



NICWA

National Indian Child Welfare Association
Protecting Our Children • Preserving Our Culture

NICWA 2020 Annual Report

Resilience:

*Cultures, Communities,
and Families*





Mission & Vision Statements

Mission:

NICWA is dedicated to the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native children and families.

Vision:

Every Native child must have access to community-based, culturally appropriate services that help them grow up safe, healthy, and spiritually strong—free from abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, and the damaging effects of substance abuse.

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A Message for Our Community

Dear NICWA Members, Donors, and Friends,

I am pleased to share with you the NICWA fiscal year 2020 annual report, *Resilience: Cultures, Communities, and Families*. At NICWA, we believe that our cultures are our single greatest resource for helping families and children. We also believe that methods of delivering our work must be just as culturally grounded as our content. This often means looking to our cultures for guidance as to how we should proceed with an important decision or a new situation.

As we have weathered the coronavirus pandemic, our board of directors, staff, and partners have had conversations about resilience. We use our Relational Worldview framework, a composite of traditional tribal teachings, to talk about cultivating intentional resilience. Looking at the four-quadrant circle representing context, mind, body, and spirit, we describe health and well-being through a balance between the quadrants.

Even when there's a lot going on in our context that we can't control, there are still things we can do to shift our balance. In fact, many times a day we unconsciously assess our balance and do something about it: when we're tired, we rest; when we're lonely, we get in touch with family and friends. We can use this same practice to adjust our balance now. When we're under a lot of stress, we need to be even more intentional about staying in balance: we can make a plan for things we want to intentionally pay attention to and adjust in each quadrant.

At NICWA, we have also talked about what the words and translations/definitions for "resilience" are in our languages—in Nimiipuutimpt (Nez Perce language), Potawatomi, Choctaw, and Creek. Translations included: "to strengthen or make stronger," "we will survive this/we will get through this;" "bold, brave, courageous, valiant, intrepid;" and "to try it again, to keep trying" and "never giving up."

Different perspectives emerged as we talked about resilience, including this: "We tell our youth that they come from holocaust and genocide survivors, not that they are resilient.... We tell them that when they wake up every day and draw that first breath, they are making a political statement—we are still here."

As you have weathered the pandemic, I hope that you too have had the opportunity to reflect on what keeps you healthy and well, balanced in your mind, body, spirit, and context. Our cultures have powerful tools to help us better understand how to conduct ourselves, how to get through tough times, and how to support one another.



Thank you for your service to Native children and families,

Sarah Kastelic, PhD, MSW (*Alutiiq*)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah F. Kastelic".

