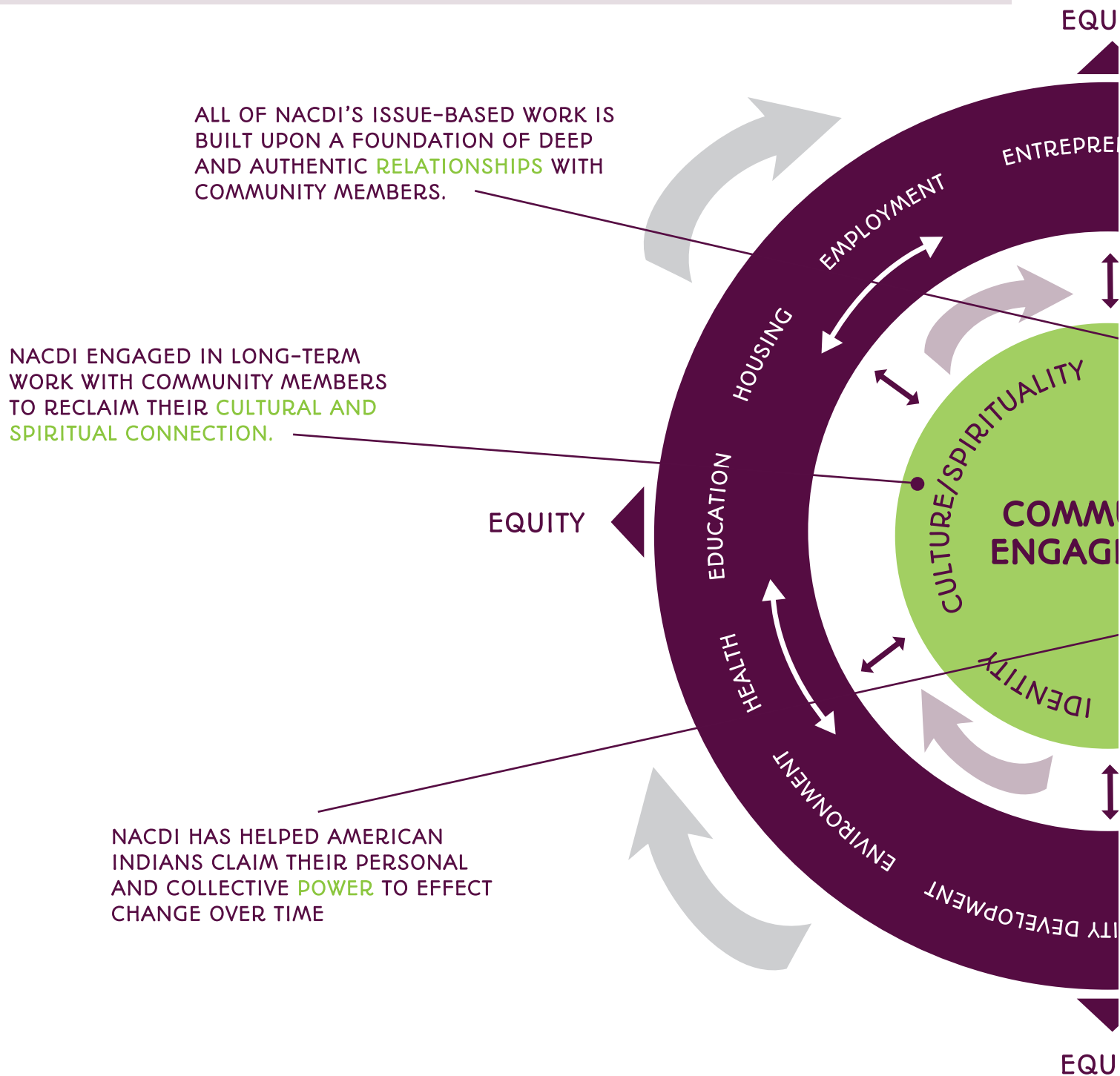


# Stories of IMPACT

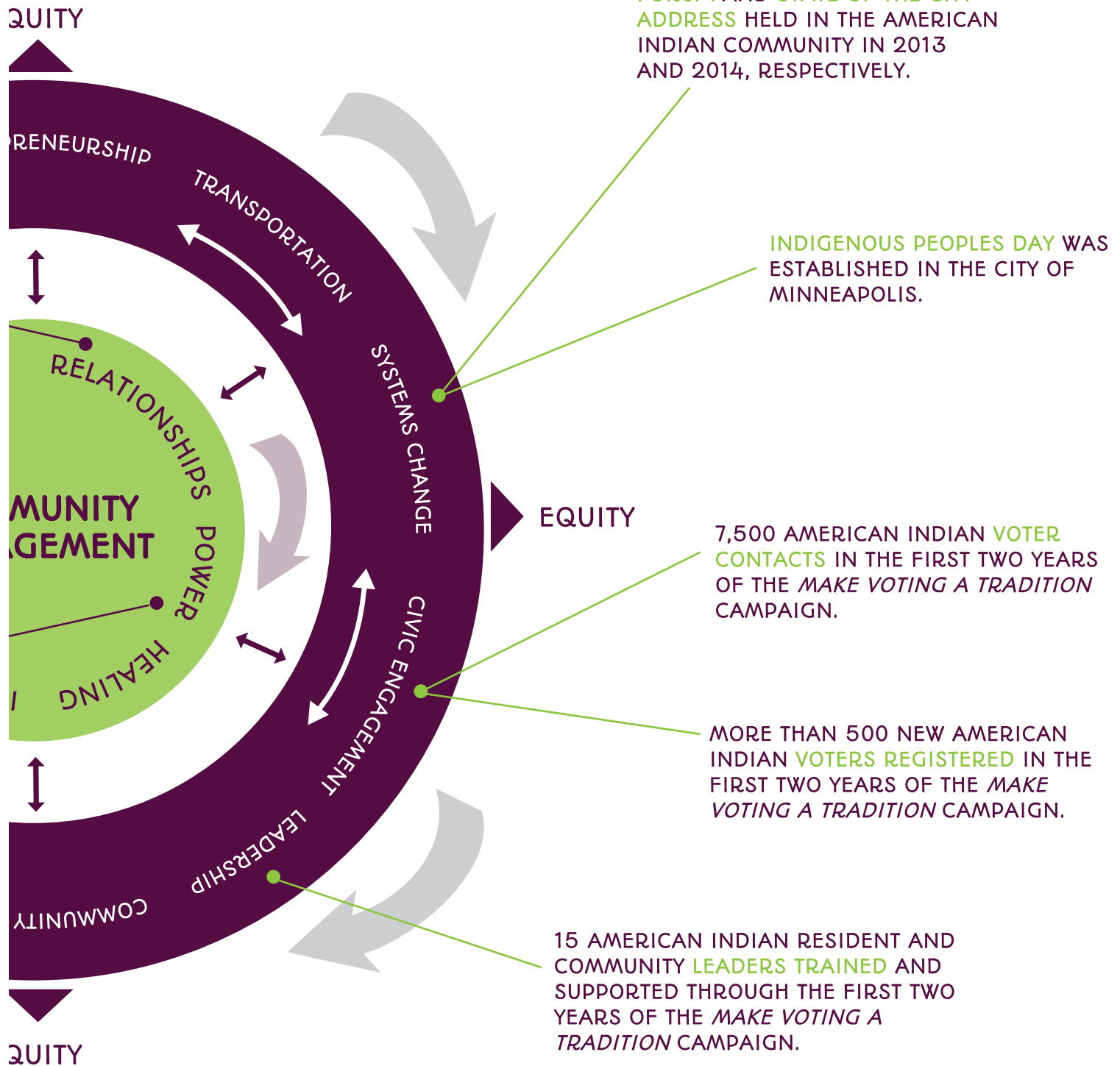
As of May 2, 2014

## THE MODEL AT WORK: NACDI AND THE COMMUNITY

This story is an example of how impacts build upon each other, as shown by the **Impacts of Community Engagement model** developed by the Building the Field of Community Engagement partners.



