



Urban Indian organizations provide **essential services** to thousands of tribal citizens often representing more than **200 tribes**.

For a listing of the NUIFC member centers and additional information about urban Indians, please visit our website at:

Janeen Comenote (Quinault)
Executive Director
jcomenote@nuifc.org



MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE;

*A Policy Blueprint from
Urban Indian America*

“ We need to focus on developing leaders, and not just Native leadership for Native people but for all of us.”

– Roundtable participant

Press ESC to exit full screen mode.



TABLE OF CONTENTS



NUIFC MISSION

NUIFC elevates a national voice and sustains Indigenous values and culture through a strong network of urban Indian organizations.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL URBAN INDIAN FAMILY COALITION

Our Goals:

- ▶ To build a movement that promotes advocacy and mobilizes systems to integrate Urban Indian issues in policy discussions and implementation.
- ▶ To build positive and mutually supportive relationships with tribal governments and other institutions for the betterment of our children and families who live in urban communities
- ▶ To create, through dialogue, a shared understanding of the barriers issues and unique opportunities facing urban Indian families
- ▶ To collectively develop and share strategies to address the issues facing AI/AN families in cities
- ▶ To increase awareness and share sustainable service and best practice models for Native American children and families.
- ▶ To sustain indigenous values and culture within urban communities.

The National Urban Indian Family Coalition (NUIFC) advocates for American Indian families living in urban areas by creating partnerships with tribes, as well as other American Indian organizations, and by conducting research to better understand the barriers, issues, and opportunities facing urban American Indian families. Program models, policy critiques, and best practices will be developed through sharing data with participating organizations. We envision building a network of urban American Indian Organizations to strengthen urban American Indian families by reinforcing cultural identity, education, and healthy families while respectfully working to harmoniously bridge the gap between tribal governments and other institutions. Ultimately, we seek to strengthen the voices of urban American Indian peoples and their access to resources. By including NUIFC members in these critical conversations and including Urban Indian issues in national dialogue regarding Native America, we ensure that the concerns of our families are addressed and that Urban issues are included in national policy work.

One of the primary intentions of creating the NUIFC is to ensure access to traditionally excluded organizations and families, and to focus attention on the needs of urban Indians. The National Urban Indian Family Coalition is dedicated to remaining an access point for the exchange of ideas and dialogue regarding Urban Indian America.



