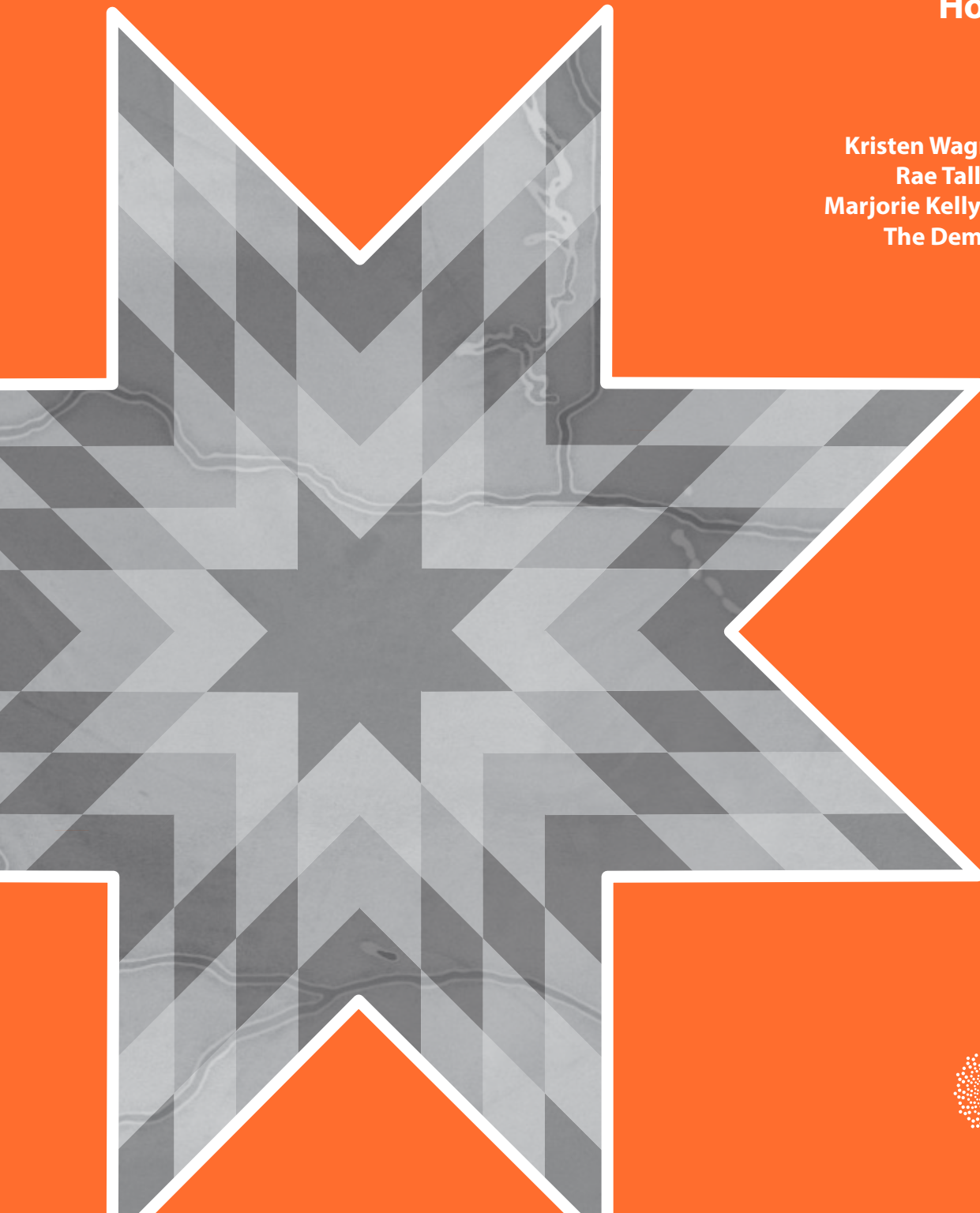


An Indigenous Approach to Community Wealth Building: A Lakota Translation

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A quilt produced by the Owín̄ža Quilters Cooperative, based on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Preface

Native-led Organizations: Advancing economic, social and cultural prosperity

**Karla Miller,
Northwest Area Foundation**

The Northwest Area Foundation is committed to Native people and communities thriving on their own terms and fulfilling their visions. This commitment is expressed through our dedication of 40 percent of our annual grant dollars to support Native-led poverty reduction and community wealth-building efforts in reservation and urban Native communities.

One of the greatest challenges facing Native communities is building thriving and inclusive economies. Developing new culturally grounded economic systems and approaches is a top priority and especially those models that inspire new thinking and build economic systems. The Learning/Action Lab for Community Wealth Building provided a forum for Native-led organizations to come together to build a knowledge base and to shape the actions and activities most aligned with each participating community and organization. The community wealth building values and drivers provided a guide for creating opportunity along with the inspiration to reshape the model.

Asset and community wealth building is at the core of the Foundation's grantmaking framework. To build assets and wealth, we recognize the need to employ multiple approaches including research, convening, connecting, collaboration, and grantmaking. The Native-led organizations that came together to learn from each other and take action conducted feasibility studies, came together numerous times over five years designing and planning their time together, connected with each other through site visits, collaborated on social enterprise ideas, and received grant support from the Foundation to move this work forward.

The Lakota Translation reflects the inspiration and new models that come from a group of visionary people and organizations working together to strategically build equitable, sustainable economic systems. It is rooted in the cultural and historical context of Native communities and connects the elements necessary to build thriving local economies. The opportunities coming from these efforts—which support small business and enterprise development, job training, financial education, access to capital, and policies that help grow local Native economies—are mutually reinforcing and will build greater economic security and reduce the economic disparities in Native communities.