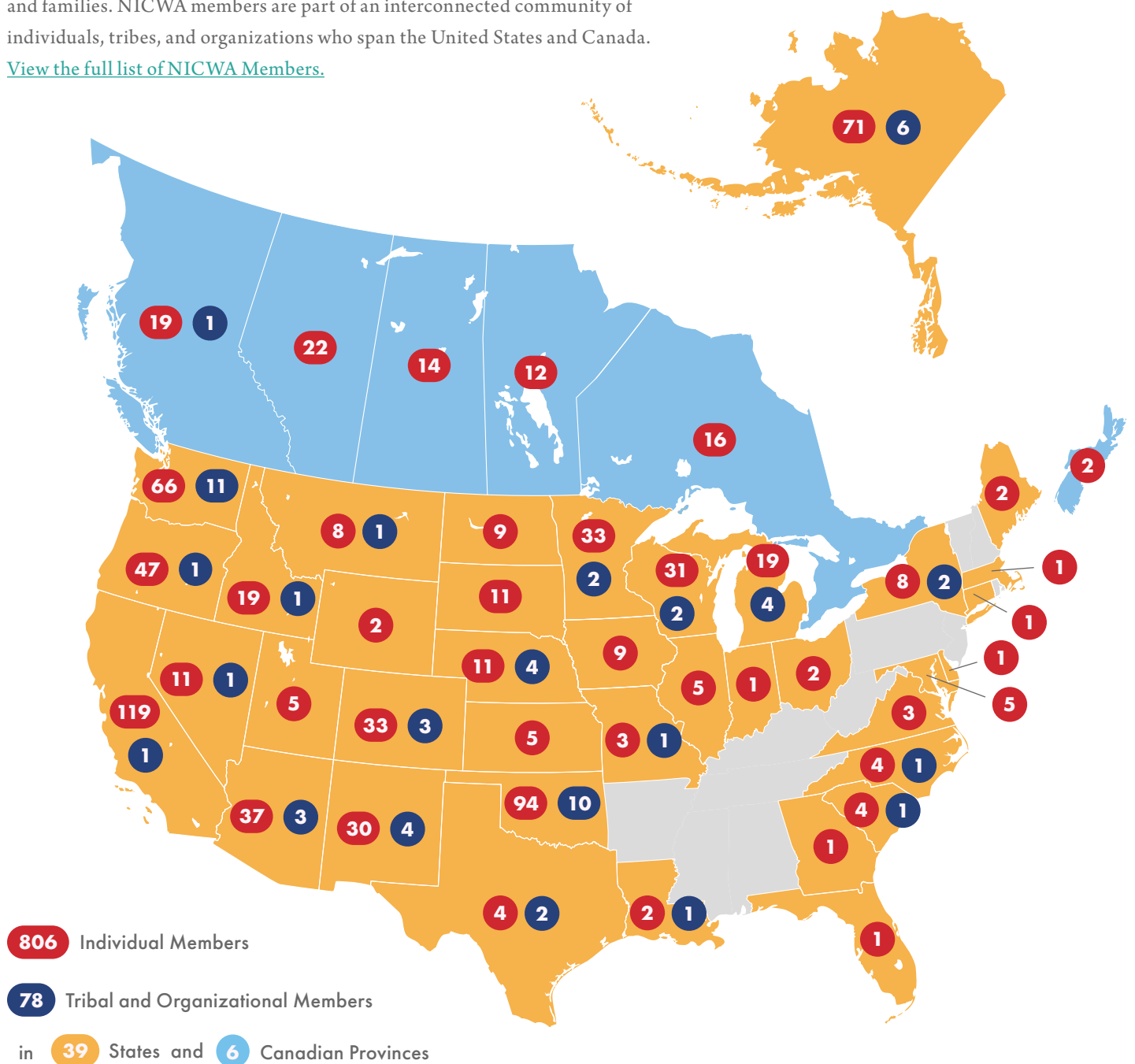
Executive Director

Our Members

Our members are a national network of strong and diverse advocates working together to advance the vision of protecting Native children and families for generations to come. Being a member is taking a stand to support NICWA's work and dedication to the mission of strengthening the well-being of Native children and families. NICWA members are part of an interconnected community of individuals, tribes, and organizations who span the United States and Canada.

[View the full list of NICWA Members.](#)

Become a member today



Community-Based, Culturally Appropriate Services

When services for families and children are community-based and culturally appropriate, they reflect the community's values of safety and wellness.

Across the nation, there has been a movement to take a more holistic approach to child welfare and provide services to families before there is a need to remove children from their homes. NICWA has increasingly been called on to conduct program reviews and provide recommendations to tribes on how to strengthen their child welfare systems.

In partnership with tribal and urban Indian communities, NICWA consults, trains, and provides technical assistance onsite to child welfare programs, children's mental health programs, and tribal community organizations. This year, we worked with Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, concluding our review of their child welfare program and beginning our technical assistance to support them in expanding their services to better meet the needs of their member children and families. We made recommendations for the program centering each quadrant of the Relational Worldview Model: environment, infrastructure, resources, and mission. We first conducted focus groups and interviews with community members who had received services or been impacted by the program, program staff and service providers, leaders, and community groups to collect information about the vision and values of the community regarding child safety. A practice model, policies and procedures, and a new children's code, all informed by the community vision and values, will create a robust and resilient framework to support children and families. This work is a manifestation of our belief, as Native people, that we are interdependent, and we have a shared responsibility to ensure the well-being of one another.