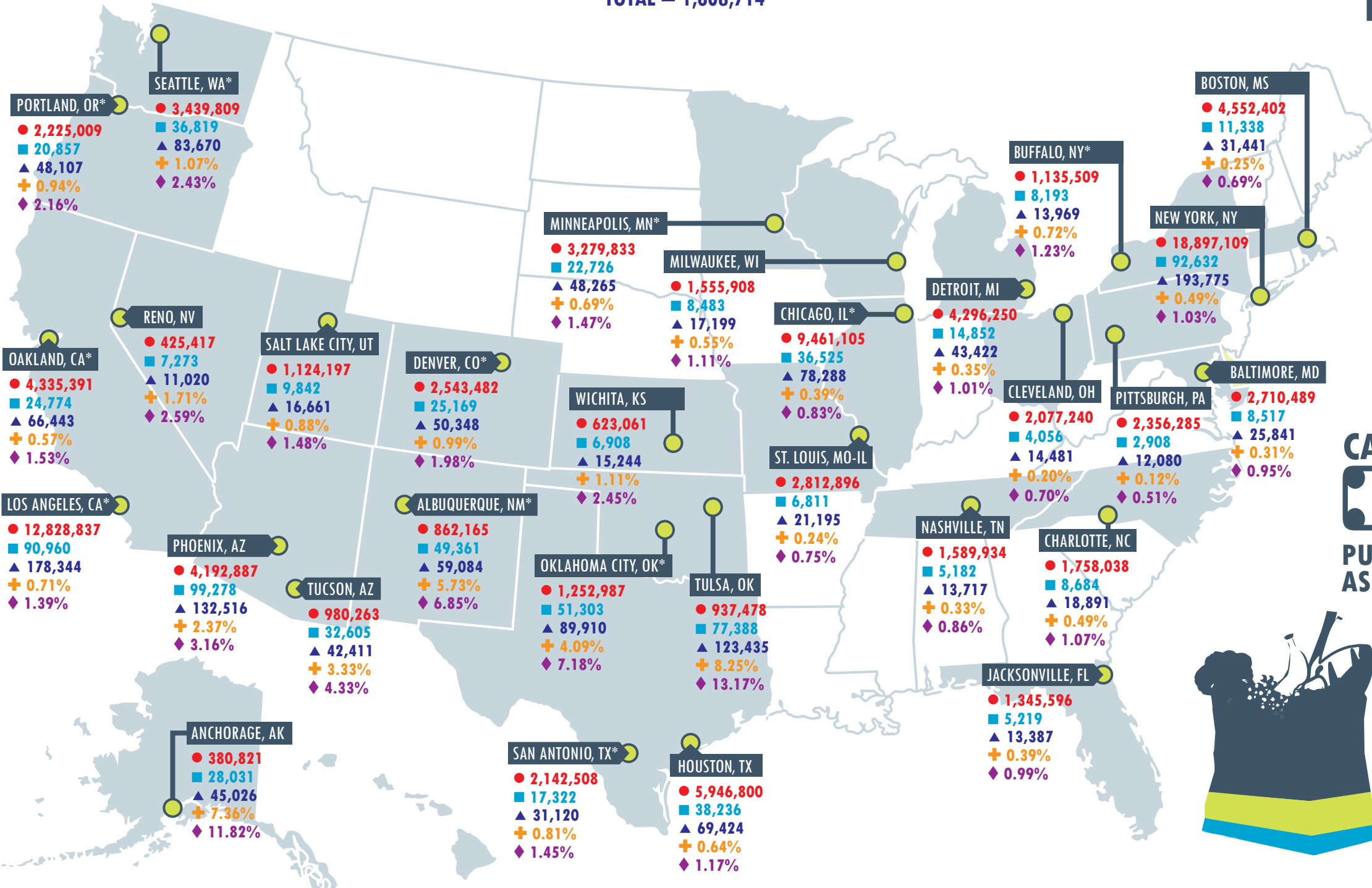
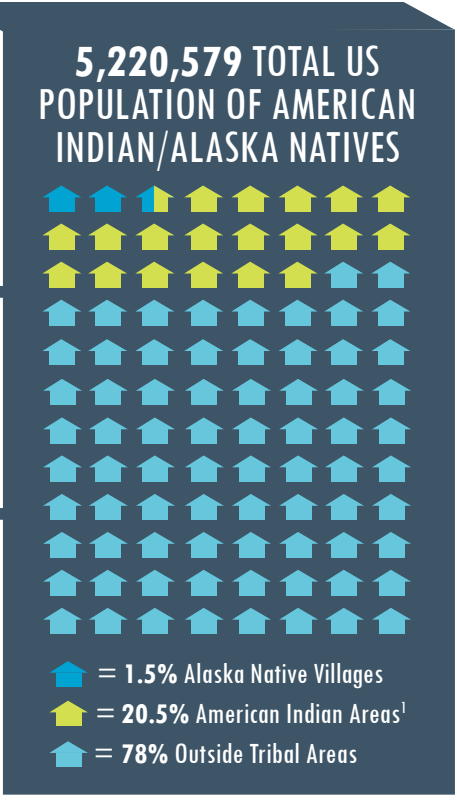
MAJOR URBAN AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKAN NATIVE POPULATION US CITY AND NUIFC GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

Source: Table DP-1
 Profile General Demographic Characteristics: U.S. Census 2010 Based on Primary and Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Areas.
 *Indicates cities who participated in the Urban Indian Roundtables

- **TOTAL METRO POPULATION**
TOTAL = 102,069,706
- **AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKAN NATIVE ALONE**
TOTAL = 852,252
- ▲ **AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKAN NATIVE ALONE OR IN COMBINATION**
TOTAL = 1,608,714
- + **% OF AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKAN NATIVE ALONE**
- ◆ **% OF AMERICAN INDIAN & ALASKAN NATIVE ALONE OR IN COMBINATION**

30.8
median age of AI/AN

40.1
median age of White²



25.9% AI/AN individuals are below the poverty level³

13% White² individuals are below the poverty rate

6% AI/AN households receive TANF income

2.3% White² Households

COMPARED TO...