Thank you to The Democracy Collaborative for creating the space within the Learning/Action Lab for all voices to inform the direction of this work. And, many thanks to Stephanie Gutierrez for bringing forward her insights on the process of integrating community wealth building into a Native values-based framework.

—Karla Miller,
Northwest Area Foundation

Introduction

The Learning/Action Lab for Community Wealth Building

**By Sarah McKinley and Marjorie Kelly,
The Democracy Collaborative**

How can Native American communities better develop community wealth that stays local and brings inspiring new models of broad-based ownership into Indian Country? Exploring the answers, in real world projects, was the aim of the Learning/Action Lab for Community Wealth Building, a five-year co-learning and co-creation collaboration led by The Democracy Collaborative (TDC) and supported by the Northwest Area Foundation (NWAf). Begun in the summer of 2013 as part of NWAf's planned multi-year initiative, the Native Employee-Owned Development Pilot Project, the initial goal of the Lab was to coach a cohort of Native American organizations in launching enterprises to root jobs and wealth in Native communities. In the five years since then, the initiative grew into something beyond enterprise development: shifting mindsets and the way that economic development is done in Indian Country.

The Learning/Action Lab journey began as a conversation between NWAf and The Democracy Collaborative about ways to intentionally promote “community wealth building” (CWB)—a systems approach to local economic development that advances collaborative, inclusive, sustainable, and democratically controlled local economies, with the aim of addressing the root causes of poverty and economic inequality. This approach deploys a range of models, including worker cooperatives, community land trusts, community development finance institutions, anchor institution strategies, municipal and local enterprise, participatory planning and budgeting, and alternative financing, all with the goal of creating a more democratic economy, built on broad-based ownership of—and participation in—the economy. Community wealth building is economic system change starting at the local level.

NWAF staff felt this framework fit well with Native communities because of its focus on inclusiveness, cooperative ownership, community rootedness, and sustainability. They were eager to see more community enterprise in Indian Country—not just tribally owned enterprise—and felt that a community wealth building approach could catalyze more economic empowerment in Native communities. The Learning/Action Lab was designed to help break the isolation of certain Native communities and help share innovation across Indian Country.

As the Lab progressed, many participants told us that community wealth building fit naturally with Native culture. As one participant put it, “what people call a ‘new economy’ is really a return to what our ancestors always knew.”

While rich in community connection and culture, Native Americans remain the economically poorest minority group in the United States—with poverty rates around 25 percent, median earnings substantially lower than the rest

Participants in the Learning Action Lab tour the Evergreen Cooperative Laundry in Cleveland, Ohio



of the population, and an unemployment rate that reached 15.2 percent in 2010 (and was still the highest across racial/ethnic groups in 2017, at 7.8 percent). Reservations, in particular, are known for high rates of poverty and a dearth of economic activity; some have unemployment rates upwards of 60 percent; most lack bank branches, grocery stores, or other retail outlets; and many lack adequate housing and up-to-date infrastructure.

As one participant put it, “what people call a ‘new economy’ is really a return to what our ancestors always knew.”

Yet, despite the enormity of these oft-reported statistics, many new opportunities are bubbling up in Native communities. Beyond the gaming and energy industries that are most familiar, Native communities have a large informal and small business economy. A 2005 NAAF-commissioned study conducted by Prosperity Now (then known as CFED) on Native entrepreneurship, “Native Entrepreneurship: Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Communities,” showed that individuals in Native communities often produce goods and services for their local markets to meet needs that are otherwise not being met due to distance, transportation issues, and an overall absence of a local formal economy.

In the absence of a tax base, market, and infrastructure, tribes have become more entrepreneurial in creating sustainable economies. Native American entrepreneurs trade goods as a means of survival; run businesses to patch together incomes for their families; and launch high-growth small businesses that produce jobs and attract mainstream venture capital. Culturally, with regard to decision-making, tribal communities consider the effect on seven generations, keeping the Native worldview that all life is interconnected.

It was these practices and norms that really connected with the frame of community wealth building. A cohort of Native American organizations—both reservation and urban based—was brought together to create new economic opportunities for their communities. These organizations included Little Earth of United Tribes in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI), also in Minneapolis; Native American Natural Foods (NANF) on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, Oglala Lakota Nation; Native American Youth and Family Center

(NAYA) in Portland Oregon; the Spokane Tribe of Indians in Washington State, Spokane Nation; and Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation (TVCDC), also on Pine Ridge. NACDI and Little Earth ended their involvement in the Lab mid-way, due to capacity issues and other concerns.

In the early years of the Lab, the cohort gathered for learning journeys to see inspiring models and meet experts in Oakland, CA; Denver, CO; Cleveland, OH; and Winnipeg, Manitoba in Canada. Among the sites visited were Recology and Richmond Solar in California, Oweesta and Revision International in Denver, the Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, and Arctic Cooperatives and Neechi Commons in Manitoba. Over time, the Lab moved to a collaborative, co-learning approach, with participant design through a curriculum advisory committee, and with the adoption of principles of co-learning, co-creating, transparency, trust, and relationship building. (Read more about the convening process in this toolkit created for the Lab participants: <http://communitywealthtoolkit.org/nwaf/>). This collaborative cohort environment laid the groundwork for a strong ecosystem of support among the organizations as they developed their projects and engaged with each other.

The cohort organizations developed a variety of social enterprise models engaging many different ownership forms, with varying degrees of success. Each organization struggled and most do not yet have stable enterprises. Yet a rich variety of new models and lessons have emerged for Indian Country.

