



A VISION FOR OUR COMMUNITY.
A VOICE FOR CHANGE.
A VOTE FOR OUR FUTURE.

A REPORT ON THE 2018 URBAN NATIVE VOTE

Prepared by the National Urban Indian Family Coalition



Representatives from the 18 grantee organizations funded by this initiative.





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INTRODUCTION

In October 2018, the National Urban Indian Family Coalition (NUIFC) launched a national voter and civic engagement initiative targeting 17 urban American Indian communities across the country representing nearly 850,000 Native people. This ambitious endeavor was critical for Urban American Indians, which make up over 65% of the total American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population in the U.S., but who are often not included or engaged in “get out of vote” and traditional civic engagement programs. The NUIFC invested \$420,000 directly into 17 Urban Indian organizations in 16 states across the country. The organizations participating in this initiative have a history of effectively serving their respective Native communities with a range of culturally-responsive services and resources.

“At the local level, elections are often won by a few thousand or even a few hundred votes, in cities with Native populations, each vote is critical and Native people can absolutely make a difference in those elections. Seeing ourselves reflected, active and engaged in the body politic in the United States is immeasurably important. We are making the invisible visible. In our 15-year history of observing urban American Indian communities, those communities who have a civically engaged Native constituencies tend to thrive in the civic landscape of America.”

Janeen Comenote | **NUIFC Executive Director**

OVERVIEW

The erasure or rendering of Native people invisible has been and remains a key factor limiting the opportunities and wellbeing of our communities. Native people residing in urban areas are amongst the most invisibilized populations in the nation, yet we represent a majority portion of Native people in the United States. This invisibility has created and perpetuates extreme disparities across all the major sectors of life and community for tribal citizens living in cities including: children and family services, education, housing and homelessness, economic development and employment, criminal justice and health and wellness. Taking action to remedy these gross inequities is challenging because urban dwelling Native people tend to have the least access to and representation in policy-making. This absence has manifested in profound inequities in the distribution of resources, and access to high quality programming and services for Native people living in cities.



Oklahoma City Indian Clinic staff planning for their GOTV efforts

URBAN INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS

The indicators described above are all related to and solvable through policy engagement and ensuring that Native voices are reflected in policy discussions. Urban based American Indian nonprofits are quite literally the “front line” organizations that provide services to the Native community and have often spent decades building trust with their client base. We empirically know that Native people will travel great distances in these cities to receive culturally relevant services from these organizations. These organizations are not only providing critically needed human services, they are fluent and familiar with their own “cultural language” and experiences and thereby remain trusted advocates and communicators with these populations. Furthermore, they provide the role as a collective voice of American Indians in their locale with the non-Native community.

The Native population is diverse, geographically dispersed, and difficult to identify through the national and state voter databases. Yet racially and culturally specific social service organizations and health centers play a key role as civic centers of the community. This in itself makes them key geographic locations to identify American Indian voters.

These organizations are also active in the community, being present or planning American Indian events that bring the community, allowing them to further conduct voter engagement outreach.

Providing these local nonprofits with resources to actually do this work is rare, most of them are operating with limited budgets so the critically important work of civic engagement is often relegated to “if we have time”, which means it doesn't get done. The provision of actual resources to work towards civic and voter engagement was of critical importance in changing the trajectory of our current body politic in America.

“All that we do, we do for the people who bear the brunt of bad law, policies, and bad decision making.”

Cheryl Kary | Sacred Pipe Resource Center



GOALS & HIGHLIGHTS

GOALS OF THIS PROJECT

- Increase number of American Indian participating voters.
- Facilitate a peer to peer network of learning and sharing of proven “on the ground” strategies focusing on those organizations who are currently engaged in this work, sharing to build capacity with those who are new to it.
- Increase American Indian voter participation in the 2018 elections
- Create a structure to build long term sustainability, ensuring that American Indian human service nonprofits organizations are active and resourced appropriately in civic engagement and voter mobilization work.
- Build understanding, implementation and documentation of other civic engagement strategies being utilized at the local level including candidate forums, poll training and advocacy on specific issues germane to the American Indian community.
- Create linkages and assistance to assure urban Indian community-based organizations (CBOs) are actively engaging with other communities of color at the local level to increase power.



Albuquerque, NM



Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) advances, from an Indigenous worldview, the cultural, political and economic rights of Indigenous peoples in the United States and around the world.