Caring for our children is not the work of the child welfare system alone. It takes a community. Mainstream service models do not serve tribal communities well. Instead we must look to our rich cultural heritages that are the foundation for a flourishing, natural safety net that keeps children safe.



Protecting Children and Strengthening Families

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is a long-standing federal law protecting the well-being of Native children and families. It strengthens family integrity and stability within communities.

Within NICWA's last fiscal year, the United States Court of Appeals in the Fifth Circuit affirmed the constitutionality of ICWA and granted a rehearing en banc in the case *Brackeen v. Bernhardt*. In defense of the 41-year-old law's constitutionality, 486 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and 59 Native organizations filed an amicus brief, and representatives from tribes, Indian organizations, and national child advocacy groups attended the rehearing to show support for the law that protects the best interests of Native children and families.

With the backdrop of *Brackeen v. Bernhardt*, now is the time when our advocacy for Native cultures, communities, and families matters most.

The Protect ICWA Campaign (the Campaign) consists of four national Native organizations: NICWA, the [National Congress of American Indians](#), the [Association on American Indian Affairs](#), and the [Native American Rights Fund](#). Together, the Campaign works to serve and support American Indian and Alaska Native children, youth, and families by defending ICWA from hostile attacks in the courts. NICWA, in our role of leading media and strategic communications, monitors and facilitates proactive engagement with the media and works to educate the general public. NICWA also assists with policy-related strategies to support effective ICWA implementation with tribes, states, and private agency partners. To stay up-to-date on the Campaign's work to protect children and families, visit www.nicwa.org/ICWA.



By the numbers

4 coalition partners

38 spokespeople

6 press releases

45 news articles

Research Supporting Native Youth and Their Connection to Culture

NICWA's research team spent the last year working on several projects related to prevention of adverse outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native children and youth through strengthening their connections to their extended families and communities. In partnership with Generations United, we provided support for building a network of grandfamilies, which are grandparents or other relatives raising their relative children. The Native grandfamilies were trained in skills for advocacy and policy change. NICWA's research team conducted an evaluation of this project through tracking survey data over time. We found that grandfamilies really valued getting to connect with one another and felt empowered to use their voices more in advocacy by the end of the project.

Another prevention project aimed at supporting Native community strengths was our community asset mapping work, a component of our First Kids 1st initiative. In this project, we worked with one tribe's youth leadership council to conduct community asset mapping. We trained the youth council on the community asset mapping toolkit, which provides guidance and resources for community asset mapping in Indigenous communities. We also provided technical assistance throughout their process. The evaluation showed that youth involved in the project took action, including the creation of a resolution adopted by the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, informed by the data that was collected during the community asset mapping process.

Our research team also developed resources highlighting the importance of [kinship care](#) and [cultural considerations in attachment and bonding](#) literature. There is strong evidence of the benefit of kinship care over non-relative placements for Native children, and considerations about the importance of attachment and bonding need to be expanded to include extended family and community. In another systematic literature review, we found that cultural connectedness, or a feeling of connection to one's identity (regardless of physical location), is an important predictor of many different positive outcomes for Native youth. That means that fostering cultural connectedness is important for prevention. Based on these research projects, we also developed products for the field, so that practitioners can use these research findings in their work in child welfare and service provision.

Finally, we received funding to launch a new pilot study of Positive Indian Parenting (PIP). PIP is a culturally based parenting curriculum developed by NICWA and used for more than three decades throughout Indian Country. This pilot study will be the first time PIP has been formally studied and will help to build an evidence base for PIP under the Family First Prevention Services Act criteria. It is our hope this will eventually lead to PIP being certified as an evidence-based practice and open up new funding streams to support delivery of this unique curriculum.

By the numbers

- 2 peer reviewed publications
- 2 research briefs produced for the field
- 1 pilot study funded
- 3 national foundations funding our research



Training Indian Child Welfare Advocates

There are people working in every Native community to protect children and strengthen families. They need the best information and training available to do that job well, so we provide high-quality, culturally specific information and training.