- **NANF** transferred ownership of their brand Tanka Bar from individual to partial, yet significant, employee ownership—despite facing intense competition from large multinational corporations (borne of their own success in pioneering a new category of buffalo meat snack).
- **NAYA** explored spinning off subsidiary enterprises run by their nonprofit into a separate nonprofit holding company but scaled back plans during a leadership transition.

- **Little Earth** launched a successful Native food truck as a joint venture between the nonprofit and a local Native entrepreneur and sold the enterprise to that individual.
- **Spokane Tribe** revived a struggling Tribal Trading Post, helping it to become a community hub and more successful commercial enterprise.
- **Thunder Valley CDC** created a social enterprise division that is developing enterprises, through acquisition and startup, in some cases supported by demand from the organization's Regenerative Community development. Thunder Valley launched their Food Sovereignty Initiative's Small Demonstration Farm, Owíŋža Quilters Cooperative, and Thikáŋa Construction in the last year of the Lab.

Chief among the learnings of the Lab was that enterprise efforts by the organizations were a means to an end. They were a way to think through a community wealth building approach to community economic development. In the end, the actual projects were less important than the process of engaging with a broader way of thinking and ultimately, a shifting of mindset within the organizations.

An example of this was when a group at Thunder Valley was gathered to discuss what enterprises might find a home within the Regenerative Community being built, and someone suggested attracting franchises from off Reservation. Several in the social enterprise team spoke up and said, we should try to focus on having Native-owned enterprises here. A whole mindset was at work: instead of having wealth leave the Reservation, keep it circulating locally; instead of having non-Native-owned companies, empower Natives as owners. Consider Native empowerment and self-sufficiency in every economic step taken. That's building community wealth.

Now that the Lab has ended, the work of spreading this mindset in Indian Country goes on. The shift is embodied in the work of Thunder Valley with its Regenerative Community—a village of homes, businesses, and commu-

nity spaces, which aims to be a net zero development, producing all its own energy, with an aim of 100 percent water reclamation. Thunder Valley is also training youth in sustainable construction techniques, in addition to building Native-owned businesses. As co-founder Nick Tilsen put it, “regeneration” means the ability of an organism to regrow or restore an original function that has been lost. What Thunder Valley is building is not just homes and other structures. It aims to regenerate many kinds of wealth: community spirit, youth skills, food sovereignty, economic self-sufficiency. It is empowering families to take responsibility for their future.

For community wealth building to work among tribal nations, it must match indigenous philosophies and values.

It must become the community’s own by grounding the frame in the cultural values of the community and translating it into the lived realities of the people.

This report, by Stephanie Gutierrez, had its seeds at Thunder Valley CDC, where Gutierrez worked in the Social Enterprise Initiative. She was also part of the Learning/Action Lab. Her team, while she worked at Thunder Valley, entered into rich and deep dialogue with members of the community, together rethinking the community wealth building frame through a Lakota lens. A key lesson emerged: For community wealth building to work among tribal nations, it must match indigenous philosophies and values. It must become the community’s own by grounding the frame in the cultural values of the community and translating it into the lived realities of the people. This report presents the process Gutierrez chose to take in order to understand community wealth building through a Lakota lens.

The process she articulates here is where a community wealth building strategy should always begin. We did not know that when we began the Lab. This lesson is part of the co-learning that has emerged. The Lab showed us that communities need to unlearn how economic development has been put upon them. As Gutierrez writes in this report, what Thunder Valley is doing is “decolonizing” how they think of economic development to rebuild economic empowerment. There are lessons for all communities in this story.

—Sarah McKinley and Marjorie Kelly,
The Democracy Collaborative

Getting Started: Exploration of CWB Concepts

By Stephanie Gutierrez

How does one begin to understand what economies are, who matters in them, what our own place is? These are questions of who holds power, who lacks it, who has a right to ownership, and who remains perpetually dispossessed and powerless. The frame of community wealth building, as I encountered it, proved an invitation to this deep exploration. I began this exploration in my economic development work at Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation on the Pine Ridge Reservation, through an extensive individual and communal process. The following narrative is a personal account of how I came to understand community wealth building, connect it to my values as a Lakota woman, and, through consultation with colleagues and community, match this framework to our way of knowing and living. Exploration of community wealth building (CWB) concepts in this way resulted in a more culturally relevant wealth building plan for the Pine Ridge community.

While serving as the social enterprise program manager at Thunder Valley CDC, I was introduced to The Democracy Collaborative and its community wealth building framework when I participated in the third and fourth years of the Learning/Action Lab. Supplied with a binder of notes and summaries of previous Lab gatherings and a copy of The Democracy Collaborative's *Cities Building Community Wealth* report articulating the community wealth building framework, I began to read. Almost immediately, I encountered examples of ways other communities of color were pursuing economic development on their own terms. One such example was the Portland Development Commission's creation of six districts in areas of high concentrations of people of color and high poverty, with each area creating a vision for improving their local economies. This

The following narrative is a personal account of how I came to understand community wealth building, connect it to my values as a Lakota woman, and, through consultation with colleagues and community, match this framework to our way of knowing and living.

reminded me of the nine districts on our reservation, each with their own unique considerations and their readiness to define what their community needs. Another unique and unconventional method I learned about were community benefits agreements. I immediately thought of our old Lakota ways of *tiospayes*, and how we made decisions communally and to the benefit of all. Our urban Native communities could utilize this method by working with local decision makers to agree upon ways they can benefit the community. Understanding this framework as an alternative to development-as-usual sparked excitement in me as I began to pencil in the margins all the ways it spoke to who we are as Lakota people. Phrases like “devotion to place,” “respect for all those who live there,” and “keeping ownership locally rooted” resonated with our Lakota values.

As compelling as the framework seemed to me, it was geared towards urban communities and did not yet resonate with my knowledge and experience of living and working on the reservation—a rural and isolating place.

