



National Native organizations receive funding to pursue *First Kids 1st: Every Native Child is Sacred* initiative

Washington, DC – This week, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded a generous grant to the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), and the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) to support a nationwide campaign to lift up and support Native youth.

This initiative - called *First Kids 1st: Every Native Child is Sacred* - aims to galvanize systems changes in education, health, welfare, and governance to better support Native children and youth. In each of these areas, community-determined and community-driven changes will improve the systems that impact Native youth, allowing them more and better opportunities to achieve their full potential.

The collaboration began in 2008 with the creation of the original National Children's Agenda, crafted by these four partner organizations and also funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The Agenda was updated in 2015 as the [Native Children's Policy Agenda: Putting First Kids 1st](#), with tribal strategies and policy objectives to implement its principles. The partners look forward to engaging with tribal leaders, community leaders, tribal citizens, and Native youth across Indian Country and the nation to realize the vision of *First Kids 1st*.

"*First Kids 1st* asks for all of us to make our Native children and youth our first priority. In whatever position we hold, we all have the opportunity to ensure our youth will thrive and prosper. Through love, responsibility, and focus we can take opportunities for our children and youth to the next level," shared NCAI Executive Director Jaqueline Pata.

The *First Kids 1st* initiative comes at a pivotal time, with Native youth making up 39 percent of the American Indian and Alaska Native population. These demographic trends bring unique opportunities to address some of the longstanding disparities seen in Indian Country and Native communities. Through multi-media communications, community engagement, data development, policy analysis, and capacity building, the *First Kids 1st* Campaign will offer a range of strategies, activities and tools so that communities can design and implement the solutions that best address their needs.

NICWA Executive Director Sarah Kastelic stated, "Our *First Kids 1st* team looks forward to working alongside all of our community partners. No one organization can do this work alone; we need each other to address the needs of children and youth holistically. Collaboration makes our vision clearer, our efforts stronger, and our success more certain."

With the new funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, *First Kids 1st* will reinforce outreach efforts and ramp up capacity building trainings beginning this summer and fall. "We know that targeted, sustained, and smart investments can make all the difference in our tribal communities. This is an exciting time and

we are honored to have a role in that investment in our Native children and youth.” shared Stacy Bohlen, NIHB Executive Director.

Campaign partners also look forward to sharing the updated 2015 *Native Children’s Policy Agenda: Putting First Kids 1st*, and providing youth data and policy recommendations. “Decision makers at every level need real-time, accurate information about our children and youth. Part of our charge will be to drill down on that data, and share it broadly so that policies and programs designed for our youth bring the benefits they promise,” stated NIEA Executive Director Ahniwake Rose.

“This campaign is about caring communities creating capable and confident kids. It’s as simple as that,” said Pata. The *First Kids 1st* partner organizations invite all who care about Native children and youth to join the initiative and help spread the word. Please contact Carolyn Hornbuckle with NCAI at chornbuckle@ncai.org.

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About The National Congress of American Indians

Founded in 1944, the National Congress of American Indians advocates on behalf of tribal governments and communities, promoting strong tribal-federal government-to-government policies, and promoting a better understanding among the general public regarding American Indian and Alaska Native governments, people and rights. For more information visit www.ncai.org

About The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)

NICWA works to support the safety, health, and spiritual strength of Native children along the broad continuum of their lives. The organization promotes building tribal capacity to prevent child abuse and neglect through positive systems change at the state, federal, and tribal level. For more information visit www.nicwa.org

About The National Indian Education Association (NIEA)

NIEA is the Nation’s most inclusive advocacy organization advancing comprehensive culture-based educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. Formed by Native educators in 1969 to encourage a national discourse on education, NIEA adheres to the organization’s founding principles- to convene educators to explore ways to improve schools and the educational systems serving Native children; to promote the maintenance and continued development of language and cultural programs; and to develop and implement strategies for influencing local, state, and federal policy and decision makers. For more information visit www.niea.org

About The National Indian Health Board

The National Indian Health Board advocates on behalf of all Tribal Governments and American Indians/Alaska Natives in their efforts to provide quality health care. Visit www.nihb.org for more information.