One important pillar of providing services that preserve and strengthen families is our Request for Information (RFI) program. This past year, NICWA received 648 RFIs where we provided compassionate telephone support to help relatives and community members navigate the child welfare system, access meaningful services, and advocate for their relatives.

As we moved forward with virtual training opportunities in 2020, the Online ICWA Course continued to provide an accessible overview of the Indian Child Welfare Act. In this online resource, the provisions of ICWA are explained in non-legal language and presented in the order in which a child welfare worker might encounter them in an ICWA case. Through the Online ICWA Course, we trained 328 social workers from tribal social service agencies; state and county social workers, including staff social workers, supervisors, and training personnel; and social work professors and students this last fiscal year.

Due to the pandemic, we also migrated several in-person trainings to virtual delivery. Our most popular training, Positive Indian Parenting (PIP), filled up each time we offered it this year. Designed as a hands-on training of trainers, the training prepares participants to teach parents and advocates traditional values of parenting while incorporating the old ways. It prepares Native and non-Native child welfare staff to teach the curriculum with a culturally specific approach. Storytelling, cradleboards, harmony, lessons of nature, behavior management, and the use of praise are taught while incorporating contemporary and historic child-rearing methods. Role play, case scenarios, and group discussions are used for interactive practice. Our PIP trainer, Lorraine Brave (*Mohawk*), is well versed in this curriculum, with 30 years of teaching experience. This year, NICWA trained over 200 people in Positive Indian Parenting over nine training institutes and four community-based trainings. The curriculum can be purchased through our online store at www.nicwa.myshopify.com. As we adapt to the changes 2020 has brought, we continue to find creative ways to adapt more of our community trainings to the virtual world.

By the numbers

4 training institutes with **9** trainings

290 training institute participants

19 trainings in communities with **380** participants



Virtual 38th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference

The 2020 Protecting Our Children Annual Conference was groundbreaking. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, we cancelled our in-person conference. Out of a strong desire to provide our training conference and support for our community despite the unfolding pandemic, we took the event online. With only two and half weeks to plan the virtual conference remotely, we convened 917 participants from a cross-section of fields and interests, including child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice service providers; legal professionals; students; advocates for children; and tribal, state, and federal leaders. Thanks to the incredible support from our 46 sponsors, the remote gathering took shape.

The event began on Monday, March 30, 2020, with a blessing given by the Honorable Paul Day (*Leech Lake*), chief judge of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Tribal Court. Terry Cross (*Seneca*), NICWA founder and senior advisor, provided the opening keynote, “Child Welfare as Medicine.” On the second day, after her keynote address, Dr. Cindy Blackstock (*Gitksan First Nation*), executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, was virtually presented with the annual Champion for Native Children award. On the third day, White Bison, Inc.’s president and founder Don Coyhis (*Mohican*) gave a closing keynote and sent participants off in a good way. The conference theme, “Honoring Our Past, Present, and Future Generations: Living Our Tribal Cultural Values and Beliefs,” was woven throughout the three keynote addresses and nine workshops offered.

Our core belief is that our cultures are our greatest strength to protect Native children and families. As COVID-19 heightens existing challenges and disproportionately impacts Native communities, we believe we need to rely on our cultures and our connection to one another. Many conference speakers and participants were on the frontlines of Indian child welfare, working to keep families and children safe while joining us in community online. We are humbled by your participation and support of our work. It was, is, and will always be an honor for us to host you, a community who embodies the celebration of the resiliency of our children, families, and nations, at the Protecting Our Children Annual Conference.



By the numbers

9 sessions on child welfare, foster care, and adoption services; children’s mental health; judicial and legal affairs; and youth and family involvement

19 workshop presenters

917 attendees

573 new NICWA members

88 newsfeed posts

46 sponsors

1 annual membership meeting

Letter from Our Fiscal Director

Dear NICWA Members, Donors, and Friends,

Our NICWA board of directors and staff have spent the last fiscal year working to protect Native children and keep them connected to their family, community, and culture.