25.3% AI/AN households have income from Food Stamps

10.5% White² households

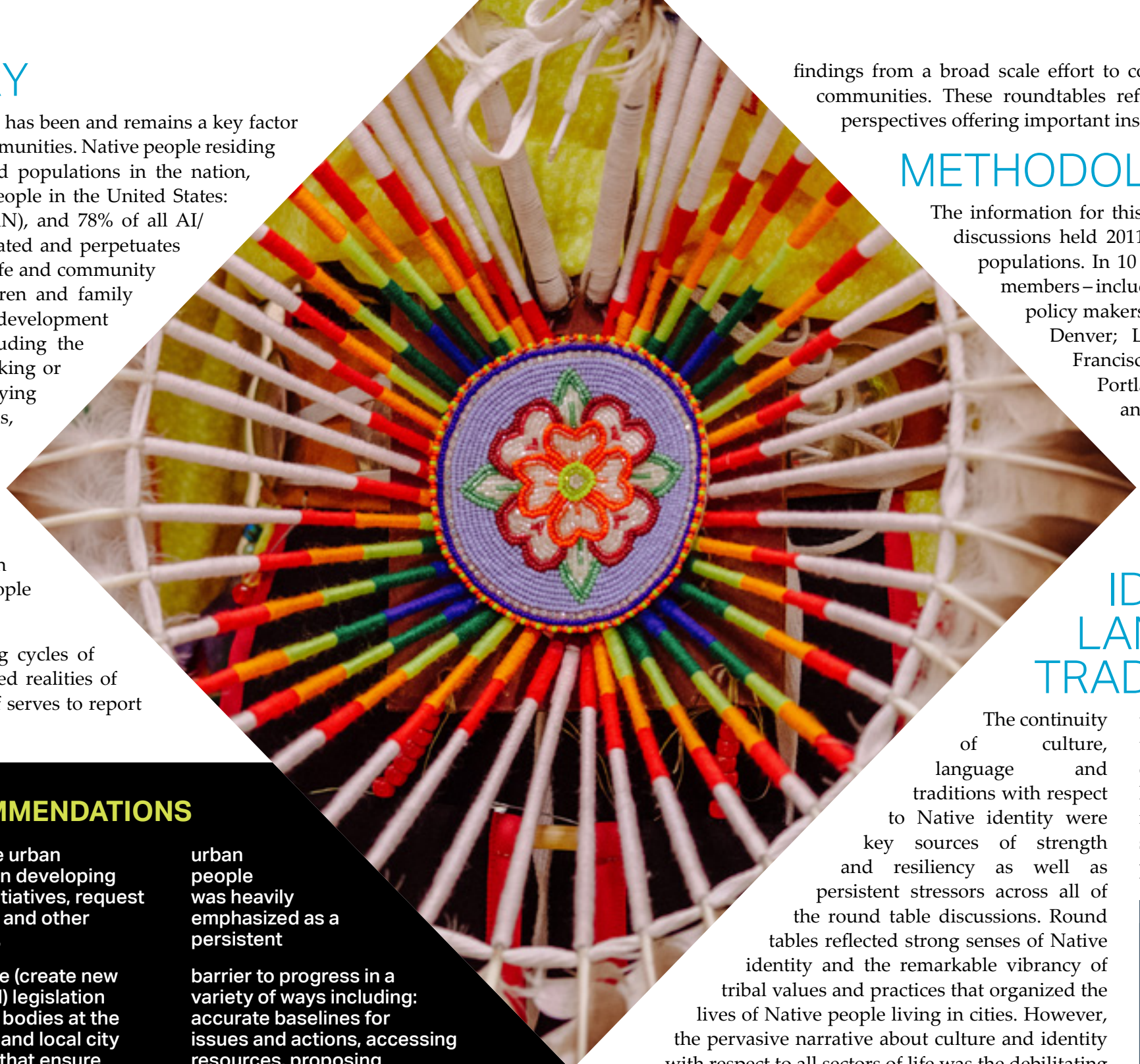
COMPARED TO...

