



Na'ah Illahee Fund

A Catalyst for Indigenous
Women and Girls

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Who We Are

Our mission is to support and promote the leadership of Indigenous women and girls in the ongoing regeneration of Indigenous communities.

WE BELIEVE that Indigenous women are at the heart of Indigenous communities and that the vision, initiatives and perseverance of Indigenous women should be supported with resources. We seek transformative change at the community level by supporting Indigenous women's traditional models of leadership and organizing. We believe that stronger Indigenous women leaders can determine their own priorities for the future and can protect our Mother Earth more effectively.

WE PROVIDE funding and support to Native women-led organizations and projects, youth training, and environmental justice programming that helps advance sustainable Indigenous cultures and collective capacities.

We are teachers and learners, grantmakers and conveners, committed to remembering and revitalizing traditional values and practices rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and living. Our unique value and contribution comes from the diversity within our group—our ages, tribal affiliations, and experiential knowledge.

Na'ah Illahee Fund (Mother Earth in the Chinook jargon language), was established in 2005 with funding from an individual philanthropic leader who shared the vision of powerful Native female-centered activism and leadership.

Na'ah Illahee Fund's scope of impact includes both urban and reservation-based Indigenous communities throughout the Pacific Northwest region—over 50 tribal nations. The majority of our direct organizing work currently takes place in the Puget Sound/Salish Sea region with Native people who are from many tribal nations, but living in urban communities and may not have ties to their homelands and families.

Na'ah Illahee Fund defines women and girls inclusively as all female identified people in our work and programming, including two spirit Native peoples and trans women.



“Absolutely nobody does what Na'ah Illahee Fund does in the United States!”

-Evelyn Arce Erickson, Past Executive Director, International Funders for Indigenous Peoples



Our Vision

A strong network of Native women and girl leaders with the skills, knowledge, commitment and resources to affect positive social change, address the violence against women, children and earth, and build strong communities with the knowledge and desire to advance sustainability—living in balance with the natural world.

Native women and girls are not safe. Violence against them has reached epidemic levels in Indian country and Alaska Native villages' rates are 2½ times higher than violence against any other group of women in the United States. One in three Native women will be raped in her lifetime, and six in ten will be physically assaulted. The murder rate for Native women is ten times the national average on some reservations.

-Indian Law Resource Center

Focusing on Women's Leadership

A history of exploitation, discrimination, and genocide has rendered Indigenous communities a part of the most excluded, marginalized, and vulnerable in the world. Centuries of destructive government policies have impoverished and broken apart many Indigenous families and communities.

The intersection of sexism and inadequate policies have also allowed the systematic eradication of gender equality from all of our cultures as well as in Indigenous communities, leaving many Indigenous women and girls at heightened risk of exploitation and attack.

Indigenous women are now reclaiming their power and voice by strengthening a tradition of leadership that existed prior to colonization. These traditional leadership models center the importance of relational responsibility and resist domination in favor of more collaborative approaches.

We at Na'ah Illahee Fund believe that it is critical to strengthen Indigenous communities and cultures through women's leadership because an investment in Indigenous women leads to stronger Indigenous communities and resilient cultures.

Reclaiming the Earth

Indigenous cultures were disrupted by colonization, and many communities became disconnected from the natural world, land, plants, sustainable harvesting, cultivation of traditional foods, cultural arts—the traditional lifeways that we related to. Cultural interruption has left tribal communities vulnerable to poor health and a lack of access to traditional diets and plant medicines. In addition, many urban and rural Native American citizens reside in low income communities that are disproportionately impacted by industrial pollution, exacerbated by climate change.

Na'ah Illahee Fund envisions a sustainable environment where humanity and the natural world are in balance, each supporting the other—much like our ancestors lived. We engage Indigenous people and allies to help us protect the sacredness of Earth Mother from exploitation and pollution and focus on developing strategies for the protection of our environment, our health, and all life forms.

“If you want to wreck a culture, hit it in the kitchen. Boarding schools did that in one generation. Take away the kids, take away their plants, take away their knowledge of the kitchen. Parents and children no longer gathered their plants together. They no longer spoke their language or shared information.”

–Tima Lotah Link,
Chia Café Collective

Weaving Women's Leadership with Environmental Justice

Na'ah Illahee Fund was originally started to be a funding resource to Native women and girls' projects, organizations and activists. But we quickly realized that many of the organizations we wanted to support were too small and too new to receive funding and needed other support before they reach a stage where they are ready to apply for grants. We have now expanded our programming areas to support women and girls to build their identity by re-connecting with the land and traditional ecological knowledge, and to address internal challenges caused by the legacies of colonization.