NICWA is driven by the belief that every Native child must have access to community-based, culturally appropriate services that help them grow up safe, healthy, and spiritually strong—free from abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation, and the damaging effects of substance abuse. This vision helps us determine where we can best intervene to produce better outcomes for children and families.

NICWA is a culturally based organization driven by both cultural values and organizational integrity values, like the fiscal responsibility of timely and accurate reporting with a commitment to quality and consistent evaluation of our systems and processes. We have always employed a conservative approach to finances. NICWA has had clean audits with no management findings or adjustments for the past eight years because of our commitment to stewardship of our resources and fiscal responsibility.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges toward the end of our 2020 fiscal year, yet we were well prepared to pivot to virtual work because of our strong relationships with tribal communities and appropriate use of technology. As a result, our work has remained consistent. The investments that tribes, individuals, private funders, and government made in our work, combined with our good management of resources over time, has put us in a solid financial position. Our financial “cushion” going into fiscal year 2020, the result of years of good management, and our nimble jump to provide services virtually, helped us weather this year. Fee-for-service revenue continues to provide additional budget stability through trainings and curriculum sales.

We remain dedicated to nurturing strong relationships with tribal communities and providing mission-centric work that complement the investments we receive each year. The scale of the economic impact from the pandemic will continue to unfold. While 2020 has been an unusual year, we are resilient. We continue to focus on cultures, communities, and families. Thank you for all you do to support Native children and families.