¹Figures for American Indian/Alaska Natives include American Indians Alone or in combination with other races; ² Non-Hispanic population; ³ Below poverty level in past 12 months.
^{**} Figures for non-Hispanic whites do not include persons who claim more than one race.
^{***} The denominator for the unemployment rate is the total civilian labor force population age 16 and over.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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 significant portion of Native people in the United States: 72% of all American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/AN), and 78% of all AI/AN children live in cities. 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, housing and homelessness, economic development and employment, and health and wellness (including the justice system). The lack of access to policy making or representation in current initiatives makes remedying these gross inequities especially challenging. Thus, there has been insufficient efforts to develop comprehensive national policy or effective infrastructure at the local, state, and federal levels to serve urban Native communities. 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.

Making the invisible visible is critical in stopping cycles of inequity. In a continuing effort to daylight the lived realities of Native peoples in the 21st century, this policy brief serves to report



findings from a broad scale effort to conduct policy roundtables across 11 urban Native communities. These roundtables reflected diverse cross-sections of stakeholders and perspectives offering important insights to inform and shape policy agendas.

METHODOLOGY

The information for this report was obtained from a series of round-table discussions held 2011 & 2012 in 11 US cities with large urban Native populations. In 10 of the cities we met with two groups: community members – including directors of Native non-profits – and legislators/policy makers. Those cities were: Albuquerque; Buffalo; Chicago; Denver; Los Angeles; Minneapolis/St. Paul; Oakland/San Francisco; Oklahoma City; San Antonio; and Seattle. In Portland, the 11th city, we met only with legislators and policy makers, as Portland already had held a number of community convenings and shared the findings with this project. Cumulatively over 300 people comprised of policy makers and Native community members participated in the 11 roundtables.

IDENTITY: CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND TRADITIONS

The continuity of culture, language and traditions with respect to Native identity were key sources of strength and resiliency as well as persistent stressors across all of the round table discussions. Round tables reflected strong senses of Native identity and the remarkable vibrancy of tribal values and practices that organized the lives of Native people living in cities. However, the pervasive narrative about culture and identity with respect to all sectors of life was the debilitating reality of Native people being largely invisible and unknown in mainstream organizations and institutions and the compounding impacts on services and programming. In short, urban Natives experience consistent cultural incompetence from mainstream program providers and endure subtle and overt racism routinely. Round tables noted these issues across all sectors of life, from children’s experiences in schools, to housing and employment,

to accessing healthcare. Many roundtables noted that the overt forms of racism manifest in specific challenges with enduring effects. For example, Native people in urban communities are over-represented in: suspension and expulsion rates in schools and in special education; unemployment; police brutality; homelessness; and child welfare.

EXECUTIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

— Create tribal consultation policies and urban Native community consultation policies at all levels. Support and encourage city consultation policies with urban Native communities across sectors.

— Support culturally competent services and programs in urban Native communities.

— Include participation of off-reservation communities in federal and state discussions, initiatives, and investments, specifically in the offices of urban affairs, department of labor, and housing and urban development, ACF,

HRSA. Engage urban communities in developing and vetting initiatives, request for proposals, and other opportunities.

— Include (create new where needed) legislation and oversight bodies at the federal, state, and local city governments that ensure representation of and equitable access for off-reservation communities.