**Thunder Valley CDC's headquarters
on the Pine Ridge Reservation**



I felt that I needed to know more about our history, about the economic systems and processes that led to our current conditions, in order to determine if this framework would address the needs of our communities. My background as a social worker in previous community development work led me to start with a needs assessment to determine the current social and economic conditions of the Pine Ridge Reservation, where I was living at the time. This was necessary in order to begin to translate the possibilities of this framework to produce a program that would meet the direct needs of our community.

I worked with my team in the social enterprise program to create a community development baseline, reflecting on development conditions of the Oglala Sioux Tribe on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Using quantitative and qualitative evidence, we described the economic profile, political and governmental structure, cultural assets, socioeconomic conditions, land holdings, environmental conditions, and natural resources, as a means of identifying the base from which community development might occur. Although much of the information was collected from federal data websites, it was known that this data was not a true reflection of actual statistics for Native communities, due to historical mistrust Native people have with the federal government and their limited participation in census reporting. We supplemented official data with statistical data, interviews, and personal reflections we collected from local organizations and community leaders. This information provided an overview of the reservation that included the identification of current challenges, existing assets (e.g., people, social networks, cultural knowledge, anchor institutions, local ecology, and language), and areas of opportunity. Core to the community wealth building process is to begin with an asset inventory, including the many kinds of assets beyond financial ones.

We supplemented official data with statistical data, interviews, and personal reflections we collected from local organizations and community leaders.

Throughout this process, I continued to read about community wealth building, but my personal moment of revelation occurred when I attended a training at the Main Street Project in Northfield, Minnesota. Working with rural Latino immigrants, they had developed a poultry-centered, regenerative agricultural system equipping farmers to address local and

regional food insecurity. I was able to see how this system resonated with the traditional practices of Indigenous People. The whole system is circular: free-range chickens feeding off the land, providing nutrients back to the soil through their waste, feeding off seeds and droppings from crops that can be harvested, only to start the cycle again. I quickly recognized this as the way we, Lakota, used to do things long ago. We harvested only what we needed, making sure to leave little to no waste, allowing the environment to naturally process and support the regeneration. But there was more. Managing the farm was just one part of the overall system. Main Street had taken this to the next level and mapped out all the businesses that would support and contribute to this whole food and ag system. I immediately thought about the systems approach the Democracy Collaborative had laid out for us. From anchor institutions to multipliers, each driver was contributing to a local economic system which we would have control over.

It clicked. This is what CWB is about! It is the restoration and redevelopment of our community, using a systems approach based on contemporary business models that embody our traditional ways of operating. It reminded me of a popular Native perspective that serves as core values for many tribes, called the four R's: relationship, responsibility, reciprocity, and redistribution. Through this ah-ha moment, I was able to connect the CWB work with who we are as Lakota people and to recognize that what makes us different is also our greatest strength.

Following this experience and re-reading the *Cities Building Community Wealth* report, I began to notice a theme in my scribbles across the margins. Many of the comments were related to Lakota beliefs and traditional ways of being.

Having a community baseline, realizing the need for more education about CWB across the organization and community, and feeling empowered by the revelation that traditional Lakota ways are visible in the CWB work, it was time to link how it was all related. We could now make this frame our own and move forward with the development of a Lakota Community Wealth Building framework.

Community wealth building is the restoration and redevelopment of our community, using a systems approach based on contemporary business models that embody our traditional ways of operating.

Community Input and Translation

My personal revelation of the connections between CWB and Lakota values was just the first step toward the development of a revised framework. More people needed to be involved in order to design a plan that would truly resonate with the organization and the broader community. Rae Tall, Program Coordinator for the Social Enterprise Initiative at the time, and I spent time reflecting on each of the seven drivers of CWB (as laid out in TDC's **Cities Building Community Wealth** report) and how the conventional approach to economic development and the CWB approach related to Lakota culture. We worked together to write our interpretation for each driver (see the chart on page 19 and Appendix A for a summary of this interpretation). For example, one driver is place—developing under-utilized local assets of many kind, to benefit local people. Other drivers are broad-based ownership as opposed to absentee ownership; and collaboration as opposed to elite decision-making that excludes ordinary people.

As Rae Tall recounts:

Initially, it was really hard. Meaning, being traditional and being Lakota I still didn't know everything [Lakota]. To put it in drivers, it was a struggle. I talked to co-workers, my mom, friends, relatives and you talked to people. We were talking to them and how it relates to being Lakota. It was fun to do. When we put it into [an] excel [chart], comparing them, it evolved into something more."

We had many open discussions about where we see the conventional colonized approach to economic development across the reservation, identifying the obvious examples and surprising ourselves as we realized the more deeply rooted examples. At times, it was met with emotion as we began to comprehend the severity of historical injustices and the imprint it has left on our land, our people, and our way of life. Each time we reviewed the CWB approach and the role of each driver, we felt a sense of hope and possibility that "it doesn't have to stay this way" and that "we can do something about it."

We spoke with other Lakota staff, our relatives, and community members through in-person, informal interviews and casual conversations, explain-

ing to them what we were working on and asking for their thoughts regarding these approaches. Through this translation process, we were able to gain insights and stories of how things used to be and how they are now. We gained different ways of understanding, but more importantly, we noticed how open and willing people were to contribute. The translation process was not an individual process. It was a communal process. We were able to learn what community wealth meant through a natural process of community building.

For Lakota, wealth means to live by our virtues in order to have a happy, well-balanced life. The goal is not materialistic things but helping, giving, and taking care of one another. Our wealth is measured in our ability to care for our people and to provide a strong foundation for future generations. This is significantly important in Lakota communities. Long ago, decision-making included many different voices. It was not considered appropriate for one person to make decisions for everyone.