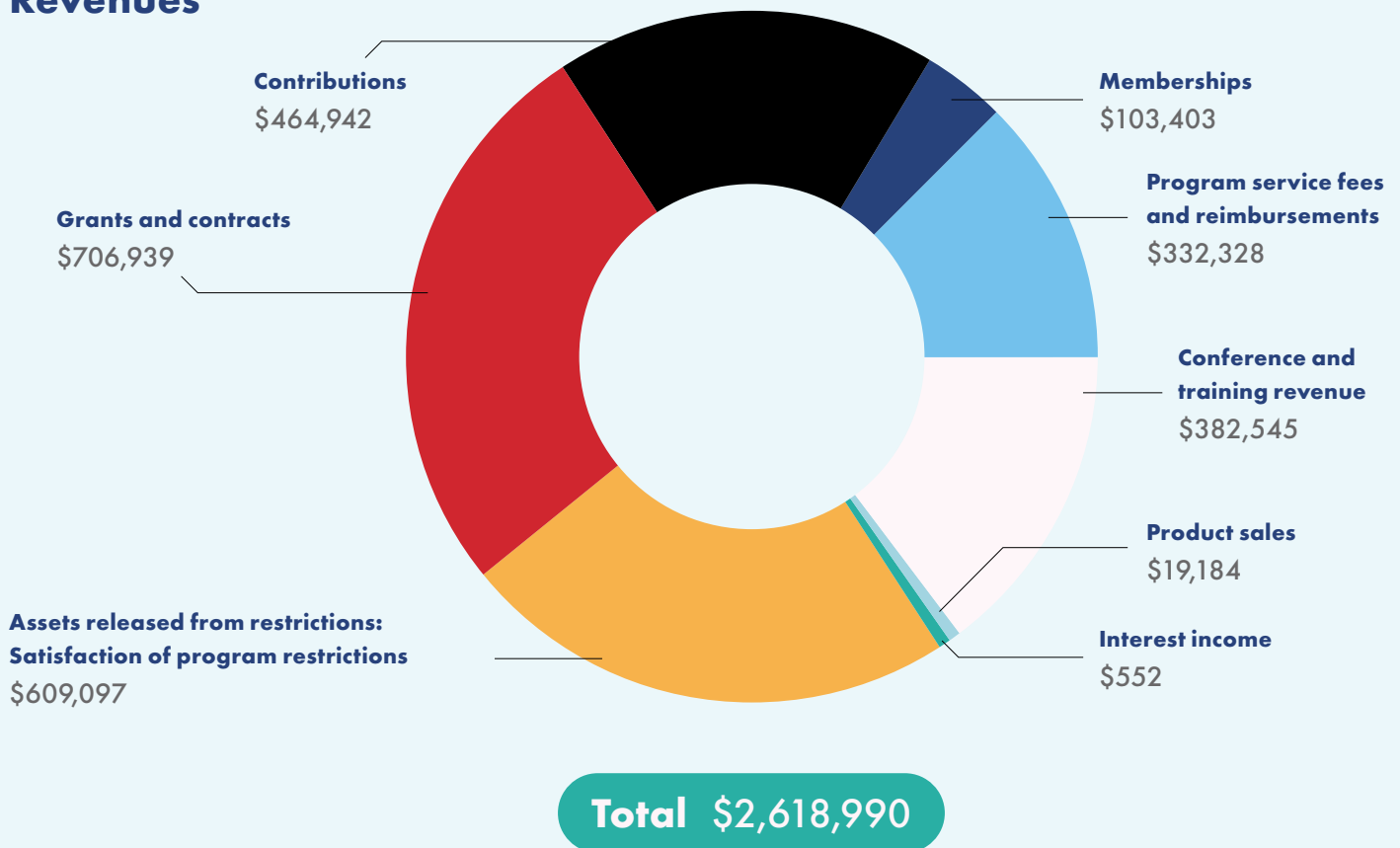


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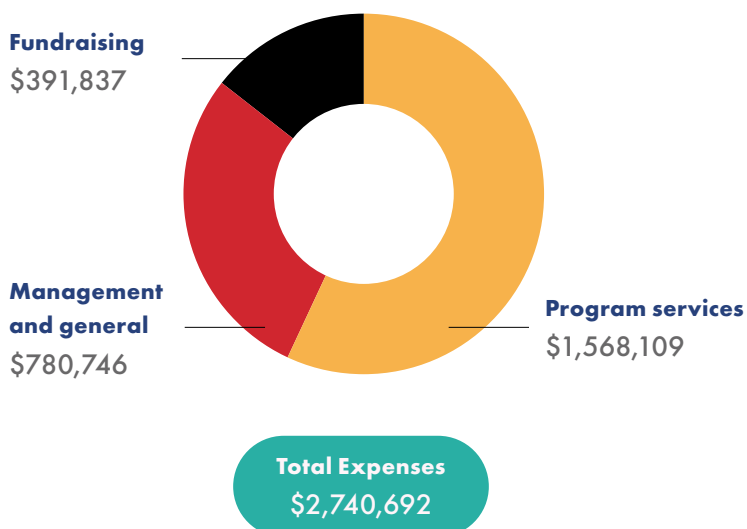
Tileah (Tia) Begay (*Diné*)
Fiscal Director

Financials

Revenues



Expenses



Net Assets, Beginning of year
\$671,163

Change in net assets
(\$121,702)

Net Assets end of year
\$549,461

Supporters

Monica and John Day

Monica's passion for NICWA dates back to 1992 when she attended our founder Terry Cross' workshop on cultural competency. She describes it as "an amazing, pivotal moment for me that began my path in this work." Monica is now an associate professor of social work, where she uses NICWA resources to teach her students to work ethically, effectively, and creatively with Native communities. "NICWA is dear to us, both as people who care about family and as social workers who want to create change."

John, a member of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, comes from a family that has always lifted up the strengths of Native cultures, communities, and families. Now retired from a career in social work, he still spends time advocating for Native children in his personal life and his local city government.

Monica and John Day are two of NICWA's incredible monthly recurring donors. We are inspired by their life-long dedication to Native children and are honored to receive their continuing support. Thank you, Monica, and John, and to all our recurring donors who help fund our work year-round.