— Support the development and capacity of urban communities and mainstream institutions to collect vital data on community needs, services, and outcomes. The lack of data about Native

urban people was heavily emphasized as a persistent

barrier to progress in a variety of ways including: accurate baselines for issues and actions, accessing resources, proposing appropriate programming, and reporting outcomes but also for strategic planning and action.

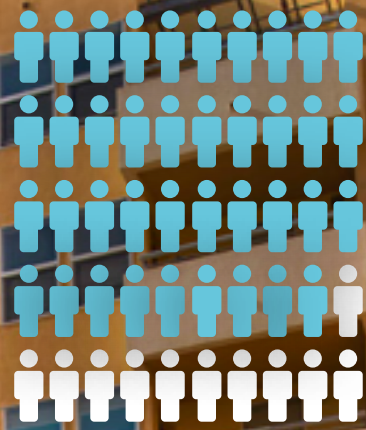
— Support and increase research efforts focused on foundational knowledge and effective strategies focused on urban Native communities across all sectors.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

— Ensure cultural programming is a dimension that is scored and rewarded in proposals and included in outcome metrics for all federal, state, and local initiatives.

— Create cultural competence training, protocols and compliance requirements for all public sectors in urban communities with respect to Native people.

— Expand efforts to support programming focused on elders and strengthening relationships between young people and elders.



1,217,943

RESIDE IN THIRTEEN (13)
METROPOLITAN AREAS
IDENTIFIED BY THE NUIFC

*2011-2013 American Community Survey

78%

OF AI/AN NOW
RESIDE OFF
RESERVATION

URBAN PARTNERSHIPS: CRITICAL NATIONAL POLICY FOR URBAN NATIVE CONSTITUENCIES

The changing needs, demographics and geographies of AI/AN peoples demand a comprehensive urban policy strategy. Urban community based organizations have been the primary institutional efforts to provide service to these communities, with little to no policy support and severe under-funding. Since 2006, the NUIFC has been in dialogue with the National Association of Friendship Centres as well as the Canadian federal government to examine urban Aboriginal policy in Canada. The key strategy is reflected in the Urban Partnerships program which provides resources for Canada's urban Aboriginal population. UAS is a strategic framework implemented by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) to address urban Aboriginal issues in the multi-jurisdictional and multi-stakeholder environment of Canada's urban centres. The National Association of Friendship Centers (NAFC) is responsible for administering \$43 million of the UAS, which includes the Urban Partnerships Program. UP is one of two available funding streams made possible by the renewed UAS. Funding for UP is distributed by the NAFC to meet the needs of aboriginal people living in an urban environment.

Urban Indian organizations provide **essential services** to thousands of tribal citizens often representing more than **200 tribes**.

UTILIZING URBAN INDIAN MULTI-SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Urban Indian organizations have been in existence in some form since there have been Native Americans living in cities in the United States. These organizations embody the practice based expertise and are a key sight of opportunity in developing comprehensive strategies. Urban Indians organized more formally beginning in the 1950's and gained influence during the American Indian Movement of the 1960's and 1970's. Native families in urban areas maintain their values and ties with each other through urban Indian centers, which act as the centerpiece for Native American culture, providing culturally relevant services to children and families. Since 1970, the number of urban AI/AN organizations has grown, as has the number of services they offer. Remarkably, these organizations provide a wide range of culturally sensitive programs to a very diverse clientele on limited budgets. Urban Indian centers were successful in raising awareness of the needs of their constituencies and in opening some access to social and economic programs.

FEDERAL POLICY

The federal government has been limited in support of urban AI/IN, despite its own recommendations to do so. Congress commissioned two reports on the status of rural and urban non-reservation AI/AN, one in 1928 and one in 1976. The 1976 report concluded that the federal government had not met their responsibility to provide for the undeniable needs of urban AI/AN. Furthermore, the 1976 report stated that the federal government had created a

national split between urban and reservation AI/AN by forcing them to compete for funding from a very limited pool of resources.