The translation process was not an individual process. It was a communal process. We were able to learn what community wealth meant through a natural process of community building.

We did not want to force the CWB drivers into a Lakota perspective. It had to resonate naturally with traditional Lakota values or it wasn't going to work. Historically, and even today, individuals from the outside have tried to force their ways on Native communities. Some were well-meaning, and some just didn't care about the outcomes. Some believed if it worked in other communities, surely it would work here. As a result, Native leaders, desperate for an answer, sometimes went forward with the outsider's ideas and approaches, unclear about the impact this would have on their culture.

Our culture is what makes us different. It also gives us our strength. Before colonization, our culture is what created our immense, large-scale management of our people, homes, lands, and resources. With hundreds of millions of acres, we operated a self-sufficient economy able to support the needs of the people.

During colonization, culture is what sustained us. Our beliefs, ancient traditions, and cultural practices, although used in hiding, saw us through some

of the worst atrocities. Although the impact of historical trauma continues to separate and divide our community, the one driving force that provides us with hope and conviction is our Lakota culture.

As Rae Tall notes:

By recreating it in our own way, we are taking it back. Historical trauma has been happening for centuries. But the time is now to make a change. To be the voice. To take ownership. We are a sovereign nation. Regardless of whether we're using the IRA [Indian Reauthorization Act] government they put upon us, we have the right to make it our own.

We also have the right to cease using the conventional economic development model, or to recreate it in our own way. It is our choice. Decolonizing and redefining economic development—the way we manage our economy, polity, and society—with Lakota values and ways of being, gives us ownership.

**The Learning Action Lab tours a
Thunder Valley construction project**



Breaking down each one of the drivers of CWB in our own community context and incorporating our tribal values was a holistic and intentional process (see Appendix A). Throughout the process, we recognized the importance of storytelling as a way to communicate our teachings. Listening to our relatives, coworkers, elders, and leaders share their knowledge and wisdom through stories was a powerful experience. It helped us to think more deeply about each driver and to refocus when we felt ourselves straying into the colonized approach. As the connections began to sync and resonate with our indigenous ways, we grew more confident in our ability to reinterpret the drivers. Quickly, we started to recognize conventional approaches happening around us and solutions we could incorporate. We were no longer afraid or unaware of what direction to take anymore. Not only were we able to act more quickly, but support and interest grew along with our confidence.

Building Wealth Broadly Held, Locally Rooted

Feeling excited and confident, and knowing the positive implications this framework has across all areas of community development, we realized it was important to share our work with more staff and leaders across the organization, so they could see how it might be translated into their own work. We created a PowerPoint presentation that explained our rationale for the program, defined community wealth, described how and why we developed the Lakota CWB framework, and identified our program goals and measures. It was met with positive comments and support from the staff and leadership team.

In addition, we developed evaluation tools that measure outcomes related to community wealth building. These assessments are completed by social enterprise program staff, future businesses supported through the program, partners and collaborators, as well as current business owners. They measure qualitative and quantitative benefits to the *Oyate* (people), anchor institution support, and collaborative measurements, just to name a few. Messaging about the CWB framework reaches a broad circle of individuals through these assessments and includes important outcomes such as stronger relationships, impact on families, and behavioral changes.

Approaches to Economic Development

Drivers	Conventional Approach	Community Wealth Building	Lakota CWB
Place	Aims to attract firms using incentives, which increases the tax burden on local residents	Develops under-utilized local assets of many kinds for benefit of local residents	Loyalty to the <i>Oyate</i> (people) and <i>Unci Maka</i> (planet); human capital and land
Ownership	Supports absentee and elite ownership, often harming locally owned family firms	Promotes local, broad-based ownership as the foundation of thriving local economy	Held by the <i>Oyate</i> ; democratization of ownership
Multipliers	Pays little attention to whether money is leaking out of community	Encourages institutional buy-local strategies to keep money circulating locally	Formal and informal economic activities such as bartering and trading locally
Collaboration	Decision-making led primarily by government and private sector, excluding local residents	Brings many players to the table: nonprofits, philanthropy, anchors, and cities	As Lakota people we give and help as we can. Keeping the traditions of our virtues to work with one another as one. Reaching out to other Indigenous People.
Inclusion	Key metric is number of jobs created, with little regard for wages or who is hired	Aims to create inclusive, living wage jobs that help all families enjoy economic security	Making sure all living things are considered; triple bottom line: people, planet and prosperity
Workforce	Relies on generalized training programs without focus on linkages to actual jobs	Links training to employment and focuses on jobs for those with barriers to employment	Considers each person and their ability and makes a place for them
System	Accepts status quo of wealth inequality, hoping benefits trickle down	Develops institutions and supportive ecosystems to create a new normal of economic activity	The system is a circular one. Lakota way of life: everything is connected; consciously re-creating sustainable communities

Additionally, CWB language is now incorporated into the interview process for the whole organization, and the communications department integrated it into program marketing materials. It was our hope that by using an engaged and participatory process to adapt the model to Lakota values and culture, we would be able to embed the community wealth building model more broadly throughout the organization and begin to root the idea in the community.

In sum, Lakota Community Wealth Building is about loyalty to place and to our people, with ownership held by the community, working with each other as one, considering each person and their ability to be part of the economy, and seeing our economy as circular where everything is connected—consciously recreating sustainable communities.