Jeri Museth

Jeri Museth (*Tlingit*), NICWA's 2020 Member of the Year, has demonstrated outstanding service, contributions, and leadership in her profession. Jeri is the southeast regional ICWA specialist and has worked for the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services for six years. Prior, she worked for the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Tribal Family and Youth Services. Due to her longstanding dedication and commitment to Indian child welfare work, NICWA was proud to honor Jeri with the award for Member of the Year at the 38th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference. Jeri joined virtually from Juneau, Alaska, and shared her story. She spoke about the Indian Child Welfare Act and how important the federal legislation is for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Jeri shared about how NICWA trainings support the spirit of the law by teaching how to apply the law to benefit our children and strengthen our families. To view Jeri Museth's bio and photo alongside NICWA Members of the Year throughout the years, visit www.nicwa.org/member-of-the-year.

Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation

Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation is a critical funder of NICWA's work. Through the Tribe's Doyuti T'uhkama partnership, NICWA has worked with the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation on a variety of training opportunities. Doyuti T'uhkama translates into "giving of the acorn" in Patwin, the ancestral language of the Yocha Dehe people. Doyuti T'uhkama giving has funded various NICWA initiatives, including the professional development program "Positive Indian Parenting" and initiatives that support the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Yocha Dehe funds the "Protect ICWA Campaign," which grew out of a response to litigation challenging ICWA. Acting as a co-leader of the Campaign, NICWA helped dramatically increase the number of signatories on friend of the court briefs in the rehearing en banc of *Brackeen v. Bernhardt* while garnering the support of tribes, Native organizations, and members of Congress.

Recognizing NICWA's body of work and decades of advocacy for Native children and their families, Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation awarded NICWA a \$150,000 grant. This grant supports our work to protect Native children while defending tribal sovereignty. NICWA is honored by Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation's continued support.

Cowlitz Indian Tribe

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe has a long history of working with NICWA. As far back as the 1980s, NICWA worked with the Cowlitz Tribe, then a state-recognized tribe, in implementation of a tribal-state agreement in the State of Washington. Once Cowlitz gained federal recognition in 2000, NICWA provided training and technical assistance to help the tribe start up its child welfare department.

In 2012, NICWA and the Cowlitz Tribe partnered to host a meeting for United Nations (UN) and gathered testimony from Northwest tribes for a report to the UN. This relationship positioned NICWA to take a vital step in gaining international recognition for the Indian Child Welfare Act when we gave testimony to the UN in Geneva, Switzerland. From 2012–2015, the Cowlitz Tribe was a partner with NICWA on an Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention research grant to develop culturally appropriate evaluation measures. Together, we demonstrated how tribes can produce practice-based evidence, that is, evidence of effectiveness of services built through routine service delivery as opposed to methods like randomized control trials. In 2019, NICWA began a partnership with the Cowlitz Tribe in an evaluation of the in-home delivery of our Positive Indian Parenting training. In 2020, Cowlitz was a host sponsor for NICWA's annual conference.

Generations United

Over the last three years, NICWA and Generations United have worked with grandfamilies through GRAND Voices: Elevating and Strengthening African American and Native American Grandfamilies. The GRAND Voices project draws on a belief consistent across almost all Native cultures: that extended family is seen as just as important as the nuclear family. A helper who does not know about this type of family structure may not recognize its value or know that a family meeting, for example, should include the whole nurturing network. Planning for the safe care of a child may look very different in a Native family than the usual process in a non-Native family. Supporting the nurturing network will require knowledge and skills that fit the family. Culturally appropriate services are culturally competent services. An important outcome of this partnership was the [American Indian grandfamilies toolkit](#), which was designed as a resource for child welfare agencies, other government agencies, and nonprofit organizations, so they can better serve all American Indian and Alaska Native grandfamilies regardless of child welfare involvement.

With GRAND Voices, our work with Generations United improves culturally appropriate supports and equips family caregivers with actionable knowledge to help them improve services to their families and address racial inequities.