AIO's voter engagement efforts was met with great enthusiasm by the Albuquerque urban Native American community to participate in the 2018 election. This was due in large part to the historic number of Native Americans running for office. In particular, Deb Haaland's (Pueblo of Laguna) winning bid for Congress (NM-D1) drummed up excitement, especially in New Mexico. The level of collaboration, coordination, and mutual support was unprecedented in Albuquerque and across New Mexico. AIO was able to coordinate voter engagement and GOTV efforts with 32 nonprofit organizations in addition to private and public partners.

Due to this unique funding, AIO was able to play a central role in an unprecedented urban voter engagement effort that resulted in turning out a record number of Urban Native voters that made a real difference in key races directly impacting their community. U.S. Representative Deb Haaland's historic victory was greatly supported by Native Americans in New Mexico's first Congressional District.

Highlights:

- Collaborating with over 100 community partners (e.g. business, nonprofit, public), AIO coordinated 7 community-based, voter engagement events attracting 3,00 participants.
- Distributed more than 4,000 GOTV materials in collaboration with community partners.
- Voter engagement and GOTV efforts made a direct impact on electing one of the first Native American women to Congress.



The Phoenix Indian Center is to develop a strong community by providing quality, culturally based job readiness, drug and alcohol prevention, youth development and language/culture revitalization services through valued partnerships.

Phoenix Indian Center proudly partnered with Native American Connections, Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY), Arizona State University, Maricopa Community Colleges, the Phoenix Indian Medical Center, Heard Museum, the Hopi Education Endowment Fund and Native Health of Phoenix. Arizona is home to the nation's third-largest American Indian population - a group that grew by 11 percent to 371,605 people, from 2010 to 2016, according to census figures on those individuals who claimed only American Indian ancestry. Key issues that tend to drive American Indian people to the ballot box include education, energy, water, environmental impact issues, Indian child welfare, Federal budget and spending and tribal government sovereignty.

Highlights:

- **Created comprehensive GOTV campaign that resulted in 350 new registered voters through phone banking, voter education, and a voter rally.**
- **49 community outreach events coordinated with numerous partners**



Founded by the community, for the community, the Native American Youth & Family Center (NAYA) is a family of numerous tribes and voices who are rooted in sustaining tradition and building cultural wealth. NAYA's mission is to enhance the diverse strengths of our youth and families in partnership with the community through cultural identity and education.

NAYA's voter engagement and GOTV efforts focused on convening community events, providing informational materials to help NAYA community members make informed decisions when it was time to vote. NAYA's community arm, the Portland Youth and Elder's Council (PYEC), was a key community convening (monthly event to discuss relevant issues) to provide educational opportunities for younger to older community members. In addition, NAYA hosted a Portland City Council Candidate forum, a presentation from Multnomah County Elections Office to present on the election process, and provided a 2018 election debrief. These events generated some of the best attended PYEC meetings.

Highlights:

- **16 voter engagement events with 1,106 participants from across Portland's Native community.**
- **Highly successful media engagement with a GOTV video of community members which reached 7,451 people and had 1,127 engagements.**
- **Played a key role in passing the Portland Clean Energy Fund along with the Coalition of Communities of Color, a collective advocacy organization made up of 19 culturally specific organizations.**

COMBINED MEDIA IMPACT

Despite the grantees having varying degrees of organizational capacity when it comes to communications and media engagement, many organizations were able to capitalize on their existing social media platforms and began bridging relationship with media outlets in their communities. Given the relatively short timeframe for this initiative and some new regulations in purchasing ads on key social media platforms, the impact made in social media sphere as well as the coverage that made it in to local, regional, and national news cycles was very impressive. The infographic below outlines the aggregate impact reported by all of the grantees.

Instagram & Facebook Views & Engagements

 +  3,968,754

Twitter Engagements

 24,869

Media Engagements

 2,857,632

TOTAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

 + 
 +  6,851,255

VOTER ENGAGEMENT METRICS

Each of the grantees designed voter engagement efforts that would reach and resonate with their respective communities. Some of the grantees had established civic engagement or voter engagement programs in place, while some of the organizations had to build their efforts from the ground up. Time was a critical commodity in this initiative but the grantees effectively leveraged their community relationships to engage a range of voters.

Participants attending events and participating in outreach efforts:



70,650



These metrics are based upon community participation in the following voter engagements (but not limited to) hosted by grantees in their respective communities.



Ballot Parties



Voter Registration Drives



Parades



Candidate Forums



Cultural Events



Election Day Celebrations



SUCCESS STORY



Little Earth of United Tribes | Minneapolis, Minnesota

- An 87-year old resident of Little Earth who had never voted, voted for the first time ever.
- Engaged our youth voters, they said, “they felt very important” because we told them their vote mattered. They said it was great to vote when a Native was running, they felt important and included.
- Over 50% of Little Earth residents voted. In the past, the average mid-term voter turnout has been under 20%.



ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

This effort reflects the first time a significant amount of funding was dedicated solely to urban American Indian voter engagement. As such, many of our organizations were doing this specifically dedicated type of work for the first time so the learning curve was steep. The overarching sentiment was that there was a real lack of time to plan for deeper community engagement.

When surveyed about what didn't work during their 6 week campaign, the organizations reported the following:

- Lack of understanding of rules and regulations regarding what each center had the ability to do and not do when it came to political work
- Knowledge of how to collect good data, store, and track
- Working with internet trolls when posting on social media
- Training on how to better maintain an accurate count on social media engagement
- Having access to the VAN databases and not knowing how to utilize those systems – there is a real need for training in this area.
- Putting together successful events in a short amount of time (voter attendance was low in some cases)
- Other outside groups coming to organizational events and pulling attendees for their events
- Engaging with other non-partisan voter engagement groups was difficult as most were partisan.
- A need for training and orientation on rules and regulations on political posting and social media (How do you purchase specific targeted ads in social media).



A FORWARD VISION >>> 2020

The NUIFC is dedicated to building awareness and power for urban dwelling Native constituencies and organizations nationally, as such, we will continue to advocate for the investment into these communities because they know what's best for their community. We feel that our role in this is as an intermediary and an agency that can bring all these voices into harmony to create collective power and to act as an agency to aid in the exchange of best practice models and hub for information and resources regarding Integrated Voter Engagement and Civic Participation.

As we approach 2020, we must critically think of the significant impact we want to leave on our local communities, and our nation as a whole. When thinking ahead, the two things that NUIFC has on the radar are the need for increased funding to build education and outreach capacity for:

2020 Census

Local participation by urban American Indian organizations is critical in ensuring that our population is adequately counted. We know that an undercount has real world impact on the formation of policy and how districts are drawn. In the last Census, American Indian and Alaska Natives reflected a 4.8% undercount, nearly triple the amount of all other race undercounts. Procuring strategies and resources for the urban AI/AN population to engage with Census is of paramount importance.

2020 Presidential Election

The coming presidential election is possibly the most important election of our lifetimes. Ensuring that our urban Native citizens have a voice and a vote and adequate time to be educated and engaged in the electoral process ensures that we will have a presence in policy discussions.

The next 18 months will be a pivotal time for our people, a time when we must all come together, hand-in-hand, and share the wealth of knowledge each of us has in order to improve the lives of our indigenous brothers and sisters alike.



LaDonna Harris, Founder of Americans for Indian Opportunity, promoting early voting in NM.



SUMMARY & CLOSING

On January 10, 2019, the National Urban Indian Family Coalition convened all grantees who received funding from the NUIFC to discuss the campaign, efforts, and strategies for moving forward. It was the first time an urban specific nationally focused Civic Engagement convening was held.

The primary lesson learned for us was really very simple: Our organizations have the strategic chops, creativity and access to community to accomplish remarkable results in very little time. A modest investment into a civic engagement strategy yielded astonishing results!

In 6 short weeks, the NUIFC pulled off nothing short of a miracle. We built coalitions, assisted in providing resources, strategized marketing plans and efforts, engaged with organizers on the ground, and convened all grantees from each of the 17 cities. With increased funding, collective capacity building, and forward-thinking strategies for implementation – we could mobilize more Native Americans than ever before; making our communities who are often invisible, visible.

- **849,481 Native people reside in the funded geographic areas and cities**
- **70,650 people attended GOTV events and rallies**
- **6.8 million people engaged in social, print and other media**
- **300 doors were knocked on**
- **2,500 people were phone banked**
- **10 candidate forums were held**
- **2 Native women were elected into office, the first time Native women have held national congressional office in two of our funded sites (Sharice Davids/Kansas City & Deb Haaland/ABQ)**
- **1 Native woman was elected as the first female Lt. Governor in history (Peggy Flanagan, MN)**
- **All orgs worked with other communities of color to strategize on GOTV efforts in their respective cities.**

We asked each center to think about the lasting impact they were able to make if they had increased and additional funding; most referenced building collective coalition building around education and outreach for the 2020 Census, others said it would allow them the ability to continue supporting staffing for the ongoing outreach efforts of civic engagement. Additionally, it would allow for increased voter engagement training which would create a synergistic and cohesive message through Indian Country. Each center reported that there was a need to have a nationwide database that our centers could access – providing resources to our communities with access to important native voter information.

In 6-weeks, we mobilized, we built, and we made an impact. Imagine what we could do with 18 months! We, as Native people are here, we are strong, and we are resilient!