# Stories of IMPACT



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PHOTO BY NACDI

Young American Indian girl watching the vote on TV outside the council chambers.

## INVESTING IN YOUNG LEADERS

Young leaders are just as important to the American Indian community as elders, particularly within the Native organizations that are likely to see longtime leaders retire in the next decades. Young leaders initiated the idea for the Indigenous Peoples Day campaign, and they did much of the day-to-day work that made it happen. Yang says it's important to recognize the young people who did the heavy lifting. "A lot of the time, it's elected officials or organizations that get the credit," says Yang, "but the people who put in the blood, sweat and tears don't get credit."

## CONNECTING PUBLIC OFFICIALS TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS

NACDI intentionally built strong relationships with Councilmember Cano and Mayor Hodges, both of whom were champions for the resolution. Those deepened public relationships signaled a commitment to pushing change that previously hadn't been possible. NACDI organized Native participation in the mayoral candidate forum, community meetings and the State of the City address so that elected officials could hear directly from American Indian people about their ideas and their vision for the community.

## BUILDING OFF OF THE WORK OF ELDERS

NACDI leaders are quick to recognize the many elders who paved the way for this and other victories in the American Indian community. Staff continue to turn to elders for decision-making and to speak publicly on behalf of the community. For example, the decision to use the term Indigenous Peoples Day, rather than Native American Day as had been used elsewhere, was a conscious effort to recognize the work of the International Indian Treaty Council dating back to the 1970s.

Means says that bridging of relationships has been a turning point for building power for the American Indian community in Minneapolis. "It is the persistence of the next generation, like the staff of NACDI, who are politically astute in the area of electoral politics," he said. "As we become more of a force socially, we also become an economic force."

## WORKING IN SOLIDARITY WITH OTHER COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Allied communities of color were essential partners in the

## Stories of IMPACT

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NACDI President and CEO Jay Bad Heart Bull speaks at a press conference before the historic vote as Minneapolis City Councilmember Alondra Cano looks on.



PHOTO BY NACDI

Indigenous Peoples Day victory, but those relationships were not built as a result of this campaign. NACDI has been strategically and intentionally building them over time, and the organization has seen how developing strong, trusting relationships with allies strengthens the work.

For example, Yang was recently in a meeting where a public official presented demographic data for a racial equity assessment. Yang noticed that he hadn't included American Indians, and asked about the omission. "He said it was because we are statistically insignificant," Yang remembered. "It was supposed to be an equity assessment

and we were already leaving people out. Our partners stood up and said, 'We're done unless you include American Indians.'"

NACDI tells multiple stories of how such acts of solidarity have benefitted the organization and strengthened the movement. The Indigenous Peoples Day victory is just one piece of a long-term change process, so these relationships must be nurtured alongside relationships with community members. When important issues come up, every community is stronger for having allies to lend support.

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PHOTO BY DICK BANCROFT

### BUILDING CAPACITY FOR FUTURE VICTORIES

NACDI's story demonstrates how community engagement can be a source of power for systemic change. NACDI's long-term community engagement work built the power of the American Indian community and created a base of leaders who could influence policymakers.

Bad Heart Bull says that the historic victory for Indigenous Peoples Day in Minneapolis is a stepping stone, a first step in the equity movement that NACDI is leading. "We have all of our elders to thank for getting us into this position of taking the reins for our community," he said. "This was an expression of passing the torch. We want to

ensure that the generations now and after us can have some victories to rally around."

NACDI knows it will be successful as long as it continues to place decision-making in the hands of the community, acknowledging the decades of work that went before and the future leaders that will go ahead. "The values of this organization are to push the dreams, the hopes and the desires of the community and to be a bottom-up organization," said Yang. "Indigenous Peoples Day is what we heard our community members wanted and asked us to dedicate time to. It came from the community. We are proud of that."