Meyer Memorial Trust

From our first grants as an organization more than 30 years ago, Meyer Memorial Trust has been a consistent supporter of NICWA's work. Since 1991, NICWA has applied for 15 grants, resulting in 12 awards totaling \$1,722,724 for general operating support and project work, including training for parenting education and child abuse prevention, as well as capacity building to effectively serve Native families with updated, culturally-based child welfare curriculum. Meyer provided NICWA with funding at key moments in our organizational history, such as a substantial multi-year grant to support our executive director transition, including support for an event for local funders with the purpose of introducing Sarah Kastelic as Terry Cross's successor and building confidence in NICWA's leadership transition.

Building institutional support and championing NICWA's work is only part of the relationship. In 2018, NICWA received a two-year programmatic grant from Meyer. Independent of that grant, Meyer provided a \$100,000 core operating grant in recognition of the increased cost of our advocacy to protect the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). After the grant ended, NICWA was awarded an additional \$180,000 over 18 months for operating expenses. This core support grant in addition to project-based funding strengthens NICWA's financial position and ability to protect ICWA.

Meyer Memorial Trust represents an ideal funding partner because they track our work and offer support for the hardest kinds of expenses to fund. NICWA's relationship with Meyer is built on decades of open dialogue, tangible results, and dedication to the well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native children and their families.

Support Our Work

Your tax-deductible donation to NICWA helps to support our work with tribal and urban Native communities to promote positive systems change at federal, state, and local levels.

Single gift

[Make a single gift today](#) to advance NICWA's mission in tribal and urban Native communities in the United States and Canada. Every gift makes a difference.

Recurring gift

By [giving online monthly](#) or quarterly, you provide resources we need to serve all of Indian Country. Even \$5 a month gives us additional stability year-round.

Planned giving

If you would like to explore planned giving options with NICWA or have already included us in your estate planning, we would love to hear from you.

Be social

Friends and family are frequently excited to support a cause their loved one cares about. Facebook Fundraisers are a quick and easy way to do this. Forwarding our emails and sharing your support with family and friends are other great ways to support NICWA.

AmazonSmile

If you're doing online shopping for the holidays, you can use the AmazonSmile program to automatically donate a portion of your total to NICWA with no added cost. Visit smile.amazon.com to start stopping.

Want to talk about investing in NICWA?

Contact info@nicwa.org with your request.

NICWA was gifted \$464,942 in donations and in-kind contributions last year to support Native children and families.

Our work is possible thanks to the generous support of committed tribes, individuals, and organizational partners. [View the full list of investors.](#)



Fiscal Year 2020 NICWA Board of Directors

Officers

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Gil Vigil (Tesuque Pueblo)

Vice President

Angela Connor (Choctaw)

Secretary

W. Alex Wesaw
(Pokagon Band of Potawatomi)

Treasurer

Gary Peterson (Skokomish)

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(Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community)

Patricia Carter-Goodheart (Nez Perce)

Rochelle Ettawageshik
(Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians)

Jocelyn Formsma (Swampy Cree)

Debra Foxcroft (Tseshaht First Nation)

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(Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of
Pottawatomi Indians)

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Derek Valdo (Acoma Pueblo)

NICWA Staff*

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Member Relations Manager

Kim Christensen (Ojibwe),
Development Director

Terry Cross (Seneca),
Founder and Senior Advisor

Sarah Kastelic (Alutiiq),
Executive Director

Brenda Nelson,
Individual Giving Manager

Tricia (Rosa) Wang,
Project Coordinator

Amory Zschach
(Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes descent),
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Betty Bryant, Project Coordinator

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Lauren Shapiro,
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Nicole Stewart,
Human Resources Coordinator

Vilma Vere,
Fiscal Assistant

Sarah Wittmann, Events Manager

April Ybarra Black,
Executive Assistant to Sarah Kastelic and
Library Specialist

Program

Alexis Contreras (Grand Ronde),
Research Assistant

Cori Matthew (Salish/Blackfeet),
Director of Programs and Policy

Puneet Sahota, Research Director

David Simmons,
Director of Government Affairs
and Advocacy

Vickie Wulf (Nipissing First Nation),
Project Coordinator

**As of the end of the 2020 fiscal year, 4/30/2020*



NICWA

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