Just transition as a framework: The “just transition” frame is being used by an increasing number of organizing networks, grassroots organizations, groups affiliated with organized labor, and environmental organizations to describe an equitable movement towards sustainable economies. Just Transition strategies were first forged by labor unions and environmental justice groups, rooted in low-income communities of color, who saw the need to phase out the industries that were harming workers, community health and the planet. Just Transition is rooted in workers defining a transition away from polluting industries in alliance with fence line and frontline communities. Na'ah Illahee Fund supports this framework and applies this analysis to our work.

Our Goals and Activities

GOAL:

Build leadership of women and the capacity of women-led projects and organizations

WHY THIS GOAL:

As caretakers of the land, we pledge to do our part by honoring the interdependency of all life and our responsibilities within the circle. Knowing that solutions reside in our community, people will guide their own destinies through remembering deep wisdom acquired throughout the millennium, affecting the realities of their lives, today. We practice decolonization in our work and build leadership based on an Indigenous model where leaders serve the people.

ACTIVITIES:

- **Fiscal sponsorship** of organizations led by Native women and girls.
- **Ahdanehi Program:** a community-based philanthropy model steeped in Indigenous cultural tradition. Each year, an intergenerational (currently ages 23–85) circle of women builds community, researches and analyzes critical issues, provides mentorship to emerging leaders, and gathers financial resources to support Northwest Native women-led community initiatives. In 2016 Ahdanehi engaged twelve women who organized community activities including marching in solidarity with the Northwest Two-Spirit Society in Seattle's Gay Pride Parade, held a grantee-partner dialogue gathering, and hosted a film and community discussion. The circle surpassed their fundraising goal of \$25,000 and awarded 9 grants to grassroots groups addressing violence against Native women, children and Mother Earth, whom we continue to engage throughout the year.
- **Capacity building cohort:** support very small and new organizations to a place of readiness for grant applications. 2016 graduated three new Native women-led nonprofits.

GOAL:

Build the capacity of our youth to develop strong identities through Indigenous knowledge and stronger supports for their education

WHY THIS GOAL:

One of the most important strategies to advance sustainable Native cultures is to provide critical tools of empowerment to Native youth and support them with fusing the traditional with the contemporary. Years of experience working in Native communities tell us that a successful young Native person is one who carries a strong identity steeped in tribal culture—history, values, language, and ways of knowing, as well as critical twenty-first century skills. These skills consist primarily of leadership, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, healthy communication, collaboration or teamwork, and literacy in STEAM, media, the environment, wellness, and global issues. These trainings connect our youth with their power and help fuel individual and cultural transformation.

Native Girls Code is currently enrolled in Women's Finding Alliance's GLOW cohort for Girl-serving organizations, facilitated by School's Out Washington to develop professional methodologies. We are also training Native women to be evaluators for youth programs, creating a professional income stream for their families.

ACTIVITIES:

- Native Girls Code, a STEAM club of middle and high school young Native women, ages 12-18, builds their skills and knowledge throughout the school year and during school breaks.
- Work in collaboration with educators to create community projects that develop computer coding and other technical skills.
- With the support of our youth we design and offer workshops in cultural arts and ecological restoration that increases their knowledge of traditional Native cultures.
- Gen7 Summer programming offers middle and high school Native youth at least 3 weeks of programming in cultural arts and STEM.

GOAL:

Advance the preservation and revitalization of traditional Indigenous knowledge through environmental justice programming that focuses on following the original teachings of Mother Earth

WHY THIS GOAL:

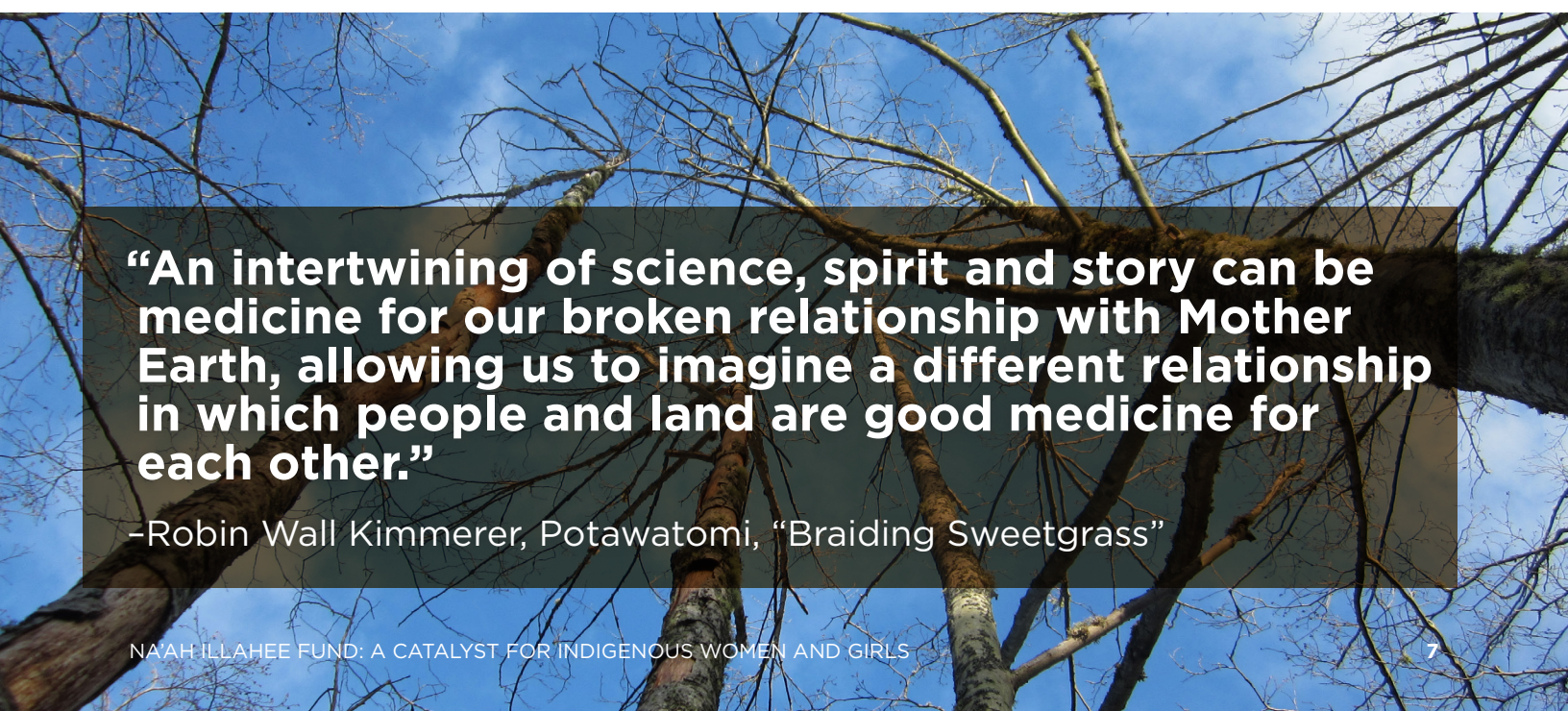
Our goal is to remember and make whole traditional ecological knowledge, to re-connect Native people to Mother Earth, our first teacher, through the leadership of Native women. We continue to organize to resist the impact of fossil fuel production and transport, and to create new pathways into the future that honor and include traditional knowledge, engage tribal youth and elders, and utilize modern technologies. Permaculture is one such strategy to advance climate justice in Indigenous communities. The founders of Permaculture took parts of traditional ecological knowledge from Indigenous people, and offers it to everyone, including back to Indigenous people themselves. We are taking the knowledge back, along with the infrastructure of the design process as a valuable tool for human interaction with the natural environment in an efficient yet respectful and collaborative manner. In 2017, Na'ah Illahee Fund's Yahowt (Lushootseed Language "lift us up, together") Circle of Native women will design and implement an ecological restoration project of the water filtration ponds located on the Daybreak Star Indian Cultural land, improving water quality of runoff from Discovery Park that empties into Puget Sound. The 30-year old ponds will be redesigned to include silt cleanup, invasive species removal, and planting of both floating and submerged native plants. The enhanced area will create a healthy and welcoming environment for both teaching and practicing traditional Indigenous lifeways through plant harvesting for medicine and cultural arts.

We are also working to advance Native food systems as a core strategy to re-build and strengthen traditional lifeways. To increase access to healthy foods, we support building sustainable systems that improve health, strengthen food security and increase the control over Native agriculture and food systems. Producing healthy food helps families through better health, connection

to land, water and plants, and nurtures self-sufficiency. The Permaculture circle and community members are engaged, collaborating with the University of Washington Botanic Gardens and Seattle City Parks and Recreation Department to access city-owned lands to cultivate native plants and edibles.

