

## Return to the Heart Foundation



*“A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground, then it is done, no matter how brave its warriors or strong its weapons.” - Cheyenne proverb*

### Vision

In this critical time for Mother Earth, social and political structures... It is time to empower the strong hearts, Indigenous women, by amplifying their voices for healing and transformative impact.

### Mission

Return to the Heart Foundation is an Indigenous Women-led grantmaking organization empowering visionary Indigenous Women-led initiatives invested in healing through: narrative change, civic engagement, restorative development and climate justice. Return to the Heart is a hybrid organization focused on walking alongside grantees through programmatic strategy on creating innovative, collaborative and strategic partnerships for meaningful impact.

### Problem

Even before this decade of Times Up, Me Too, Climate Crisis and the 100th Anniversary of the Women’s Suffrage, the contributions and struggles of Indigenous women and girls has not been visible or been significantly included in contemporary social causes and initiatives. Therefore, the solutions of and for Indigenous women and girls have not been present at the decision-making table.

Against this backdrop, this is the critical moment and opportunity to support an Indigenous Women-led organization, Return to the Heart Foundation, which is focused on uplifting initiatives to achieve long-term narrative change strategies from within social movements. Indigenous Women hold unique wisdom and critical solutions to heal and re-align in the face of patriarchy and colonization.

- **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & ACTION** - The genocide of Native people is only beginning to be acknowledged. We have survived and thrived despite systematic attempts to eradicate our culture and our children. While this devastating history can speak to hundreds of lost tribes and lost languages, indigenous peoples are the ultimate survivors carrying with us critical traditional knowledge for saving the Earth as the current climate crisis deepens. Until we review and acknowledge the past to collectively heal, we will not be able to move forward to create a sustainable future for Native and all people.
- **SUPPORT THE FUTURE** - Demographically, the Native population is a young population and growing. However, the census has not accurately counted Native communities. In fact, some researchers estimate many communities will see a population boom in the next several years. We have to be prepared economically for our future. **We have a vision for transformative change that not only benefits our communities but ALL communities.** It is in America’s best interest to cultivate the community health of Native Americans to support the wellbeing of all peoples and the web of life that is our shared home.
- **ERADICATE RACISM** - The biggest challenge Native people have had to face is that mainstream America is still largely ignorant to the historic plight of Native American

communities. We continue to face imminent danger to the health and safety of the geographic spaces we inhabit due to racism and the struggles to access and protect our resources such as land and water.

- **SUPPORT MOVEMENT BUILDING** - Indigenous Peoples have been hit the hardest by dramatic changes in climate -- and yet their knowledge and solutions have yet to be heard and centered in dialogue and actions. Indigenous Women have continued to endure the violent economic and environmental impact of the fossil fuel industry and those Indigenous Women-led organizations on the front lines need support now more than ever to continue their fight for their rights related to land, territory, culture, language, livelihoods, sovereignty, self-determination and development.
- **STRIVING TOWARDS EQUITY** - Philanthropic giving for Native communities is only 0.4%. It is anticipated in the next Census that Native Americans will be 3% of the population and funding would need to be increased 11 times in order to achieve equitable philanthropic giving towards Native Communities. The goal of Return to the Heart Foundation, will help to close the gap -- if philanthropy will commit to take action to realize a shared vision for equality.

We are ushering in the end of the devaluation and genocide of Native people and a new beginning. We must protect indigenous women for the future of the world we live in. In order to meet the great needs, we need great solutions. We will identify, advocate and support the kinds of innovative, culturally steeped, bold solutions needed to fight for the lives of children, families, and communities.

### **Objectives**

- To cultivate unique and strategic relationships with donors, community partners, and grantees for a culture shift in America utilizing deep cultural knowledge for direct community impact.
- To innovate grantmaking methods and programs to scale creative Indigenous women-led projects and their leaders.
- To facilitate the flow of social, financial and human capital and incorporate collaborative indigenous practices that move from the transactional into the relational.

### **Focus Areas**

Since time immemorial, Indigenous women have led their communities with holistic indigenous knowledge, collective decision making, and collaborative practices. Within the two decades this asset framing has been uplifted as a strength, however Indigenous women have not been utilized for their expertise as life givers, culture bearers, community leaders and protectors.

### **Healing**

It's time for true healing to begin. As a nation, we have not come to terms with the genocide that has been committed against the Indigenous people of this land. More and more, in the 21st century, revisionist history is being rejected and skewed history is acknowledged. For example, Christopher Columbus mistakenly calling the Indigenous people "Indians" has had a profound and lasting impact on social, cultural and historical contexts as a simple mistake by a brutal colonizer that would last more than 200 years without being widespreadly corrected. There is dire need for healing in this

country and healing can only happen when we begin at home, with the first people, the Indigenous people of this country. This means not only correcting the 500 year old propaganda embedded in systems, but creating a cultural shift truly honoring Indigenous Peoples and supporting those healing intergenerational trauma through cultural revitalization in their communities.