1990 saw a demographic change for AI/AN: for the first time in history, 51% of all AI/AN lived in metropolitan areas. Prior to 1990, the majority of AI/AN lived on reservations and trust lands. This movement to metropolitan areas has steadily increased over the last twenty years. As of 2000, 66% of all AI/AN lived in metropolitan areas. By 2010, 78% of AI/AN lived off reservations.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

It is the strong recommendation of the National Urban Indian Family Coalition and our partners that the United States Federal Government engage in a process with both tribal and urban leaders to design policy and program strategies that mirrors the Urban Aboriginal Partnership in Canada.

We advocate for core funding for these multi-service organizations to maintain and expand their capacity to provide critically important services to this vulnerable population. As a series of opening steps we recommend:

- 1 Develop in concert with key stakeholders a timeline, framework and goals for a national federally driven Urban Indian strategy.
- 2 Identify which federal department could coordinate a project of this scope. The NUIFC potentially recommends the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) or the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) mechanism employed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

“ We are many. We are diverse. We represent our many cultures. We are a resource. We influence our people. We have roots and heritage. We live in two worlds. We feel unity when we gather. We have dual citizenships. We are the caretakers for our aging elders and children. We are the link to those who have left home. We are you.”

-Katherine Gottlieb (Aleut)
President, Southcentral Foundation
Anchorage, AK

32.1%

OF AI/AN INDIVIDUALS BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 18

17.8% of White (non-Hispanic) individuals are below the poverty level and under the age of 18

OF CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 18:

30%

OF AI/AN POPULATION IS UNDER 18 YEARS OLD

While 21.6% of the White (non-Hispanics) population are under the age of 18



EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ Expand and support early childhood programming for urban Native communities both at the federal and state level.
- ▶ Increase the amount of Head Start and Early Head Start programs operated by urban Indian organizations and consider the inclusion of urban Indian organization into Region XI.
- ▶ Increase support and training for the development of high quality Native family daycares in urban communities.
- ▶ Create and resource a network of after-school and summer programs across urban Native communities focused on academics, social-emotional health, culture, and leadership.
- ▶ Ensure organizations serving urban communities are eligible for federal and state opportunities (e.g. Indian Education Demonstration Grants)
- ▶ Include an urban focus in the State Tribal Education Partnerships (STEP). Support urban districts in applying for and participating in STEP.
- ▶ Expand education and job training programming and services aimed at 18-25 year olds.
- ▶ Expand capacity to collect accurate and coordinated academic data about Native children in urban communities, including attendance, suspension and expulsion, standardized test scores, homework completion, and grade.
- ▶ Target and partner with teacher education programs feeding urban districts to include issues related to Native people in their teacher preparation.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The heart of Native communities resides in our familial relations and the extent to which we can raise our children to lead our communities in the 21st century. Serious investment in preparing our youth to be our next leaders, given the range of challenges we collectively face, could not be more pressing. A resounding need across the roundtables was increasing opportunities for Native youth and their families to thrive. Education and training, both formal and informal (after-school, summer, community) across the life course was critical across each community. In this section we focus on children and youth and their families. Children and youth related policy recommendations include:

FAMILY RELATED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand family engagement and family education programs from strength-based perspectives.
- Increase resources to provide comprehensive supports for families in or recovering from crisis and violence. Revise current eligibility to include programs that serve urban Native communities.
- Ensure ICWA is fully implemented in urban communities and increase requirements and training for foster parent certification using exemplar states as a model. This requires coordination of cross county-based child welfare programs.
- Increase and support extended family members, especially grandparents, involvement in Native children's lives and for those extended family members serving as caregivers.
- Increase access and support to programming and opportunities focused on Native men and boys, and fathers more specifically, in urban communities.
- Develop family based data collection processes to track familial well being over time. Ensure that this data reflects both tribally enrolled family members and descendant status family members.

59.3%

**OF AI/AN
POPULATION
16 AND OVER
ARE EMPLOYED**

While 63.3% of White (non-Hispanic) population 16 and over are employed.