Our conclusion is that community wealth building strategies must be translated and integrated into cultural values and practices through inclusive participatory processes to increase the likelihood of success. Using the CWB framework, Native communities have the opportunity to decolonize their economic approach and to reclaim the way they managed their economies long ago. We are not talking about a completely new economic strategy, but rather, reclaiming and revitalizing traditional processes of reciprocity, redistribution, relationships, and responsibility—while using contemporary, modern-day, under-utilized business concepts that align with cultural values. CWB has the potential to restore and redevelop the wealth of Native communities through a systems approach involving loyalty to geographic place, local broad-based ownership, recognition and support for the formal and informal businesses that currently exist across Native communities, and a collaborative, inclusive spirit aimed at providing workforce opportunities for everyone.

Conventional economic development strategies and common practices evident in our communities today—such as big industry in natural resource development, mining, manufacturing, and tribally owned enterprises—have benefited some tribes. However, it remains

Community wealth building strategies must be translated and integrated into cultural values and practices through inclusive participatory processes to increase the likelihood of success.

clear that these benefits do not always trickle down to the broader community, are not the most viable strategy for some tribal communities, nor are the benefits sustainable over the long term. In fact, current economic strategies still result in dollars moving off reservation, with non-Natives the ones primarily gaining from employment. Any money that comes back to Native communities is typically spent outside the community, leaking off the reservation at rates as high as 94 percent, rather than serving as reinvestment back into the local economy.

In addition, there is a gap between the decision-makers and the community members. Tribal governments do not include entrepreneurship in their strategies and sometimes put up barriers to independent businesses, making it difficult for entrepreneurs to succeed. Research has proven that small businesses are a primary contributor of employment in rural communities, as well as providers for much needed products and services. Therefore, the CWB model—designed for broader community knowledge-building, investment, ownership, and growth of community assets—is worth consideration in Indian Country.

The Future of CWB in Indian Country

This qualitative research and interpretation effort is the first step toward creating a new narrative of CWB for Native communities, defining the concepts through an indigenous lens, and determining the indicators needed for more rigorous research moving forward. Our recommendations for moving this work forward fall into three main areas: 1) curriculum and training, 2) research, and 3) policy. With The Democracy Collaborative's support, Hope Nation LLC (a Native-owned consulting firm) is committed to carrying on the work of community wealth building in Native communities.

Curriculum and training

A common request by the teams in the Learning/Action Lab was for visuals they can provide to leaders and community members about CWB. Training toolkits created for and by Native people, that provide helpful

information about ownership models and anchor institutions, were also identified as critical to supporting the sustainability and expansion of this work across organizations and to other Native communities.

Currently, there are 577 federally-recognized tribes and 62 state-recognized tribes, all working to create strong and resilient economies that are self-sufficient with their own cultures and traditions intact. Since the Era of Self-Determination began in the 1970s, tribes have been focused on redefining and reestablishing their governments, programs, policies, and practices to reflect who they were before colonization. Tribes work together like never before, sharing best practices and teaching one another how to reclaim their sovereign rights. Among community development practices in Indian Country, one practice has shown to have strong impact for change: including community members across all generations, especially youth, when leaders are sharing knowledge and imparting wisdom. Children are considered sacred among many tribes, and with



the Native youth population at more than 50 percent across all tribes, it is important to include youth in order to sustain the work of community wealth building. The more we can educate everyone in the circle, the stronger the circle will be.

Research

Since the Learning/Action Lab was the first of its kind to explore, interpret, and implement CWB strategies in Indian Country, more research is needed to identify the most useful approach for introducing and decolonizing the concept, designing culturally relevant CWB strategies, and developing leadership to carry out CWB initiatives. Additional, useful research may include feasibility studies to identify community readiness factors for broad-based ownership models, as well as long-term data collection strategies to measure social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

Policy


There are already numerous federal and state level policies in place to support a shift from conventional economic development to the integration of community wealth building approaches in Indian Country. Increasing awareness and knowledge about these policy options may be more necessary than changing actual policy in its current state. Tribes can see greater economic gains if the enterprise development that they're already doing is blended with CWB. For example, tribes and Native-serving organizations may want to consider new enterprise models that combine nonprofit programs with profit-generating enterprises, to take full advantage of tax benefits and investment opportunities. In addition, the creation of business improvement districts would make tribes and Native-serving organizations eligible for both profit and nonprofit program development funds from the federal government. As more tribes and Native-serving organizations begin to implement CWB strategies, policy gaps and limitations may be identified. In the meantime, it will be important to document how current policies are utilized and what is needed to more effectively build and sustain such efforts.

The more we can educate everyone in the circle, the stronger the circle will be.

Key Findings

The following are the key findings that are applicable to community wealth building work in rural Native communities:

- **Develop a community baseline/profile.** This is an important action step for Native communities, due to the limited or inconclusive information available about Native communities. Although it would be ideal for all communities to be able to get the funding to support a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report, this will provide a good start for anyone wanting to know the current landscape, with its challenges and strengths.
- **Educate everyone.** Effective translation and application of the CWB model depends on the level of involvement from the community. Therefore, it is important to educate everyone (staff, board members, funders, partners, tribal leaders, youth, etc.) in the community about community wealth building. It benefits Native people to recognize themselves in the economic development framework. If a large and diverse pool of community members receive it positively, the concept is likely to be sustainable.
- **Recognize and include culture.** Part of educating people about CWB is also asking for their reactions and interpretation of the model. It is important to start with this step when beginning this work to ground the work in the cultural roots of the community. The work will sync much faster and move quickly if it starts with who we are and how, or whether this work resonates.
- **Embrace diversity and inclusion.** The translation process is not an individual process—it is a communal process that is most effectively accomplished with a diverse group of community members. Allow the natural process to occur. In Native communities, an effort must be made to include all ages in the discussions, especially youth and elders.