### **Climate Justice**

Many in climate justice circles acknowledge Indigenous Peoples hold the key to reversing the damage and yet their knowledge and solutions have yet to be heard in meaningful dialogue and actions. Indigenous Peoples are caring for 80 percent of biodiversity worldwide and are the first to be drastically affected by climate change and even more devastating, are targeted for their resources. Coastal tribes in Alaska are losing their communities and way of life as the environment that has sustained them for centuries is warming in the two decades. Water on some reservations is not drinkable due. Sacred sites are becoming desecrated due to greed and disregard, even laws have been passed to prosecute the protectors of the land siding with big oil companies who many times have circumvented regulations and protections put into place to protect the people.

Indigenous Women have endured the violent impact of the fossil fuel industry and the Indigenous Women led organizations on the front lines need support now more than ever to continue their fight for their rights related to health, land, territory, culture, language, livelihoods, sovereignty, self-determination and development. Support for the many Indigenous communities in the northern United States organizing to protect women and children is needed now as they prepare for the effects of pipeline construction and man camps to cut south through their homelands.

### **Civic Engagement**

Native People are beginning to have representation and building power in state, county, and national elections. In 2018, there were 10 Native candidates for Congress, a dozen running for state-wide offices, and 78 prospective representatives for state legislatures. History was made in 2019 with the first Native Women being elected to Congress, as State Representatives, and to local government in states and on the national level. Native people have been called the "sleeping giant" and our voices in many states could turn the elections, change America and even change the world. It will take strategic vision accompanied by actions to support those who will stand up, be the voice, represent us, and take on the systemic barriers that we have yet to overcome.

### **Narrative Change**

Our voices, our stories, our narratives are only beginning to be heard. History is fraught with stereotypes, misinformation, and unacknowledged contributions and struggles of Native people, most especially Native women. Pocahontas is used as a racialized slur from the leader of America. This is unacceptable. Native women have experienced -- and continue to endure -- issues of crisis proportions that have not had the visibility that is both necessary and deserved. One such example is the vast numbers of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) as well as violence against Native Women all based on devaluation and degradation, a legacy of colonization.

### **Restorative and Regenerative Development**

Native women led approaches to economic development recognize the centrality of healing work to economic development and focuses on the kinds of priorities and projects that lead to generational change. The healing of the land, the healing of generations, and the healing of relationships is

central to this new approach to economic development. To address the deep economic challenges facing native communities, we must support the leadership, creativity, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment of Native Women. Return to the Heart Foundation focuses on stimulating women-led economic development and business activity by expanding access to capital, increasing asset development, and expanding local employment opportunities.

As Native women, we recognize the centrality of healing work in economic development and importance of supporting priorities and projects that lead to generational change. The healing of the land, the healing of generations, and the healing of relationships is at the heart of our approach to economic development. To address the deep economic challenges facing native communities, we must dig deep into the root causes. We must support the leadership, creativity, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment of Native Women who can lead the solutions in their own communities. Return to the Heart Foundation's vision is to open doors that have never been opened to innovate and catalyze Native women-led economic and business activity by expanding access to capital, increasing asset development, and expanding local employment opportunities.

### **Team**

The co-founders are visionary Native women experienced in community bridge building, called to bring healing and action to native communities through their ancestral wisdom. They believe impact and cultural shifts come from a diversity of perspective and skill. This team holds unique expertise in advocacy, civic engagement, community development, healing, narrative change, philanthropy, strategic planning and leadership development.

**Sarah Eagle Heart - Co-Founder/Co-CEO** – Sarah is an Emmy-award winning social justice storyteller, non-profit leader, consultant, activist, author, media strategist, and producer focused on advocacy on behalf of Indigenous Peoples rooted worldview as an Oglala Lakota raised on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. She is an internationally accomplished executive with a diverse background in tribal, corporate, and non-profit organizations. Ms. Eagle Heart is the former CEO of Native Americans in Philanthropy. She has raised over \$20M for native people.

**Reddawn Foster - Co-Founder/COO** - Red Dawn has over ten years of experience working with Tribal communities in the community and economic development field. Red Dawn is passionate about utilizing her education and experience to promote positive planning, design, and construction for the future growth and development of Tribal Nations. Red Dawn received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from the University of Colorado and received her Master of Arts degree in Business Administration from the University of Notre Dame.

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