The **unemployment rate of the AI/AN population is 15.6%**, almost double than the White population which is **8%** unemployed.

EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Poverty and the manifesting issues born of poverty plague Native people and are reflected in the persistent and rampant rates of unemployment, under-achievement in education, inadequate job training programs and employment opportunities. Increasing focus on employment and economic development is critical for Native communities. Many roundtables noted that these dynamics are heightened because many people hold stereotypes of casinos and wealthy tribes in the broader urban community. Not only do these stereotypes affect individuals, they also affect Native serving organizations - effectively creating poverty stricken organizations. In exploring solutions, roundtables were quick to recognize that often these issues are positioned in such a way that urban and reservation communities are in competition. In short, serious economic development efforts in urban Native communities has been largely non-existent but are desperately needed for long-term change.

EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

Develop of a strategy to broadly integrate housing, community development, economic empowerment and stability, possibly through a block grant funding structure.

Enact policies to address unique employment and training needs for urban Native Indian youth. These policies should be interwoven with education systems that promote transferable skill sets, and culturally specific workforce development.

Increase efforts to support Native adults and diversify opportunities of job training programs.

Increase communities' knowledge of contracts and service possibilities. Support agencies with technical assistance to help cultivate urban Native organizations capacity and competitiveness for winning contracts.

Explore ways of supporting the development of small businesses and other entrepreneurial efforts amongst urban Native communities.

It's important to note that recommendations for other strands could be replicated here particularly with respect to children and families as these are intertwined issues.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Ensuring that Native people have safe, reliable homes is critical to rebuilding healthy communities and raising thriving young people. Further, the role of housing in economic security is critical however Native people are over-represented in homelessness and under-represented in home ownership. This two-tailed dynamic is unique to Native peoples suggesting community specific issues and not simply a common problem also being experienced by the Native community. Further the program of Native homelessness is biting given our histories and is a profound reminder of this history.

Round-table discussions focused on the role of housing in several ways. First they noted the high rates of homelessness and the lack of resources to serve homeless populations. These rates are appalling and demand immediate action but communities largely reported not having the resources or capacity to respond effectively. Roundtables noted that they saw a connection between homelessness and the deep need for supportive housing for Native people transitioning from reservations to the city. Some roundtables noted that employees of community organization became makeshift transitional housing or they scrambled to find community members who would help.

The lack of access to affordable housing is reflected in housing policies failure to focus on urban Native communities, for example HUD programming for Native people. Further participants noted that there is a paucity of efforts working on fostering home ownership for Native people in urban communities A final dimension mentioned was the lack of housing for ex-offenders or programming the supported ex-offenders and their families during transition times.

\$127,000 is the median **value of owner occupied homes among AI/AN households**, while White (non-Hispanic) households occupy homes with a **median value almost 40% higher of \$174,600.**

HOUSING TENURE

53.3%
**OF AI/AN
POPULATION
ARE HOME-
OWNERS
WHILE**

46.7%
ARE RENTING

Among the White (non-Hispanic) population 69.3% own their homes, while 30.7% rent

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- ▶ Significantly increase resources to serve and solve Native homelessness, including resources for adults and especially families. The need to focus on homelessness in families is critical in disrupting issues of education, behavioral health, and child removal.
- ▶ Ensure urban Native communities have access and are included to housing and homelessness initiatives.
- ▶ Support a variety of transitional housing programs. Partner with tribes to support newly relocated families.
- ▶ Increase access to housing programs for urban Native communities at the federal, state, and city levels.
- ▶ Increase efforts to foster home ownership and support technical assistance for homeowners across the course of homeownership.
- ▶ Increase homeowner's financial literacy and support for home improvement.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

There has been important progress made with respect to health and wellness in Native communities. The issues raised by roundtables tended to focus on issues of access to high quality culturally competent health care options and issues more broadly focused on wellness and living healthy lifestyles. Thus there is an increasing need for continued improvement of successful health and wellness related services.