- **Decolonize the concepts.** Indigenous communities have the power, strength, and intelligence to develop culturally specific strategies of liberation, health, and well-being. Indigenous people have the right to accept new ways of thinking, reconstruct them, or to deny them. Translation is not only encouraged but necessary.
- **Engage through storytelling.** Storytelling is not only a prominent way of translating knowledge and wisdom across Indigenous communities but is often used to share history, preserve culture, and teach lessons. The process of storytelling can come in many forms and takes time, which is often difficult for outsiders to understand. With information sharing, trust has to be built and acceptance granted before information can be shared openly. It is best to approach information gathering with a lot of time, patience, and reflection. 

Appendix A

This document was created as part of a Social Enterprise Program Summary for Thunder Valley, CDC to convey how Lakota philosophy can be found in the CWB approach.

Lakota Community Wealth Building

When wealth is rooted in community, held locally and inclusively, the foundation of a truly democratic economy is laid. It is an economy that, in its normal functioning, tends to benefit all community members.

Cities Building Community Wealth

Democracy Collaborative, 2015.

As we delved into the community wealth building work, we learned how this approach compares to the conventional economic development approach, and why this new framework is not only necessary but vital to our future, given the current conditions of our reservation. From the beginning we immediately identified with ways in which this framework speaks to Lakota philosophy and the potential it has for wealth-building in our communities.

To Lakota People, the word **wiconzani** means wealth. It means to live a happy, well-balanced life, a life of physical and mental health, in balance with creation. Prior to colonization, the Lakota, the **Oyate** (people) held control of the wealth, working sustainably and in unison with the nature around us. Wealth can mean many things to different groups or cultures. For Lakota it means to live by our virtues in order to have a happy, well-balanced life. It is not about materialistic things but helping, giving, taking care of one another. Our wealth is measured in our ability to care for our people and to provide a strong foundation for future generations. As evident today, our communities are imbalanced and in need of resources to return us to a flourishing, healthy Lakota economy.

Lakota practice the seven virtues that were spoken to us by the White Buffalo Calf Woman. This is what we practice in order to build **wicozani**. The virtues are:

- **Wocekiya** - Prayer
- **Waohola** - Respect
- **Waunsila** - Compassion
- **Wowijake** - Honesty
- **Wawokiye** - Generosity
- **Wahwala** - Humility
- **Woksape** - Wisdom

The aim is to create a new system that enables inclusive indigenous enterprises to thrive and provides long-lasting economic security for **tiospayes** (families). Each driver listed below is explained in more detail and includes reasons why this framework speaks to Lakota traditions and culture:

1. Place

Our core value is loyalty to the Oyate (people) and Unci Maka (Grandmother Earth).

Community wealth building begins with loyalty to geographic place. For Lakota, community connotes both geographic place and kinship. It signifies something profoundly different from a conventional economy that is indifferent to people and place. From the beginning, we were connected to our lands; we came from the Unci Maka (Earth) out from Wind Cave.

Even though we were nomadic people, we have always had our sacred sites and a land base that was deeply spiritual to us. It provided for us and therefore, we honor and care for all living things. Our culture is based on kinship and connection to all that is around us: people, plants, animals, the stars, the land. Before colonization, we had communal ownership of land and extended, matrilineal, nomadic family structures. Although our territory stretched across five states, we were one nation, coming together in the Black Hills once a year for ceremony. This deep connection to land is still with us today.

2. Ownership

Ownership is held by the Oyate, in democratic ownership.

Community wealth building promotes local, broad-based ownership as the foundation for a thriving, resilient local economy. Ownership of assets is the foundation of every economy, for it determines who has control and who receives the majority share of benefits.

For centuries our people controlled their own destiny. There was no one benefactor who got more than the others. Lakota practiced generosity and shared what they had with one another; no one went without. Through colonization, other ways were put upon us, and dependency was inevitable. Our rights were taken and the power and control was no longer the people's, it belonged to the government. This is true today, as represented by the fact that more than 80 percent of the \$400 million dollars that runs through our communities is controlled by the government through social service programs and infrastructure. The majority of the decision-making and political power is held outside the circle.

Regardless of our financial dependency on the federal government, we have survived as a sovereign nation, with currently more than 180 locally owned businesses on the reservation creating revenue and employment. Traditionally, our way of governing was based on autonomy and the critical level of allegiance was local, to the *tiospaye*. Despite the amount of influence or interference from the U.S. and its efforts to transform, and even terminate tribal politics, our traditional ways of democracy still exist.

As Justin Huenemann, Executive Director of the Notah Begay III Foundation said, "focus is needed on the democratization of ownership." We believe that a return to our traditional ways of community is evident in many of the different inclusive ownership models Thunder Valley CDC is considering. Social enterprises, cooperatives, and employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs) are some of the models that are planned to be implemented. With a Native community credit union and a regenerative housing development, we are beginning to see a movement towards democratization of ownership on Pine Ridge Reservation.

3. Multipliers

Local formal and informal economic activities such as bartering and trading are important ways to meet the needs of the Oyate.

Lakota people have long understood the concept of multipliers, since as the majority of what we needed to survive was provided for within each *tiospaye*. Trade was primarily done for items not produced from within. As dependency on federal support became our reality, an informal market emerged, with microenterprise operating across the reservation, producing goods and services in response to the lack of mainstream businesses. Many people trade and exchange goods as a means of survival; in many cases they run businesses on the side to patch together income to support their families. These businesses are often outside the framework of regulation, taxation, benefits, and health and safety protections. According to a study done on the reservation in 1988, this informal sector accounted for more than half the total net wealth accumulated by tribal members. More than 85 of reservation residents were involved in one or more forms of self-initiated, home-based, informal, income-generating activities.