ACTIVITIES:

- Since 2012 the Yahowt program has provided community education workshops in fields of Indigenous Sustainability, cultural arts, native plant medicines and Indigenous permaculture
- Na'ah Illahee Fund is currently engaged in a partnership with Lush Cosmetics Company to provide funding and support for a cohort of eight Native women at Oregon State University (one of the region's leading permaculture programs) to receive Professional Permaculture Design certification. Permaculture is the chosen framework to advance our work because it has been the closest to Indigenous knowledge systems that we have found. This framework focuses on thriving, interconnected, interdependent relationships in nature, where humans regain their rightful place as caretakers and protectors of Mother Earth. Throughout this program, we follow our 8 leaders who graduate with a professional certificate and support their process of finding jobs in the field of permaculture as they design and implement human built ecological projects through an Indigenous lens.



“An intertwining of science, spirit and story can be medicine for our broken relationship with Mother Earth, allowing us to imagine a different relationship in which people and land are good medicine for each other.”

-Robin Wall Kimmerer, Potawatomi, “Braiding Sweetgrass”

2016 Highlights

Yahowt Program held **nine community workshops** in food security, cultural arts and traditional plants and medicines to strengthen traditional knowledge.



Yahowt Cedar bark weavers in their newly completed Coast Salish style hats, with teachers Judy Bridges and Donna Martinez.

Graduated eight Indigenous women with their professional Permaculture Design certificate from Oregon State University and planned an ecological restoration project at Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center lands.

Gen7/Native Girls Code program **held forty youth workshops** in STEAM (Indigenous and Western science, technology and media arts, traditional/cultural arts, and math).

Participated in the **“Paddle to Nisqually”** Green Team.

Ahdanehi Women’s Giving Circle met bi-monthly throughout the year, held convenings for our grantees and made nine grants to Native women and two-spirit led grassroots community initiatives.

Hosted community dialogue and film screening of **“Crying Earth Rise Up”**.

Sponsored and co-organized the **Living Breath of wətəbʔaltx™ Traditional Indigenous Foods and Ecological Knowledge Symposium**. This symposium serves to foster dialogue and build collaborative networks as we, Native peoples, strive to sustain our cultural food practices and preserve our healthy relationships to the land, water, and all living things.





Since 2009, our large network of volunteers has produced the annual **“Blue Jay Brings the Back the Moon: A Celebration of Native Arts & Culture”** community event where we award the Spirit of Native Leadership to a Native woman leader.

Needing support and leadership in their formation, we graduated **3 Native women-led new nonprofit organizations with a start-up strategic plan and fiscal sponsorship.** These organizations are currently meeting with funders in the Seattle community. Na’ah Illahee supported them to make these connections and prepared them for meetings with funders.



Na’ah Illahee Fund collaborates with the University of Washington’s Institute for Science and Math Education, Washington NASA Space Consortium and the Information School to increase the number of Native people in STEM fields in Seattle/King County, and has continued to collaborate since 2015.

Fifteen young Native women were a part of the **Native Girls Code** program in 2015–16, all ages 12–18. They presented at the UW Living Breath Traditional Foods and Ecological Knowledge Symposium. They visited Google, Facebook (10 girls received free laptops) and the University of WA NASA Space Grant Consortium summer science camp. They learned cultural arts, created short films, volunteered with the Green Team at the Paddle to Nisqually Tribal Journeys, and they attended the Annual Traditional Youth and Elders Gathering at Nooksack.

We are engaged in **multiple partnerships and collaborations** including: Seattle Urban Native Nonprofits Network, Seattle Native Youth Programs Collaborative, Women’s Funding Alliance GLOW Program, University of Washington, Front and Centered, Environmental Professionals of Color, Progress Alliance of Washington, Pacific NW Tribal Climate Change Network, Center for Women and Democracy, International funders for Indigenous Peoples, Slow Food Turtle Island Association Seattle Chapter, and Native Americans in Philanthropy.



WE NEED TO DO MORE



WE CAN'T AFFORD TO BREAK STRIDE

To scale our complex work to meet our community's needs in the timeframe demanded, we need to secure and build our internal capacity. We need your help. Your support helps us to:

- Raise more money for project funding. Respond quickly to opportunities and take on more projects to have a substantive impact.
- Recruit and sustain the best, most uniquely skilled, connected, and experienced staff.
- Leverage your contributions to raise additional money from corporate, foundation, and government funders.
- Raise a core of unrestricted funding to strengthen our programs and makes them more competitive when philanthropic funding is limited.

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Program Coordinator



Na'ah Illahee Fund
6512 23rd Ave NW, Suite 324
Seattle, WA 98107

www.naahillahee.org