While many of the organizations involved in the NUIFC provide healthcare and all of our participant organizations provide programs that address many determinates of well-being, it should be noted here that there are two resources that are critically informative for urban Indian constituencies – the [National Council on Urban Indian Health](http://www.ncuih.org) www.ncuih.org and the [Urban Indian Health Institute](http://www.uihi.org) www.uihi.org. It is the intent of the NUIFC that health related information and issues go to these organizations.



COLLABORATION, COALITION BUILDING, AND STRATEGIC ACTION

Across the roundtables the power of community coalitions and strategic actions was articulated repeatedly. Many communities reflected that their biggest successes were achieved when there was collective organizing and action especially when allies and political representatives were also involved. Communities noted how challenging creating and maintain such relationships are, and identified four challenges to success. Some of the recurrent themes were:

HEALTH AND WELLNESS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Ensure Native representation on health related policy-making bodies at the federal, state, and local levels – not just those bodies focused on Native communities.
- Ensure all urban Indian health organizations have adequate funding to support clinics, dental, mental health, and support and prevention programs.
- Create legislative actions that enable more efficient specialty care access for Native people.
- Increase focus on wellness and healthy life styles, especially by increasing access to healthy foods.
- Increase funding and integrated supports between food banks and Native organizations.
- Increase funding to support licensed child psychologists who can perform school related assessments, testing and counseling. This could include specific incentives for Native people to enter the field.
- Increase physical activity programming across the life course.



BUILDING TRUSTING AND PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS takes lasting commitment and time that is often not aligned with bureaucratic and funding timelines. From community perspective, this disconnect results in many false starts compounding distrust and creates cycles in which new efforts inherit the lack of accountability often arising from past efforts.

BUILDING THE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AND CAPACITY to influence legislative processes seemed universally needed. Either having or needing to develop relationships with legislatures and legislative bodies was echoed across communities.

THE NEED TO CHOOSE SPECIFIC ISSUES and work to place representatives in key positions effecting those issues. A challenge related to this was having the human resources to do this as many community leaders are often over-extended as it is.

THE NEED TO PARTNER WITH FUNDERS AND ALLIES to help develop a broader well informed knowledge base and to shift public narratives about Native people. Roundtable suggested that investment in large public events and public media campaigns and communication were important so that Native peoples visibility in large urban centers was increased.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The NUIFC would like to extend our deepest appreciation to the urban Indian organizations, policy makers and Native community members in the 11 cities in which we conducted the roundtables as well as the following individuals who helped draft this paper:

Megan Bang, PhD (Ojibwe and Italian decent)

Megan is a professor of the Learning Sciences and Human Development in Educational Psychology at the University of Washington. She is the former Director of Education at the American Indian Center of Chicago (AIC). She conducts research on culture, learning, and teaching across the life course and in both formal and informal contexts with a focus on Science. She utilizes community-based methodologies that work to empower local community and build capacity. Megan is a mother of three and auntie to many.

Maura Grogan

An independent consultant with more than 30 years experience in organizational improvement, including expertise in finance, business and consumer research, marketing and communications, and strategic planning. Ms. Grogan has managed numerous research projects including focus groups, consumer surveys and one-on-one interviews with entities ranging from major corporations to small non-profits. She has a Bachelor's degree from Yale University.

Crystal Florez (White Earth Ojibwe)

Crystal earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Washington, where she studied American Indian Studies. She is currently a graduate candidate in the Master of Public Administration program, with an emphasis in Tribal Governance, at the Evergreen State College. She hopes to serve as a change agent for her communities and those alike, by committing to the efforts of the NUIFC and other local urban Indian support organizations in promoting healing, sustainable, and responsive national policy for the vitality of urban Native communities.

Funded by Marguerite Casey Foundation

Designed by euniQue LLC

www.euniQuecreative.com

"A Native American Woman Owned Company"

Published June 2015

MAKING
THE INVISIBLE
VISIBLE