Often these informal enterprises are derived from traditional activities such as hunting, harvesting, drumming and singing at ceremonies and events, or working through the traditional arts such as beading and quilting that meet the needs of the *Oyate*. Regardless, these enterprises show the demand that resides on the reservation. The formal anchor institutions—such as the hospital, schools, university, and government offices—all offer an opportunity for a conscious linking between their needs and opportunities for new businesses to support anchor needs. The procurement, hiring and investment practices of these anchor institutions represent a potentially enormous source of economic development support.

4. Collaboration

As Lakota people we give and help as we can, keeping the traditions of our virtues to work with each another as one.

One of the most important units in Lakota society was the *tiospaye*. Originally hunting bands, families lived together, supporting and collaborating. This was the most important unit of society. Decision-making included many different voices. It was not considered appropriate for one person to make

decisions for everyone. Thunder Valley CDC returned to inclusive collaboration when forming the organization, ensuring a more collective approach to decision-making. We started with our community by launching into hundreds of hours of listening and visioning sessions. We engaged youth, elders, political leaders, parents, together planning a vision for our future. We challenged our community to think about what was possible instead of the challenges that would get in the way. In these community engagement sessions, one elder woman said: “That was the best meeting I have been to in my whole life,” because “[n]o one ever asked me what I wanted for my community, or for my life. Things have been prescribed to this community for a long time.”

5. Inclusion

We consider all living beings, embracing a triple bottom line of people, planet and prosperity.

Lakota inclusion recognizes that all living beings are active participants in an economy. This includes not only the people but the environment as well. True growth and strength of a community cannot be heralded without the recognition of all living things. Prior to colonization, all families were provided for. If a family couldn't provide for themselves, other members in the *tiospaye* would help. True to the meaning of the word “Lakota,” we are “friends and allies” to one another. We deliberately aim to build participative processes in our economy, with broad, local ownership across our tribe, respectful of the environment, so that everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

6. Workforce

Each person and their abilities are considered, so each can find a place in the circle.

Traditionally, we each had a role in maintaining the safety and harmony of our *tiospayes*. Everything had a purpose and no one was left to fend for themselves. This begins at birth, with a belief that children are sacred, and that we are all responsible for their growth and development. Parents and extended families taught children and youth about their importance and ceremonies, and still do so today, providing preparation for becoming a woman and a man. We were intentional about the future of our youth by providing them with knowledge and wisdom to live a good life. Today, at

Thunder Valley CDC, our organization was founded by young people with young families. Regardless of any barriers to employment, everyone deserves this same compassion, same access to opportunities.

7. System

From beginning to end, the system is a circle. In the Lakota way of life, everything is connected. We are consciously re-creating sustainable communities.

Living in the poorest county in the country, hours from an urban city or town that provides access to basic necessities and leisure items, Lakota families often make do with what they have. Even during the roughest historical times, our people had an undocumented flow of economic activity that served the needs and wants of the people. Creative entrepreneurs provided their skills and knowledge in return for money or trade, to support their families. Now, more than ever, there are cooks, artists, seamstresses, and many others who are entrepreneurs in the true sense of the word, making a living by selling their work within the communities and surrounding border towns. These skills and knowledge are assets.

In addition, the reservation offers many other under-utilized assets, such as social networks, cultural riches, local ecology, and Native language. As we have learned at Thunder Valley, language proves to be a key asset necessary for building a regenerative community. We believe that without our Lakota language, we cannot build a future for the next generation. Our language provides the necessary tools to educate our people about our belief system and virtues. It is crucial that the Oyate know the effects of a life without our language, our way of life.

The Democracy Collaborative

The Democracy Collaborative, a nonprofit founded in 2000, is a national leader in equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development. Our work in community wealth building encompasses a range of advisory, research, policy development, and field-building activities aiding on-the-ground practitioners. Our mission is to help shift the prevailing paradigm of economic development, and of the economy as a whole, toward a new system that is place-based, inclusive, collaborative, and ecologically sustainable. A particular focus of our program is assisting universities, hospitals, and other community-rooted institutions to design and implement an Anchor Mission in which all of the institution's diverse assets are harmonized and leveraged for community impact.

Learn more:

<http://democracycollaborative.org>

Hope Nation, LLC

Hope Nation's team brings a combined 47 years of academic leadership and community development experience to provide capacity building consultation to indigenous and rural communities across the country. The core values driving our work are to: 1) use hope as a catalyst for change, 2) build community wealth, 3) create authentic community partnerships, and 4) honor community. Hope Nation works with national and local nonprofits, educational institutions, corporate organizations, as well as tribal, local, state, and federal governmental entities. Our services include, but are not limited to social enterprise development, organizational management, program planning and evaluation, and the development of community empowerment practices.

Learn more:

<https://www.hopenationconsulting.com>

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About the cover image:

The Lakota Star Quilt has a deep, spiritual meaning to the Lakota people as it represents the Morning Star, the star that stands alone, just before the sun rises, shining brightly in the east, bringing in each new day. Star quilt design stems from patterns originally used in the making of traditional buffalo blankets and robes. As buffalo herds were hunted into near-extinction, Lakota learned from European missionaries the art of quilting and adapted their unique designs into quilts. Star quilts are significant in ceremonies and given at the most important moments in life—birth, coming-of-age, marriage, honor, and death. Sewn by hand or machine, Lakota quilters have expanded the design and form raising the Lakota Star Quilt to a treasured form of art.

The **Owíŋža Quilters Cooperative** is a social enterprise created by **Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation**. The for-profit women-, worker-, and indigenous-owned cooperative business sells beautiful, hand-crafted star quilts and other products made by local Lakota quilters from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

Learn more at nativestarquilts.com.



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Best practices and lessons learned from key leaders in the field